Early Ethiopian Cinema, 1964–1994

Eyerusaleam Kassahun and Steven W. Thomas

Abstract: The first generation of Ethiopian filmmakers produced significant fictional and documentary films inside Ethiopia from the 1960s to 1990s, but access to these films has been limited. Drawing on interviews with filmmakers, Kassahun and Thomas analyze this early production in its cultural context and compare it with Haile Gerima's internationally celebrated *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1975), produced in the United States, to complicate the meta-narrative of Ethiopia's film history. In the context of debates by intellectuals about art and politics, early Ethiopian filmmakers participated in an internationally conscious Ethiopian modernism across the political revolutions of 1974 and 1991.

Résumé : La première génération de cinéastes éthiopiens a produit d'importants films de fiction et documentaires en Éthiopie entre les années 1960 et 1990, mais l'accès à ces films a été limité. S'appuyant sur des entretiens avec des cinéastes, Kassahun et Thomas analysent ces premières productions dans leur contexte culturel et les comparent avec le célèbre *Harvest : 3000 Years* (1975) de Haile Gerima, produit aux États-Unis, pour compliquer le méta-récit de l'histoire du cinéma éthiopien. Dans le contexte des débats des intellectuels sur l'art et la politique, les premiers cinéastes éthiopiens ont participé à un modernisme éthiopien internationalement conscient à travers les révolutions politiques de 1974 et 1991.

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Resumo : A primeira geração de realizadores de cinema etíopes produziu na Etiópia, entre as décadas de 1960 e 1900, uma quantidade significativa de filmes de ficção e de documentários, os quais, porém, tiveram uma distribuição limitada. Com base em entrevistas a realizadores, Kassahun e Thomas analisam esta fase inicial de produção cinematográfica à luz do seu contexto cultural e analisam-na por comparação com *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1975), o filme internacionalmente consagrado de Haile Gerima, que foi produzido nos Estados Unidos, assim complexificando a metanarrativa da história do cinema etíope. No contexto dos debates sobre arte e política que tiveram ligar entre os intelectuais, os primeiros realizadores etíopes participaram de um modernismo internacionalmente consciente que atravessou as revoluções políticas de 1974 e 1991.

ከ1960 እስከ 1990 ባለው ጊዜ ውስጥ የመጀመሪያዎቹ የኢትዮጵያ ፊልም ሰሪዎች ትውልድ፣ ጉልህ የሆኑ ልብ ወለዳዊ እና ዘጋቢ ፊልሞችን በኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ አምርተዋል፤ የስራዎቹ ተደራሽነት ግን ውስን ነበር። ሁለቱ የዚህ ጥናት አቅራቢዎች ከፊልም ሰሪዎች ጋር ያደረጉትን ቃለ ምልልስ በመመርኮዝ፣ ቀደምት የሆኑ ኢትዮጵያዊ የፊልም ምርቶችን፣ በአሜሪካ አገር ከተሰራው እና በዓለም አቀፍ ደረጃ ከሚታወቀው ከሃይሌ ገሪማ ምርት 3000 ዓመታት (1975) ከተባለው ፊልም ጋር በማወዳደር፣ ነባሩን የኢትዮጵያን የፊልም ታሪክ በማስረጃ በማጠየቅ ሞግተዋል።

በኪነ ጥበብ እና በፖለቲካ ዙሪያ ምሁራን ከሚያደርጓቸው ክርክሮች በመነሳት እንዲሁም በ1974 እና በ1991 የተደረጉ የፖለቲካ አብዮቶችን በመንተራስ፣ ቀደምት የኢትዮጵያ ፊልም ሰሪዎች ዓለም አቀፍዊ አውድ የነበረውን በኢትዮጵያ የዘመናዊነት ጽንሰ ሀሳብ ላይ ይደረግ በነበረው ውይይት ላይ ተሳትፈዋል።

Keywords: Ethiopia; Eritrea; cinema; African film studies; Derg; Haile Gerima; Haile Selassie; modernism

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The rapid growth of local digital movie and television production in Ethiopia since 2005 has spurred new scholarly research on Ethiopia's multifaceted cinema history. Most notable is the collection of essays *Cine-Ethiopia: The History and Politics of Film in the Horn of Africa*, edited by Michael W. Thomas, Alessandro Jedlowski, and Aboneh Ashagrie (2018), along with earlier journal articles by Thomas (2015), Jedlowski (2015), and Ashagrie (2016), which altogether advanced the scholarly understanding of movie production, distribution, and consumption in the Horn of Africa. Prior to their work, most scholarship in English and French in the field of African film studies had little to say about production in Ethiopia, since it has been mostly concerned with productions from those nations that were formerly colonies of England and France.[1] On those rare occasions when studies mentioned Ethiopia, they focused on just two filmmakers—Haile Gerima and Salem Mekuria—who are both based in the United States, and analysis was centered on their representative African-ness but did not situate them in the context of Ethiopia's media history, political economy, or cultural traditions.[2] Addressing the unfortunate separation of the Horn of Africa from the rich scholarly discourse on African cinema, the collection *Cine-Ethiopia* foregrounds the

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diversity and complexity of movie production in the region. However, although this groundbreaking book includes one chapter on the historical moment of the 1930s under the Italian occupation and another chapter on the 1974 revolution, for the most part, the new scholarship on Ethiopian cinema understandably focuses on what is new—that is, filmmaking in the twenty-first century.

What is missing from both the scholarship on African cinema in general and the new scholarship on digital productions in Ethiopia in particular is a focused analysis of the early movies produced inside Ethiopia from the 1960s through the early 1990s—a moment in time that was important not only for the development of Ethiopian film and media but also for the development of an independent black cinema across Africa and the Americas. Films from this period include the feature-length dramas *Hirut, abatwa mannew?/Hirut, Who Is Her Father?* (dir. Lambros Jokaris, 1964), *Gouma* (dir. Michel Papatakis, 1974), *Behiwot Zuria* (dir. Berhanu Shiberu, 1989), and *Aster* (dir. Solomon Bekele Weya, 1991/1992), as well as some documentaries and essay films for both theater and television. They were produced during a politically and culturally complex period, when Ethiopia experienced revolutionary changes in government in 1974 and 1991. Brief summaries of this period are included in the overviews of the history of Ethiopian cinema by Thomas, Jedlowski, and Ashagrie, but they refrain from analysis of the individual films. Most probably the reason why these films have not received the sort of close reading of their plot, mise-en-scène, and context is that the 35mm and 16mm prints remain quite inaccessible in secure government archives and have been exhibited to the public on very rare occasions. Fortunately, on December 11–14, 2019, the Addis Ababa Cinema Houses Administration Enterprise organized a festival to exhibit some of the Ethiopian classics. Our viewing of these films is informed by our interviews with the filmmakers and from newspapers, as well as recent scholarship on the Ethiopian student movement in the 1960s and 1970s and on modernist art, literature, and theater in Ethiopia. Building on the pioneering work of Ashagrie, Jedlowski, Thomas, and others, our article contributes to the scholarship on both African cinema and Ethiopian studies by analyzing the content and style of the films in their international and local cultural contexts.

In doing so, we aim to complicate and revise the historical meta-narrative of Ethiopia's film history and its position within the field of African film studies by investigating three interlinked questions. First is the question of continuity and discontinuity across time. Typically, the periodization of Ethiopian film history has corresponded to political regimes: the monarchy of Emperor Haile Selssaie to 1974; the nominally communist Derg regime from 1974 to 1991; and the EPRDF regime after 1991. Some accounts of Ethiopian film history imply that due to such revolutionary breaks, the emergence of digital production in the twenty-first century which has been driven by entrepreneurial ingenuity and private financing is institutionally separate from the early celluloid production that was underpinned by the state. Such an understanding raises a second question as to whether

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production during the nominally communist Derg regime was entirely controlled by an infamously repressive government and was therefore merely a tool of state propaganda. The third question that follows from the first two is Ethiopian cinema's relationship with world cinema—whether movie production under the auspices of the Ethiopian state is largely local and somewhat disconnected from Pan-African and international cinema movements. In answer to these interlinked questions, we pose three interlinked answers. First, in spite of the changes in government, there was significant continuity, as some of the same filmmakers worked across all three regimes. Moreover, in spite of repression during the Derg, there was also prolific creativity that deserves closer examination. Finally, Ethiopian filmmakers participated in the broader conversation across Africa about modernity—a concept that was contested in relation to issues of imperialism, race, class, gender, and ethnicity alongside debates about Pan-African solidarity and Ethiopian national identity.

These innovative films were part of a broader intellectual conversation about what art historian Elizabeth W. Giorgis has recently theorized as an Ethiopian modernism, which was interested in the dialectic of westernization and indigenous traditions. Giorgis draws from various postcolonial scholars such as Chika Okeke-Agulu and Talal Asad, as well as Ethiopian intellectuals such as Andreas Eschete, who deconstruct the binary of modernity and tradition in relation to the history of imperialism. She argues that "different generations of artists… reworked modernism" in light of multiple and overlapping temporal trajectories (Giorgis 2019:16). Early Ethiopian cinema was international, as not only did all of the filmmakers receive training abroad, but they also participated actively in film festivals across Africa, western Europe, and the Soviet Union. Moreover, the interest in film, television, and photography occurred side by side with other artistic, cultural, and political movements that were concerned with global conversations about class, race, gender, empire, and ethnicity (a.k.a., "the nationalities question.") As Elleni Centime Zeleke has noted in her recent book *Ethiopia in Theory* (2019), in dialogue with theorists such as Mahmood Mamdani and Donald Donham, Ethiopian cultural expression exhibited a "vernacular modernism" in which the aspirations of a progressive, liberatory politics were expressed in terms of indigenous culture in response to the demands and the allure of global capitalism (Zeleke 2019:66, 225). Moreover, drawing attention to the historical question of continuity and discontinuity, Zeleke demonstrates that intellectuals across the three political regimes from the 1960s through the 2000s have been concerned with some of the same aesthetic, cultural, and political debates. Our history of Ethiopian filmmakers may serve as a corollary to Zeleke's hypothesis, since many of the senior instructors at the national university and at private film schools in the 2010s were educated in Moscow, Kiev, Paris, Havana, and Accra in the 1970s and 80s. A popular meeting place for filmmakers in Addis Ababa has been continuously since the 1970s, and still is today, the Pushkin Center for Science and Culture, founded by the Soviet embassy. Therefore, examining "early Ethiopian cinema" from

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the 1960s through the 1990s across the three regimes allows us to better understand the historical continuities and international connections as well as the discontinuities and disconnections.

Modernist Ethiopia, 1964–1974

Before the 1960s, film production and distribution in Ethiopia were primarily managed by foreigners (Jedlowski 2015:172; Thomas et al. 2018:9–10). Theaters such as Cinema Empire and Cinema Ethiopia showed mostly American, European, and Indian films. In addition, the French, Italian, British, German, U.S., and Soviet embassies hosted regular film screenings (Tessore 1989). In response, as part of a national effort to encourage a more truly Ethiopian dramatic and visual arts, Emperor Haile Selassie completed the building of a national theater in 1955, named the Haile Selassie I Theatre, to celebrate the "silver jubilee" anniversary of his coronation. Also as part of the silver jubilee that year, BBC set up closed-circuit television to broadcast the event—the first time television was broadcast within Ethiopia. As early as 1949, Ethiopian government officials had entered into talks with the French Moncel Trading Company about establishing a motion picture studio in Ethiopia, though nothing materialized.[3] Then, in the early 1960s, a private film company *Yehager Filminna Yemastaweqiya Mahiber Yefilm Dirijit* (Indigenous Film and Advertising Association's Film Company) was formed with the aim of producing films in the Amharic language about Ethiopia's diverse cultures and history (Ashagrie 2016:722).[4] After a failed attempt at a historical drama, "King David III," it released its first feature-length film in 1964, *Hirut, abatwa mannew?/Hirut, Who Is Her Father?*, produced and written by Ilala Ibsa and directed by Lambros Jokaris, an Ethiopian-born Greek. The technical crew was mostly European, with post-production in Italy. That same year, the Ethiopian government also created its first television station with the assistance of the British company Thompson Television International (Reta 2013:135). Four years later (in 1968), Radio Ethiopia and Ethiopian Television merged into the Ethiopian Broadcasting Service, which was financed and tightly controlled by the government. In addition to local and international news, its schedule, which was published weekly in the *Ethiopian Herald* newspaper, included mostly American popular shows such as *Flipper* and *Hawaii Five-O*, along with a Saturday night movie.

At the same time, Ethiopia was sending young students to universities in the United States, Europe, and the Soviet Union for education. During the final years of the emperor's reign in the late 1960s, three students—Michel Papatakis, Getachew Desta, and Tafesse Jarra—returned from the Soviet Union with degrees in film arts to pursue promising film careers in Ethiopia. Tafesse Jarra would later be employed by the Derg leadership as its official documentary filmmaker. Michel Papatakis formed the Amare Film Company (Ashagrie 2016:722). On May 17, 1974, in the Haile Selassie I theater, they exhibited what is considered the first feature-length Ethiopian movie to be

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produced, written, and directed by Ethiopians, titled *Gouma*. The film was well received and highly praised in local newspapers in Addis Ababa and Asmara, and it also had a favorable reception at international festivals in Tunisia and Ireland. The success of the film appeared to inspire confidence in the possibility of a local film industry, but four months after its debut screening, the emperor was deposed on September 12.

At roughly the same time as *Gouma*'s director was studying in the Soviet Union, another Ethiopian was studying theater and film in the United States. In 1970, Haile Gerima joined a cohort of black filmmakers at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), which would come to be known as the L.A. Rebellion (Field et al. 2015:15). Gerima arrived there at an auspicious time, just one year after the famous African American philosopher Angela Davis joined the university as a professor and just a few years before another Ethiopian intellectual, Teshome Gabriel, began his career at UCLA as one of the most important early theorists of Third Cinema. All of them were part of an international movement against racism and colonialism which linked black students, professors, artists, and activists from across the world. Haile Gerima obtained permission to bring film equipment from UCLA to Ethiopia to make an ethnographic film, but instead he made a movie dramatizing the oppression of peasants by feudal landlords (Willeman 1978:33). The previous year, the British journalist Jonathan Dimbleby's documentary film *The Unknown Famine* had shocked the world. Ethiopian professors and students both at home and abroad had begun investigating and documenting the famine, which eventually took 200,000 lives, primarily in the Tigray and Wello provinces. Gerima's brief sojourn home occurred at the height of political uncertainty in Ethiopia—a transitional moment when the emperor's control was declining and the military "committee" (Derg) was gaining. This moment of uncertainty provided a brief window of relative freedom for Gerima's film crew (Davis 1975:19).

Coincidentally, the arrival of Gerima and his team occurred just weeks after the theatrical release of *Gouma*. After shooting his film, Gerima returned to his university in California at the end of the summer, shortly before the Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed and arrested. He completed editing his film *Mirt Sost Shi Amet/Harvest: 3000 Years* the following year at the same time that he was working on his thesis film, *Bush Mama*, which dramatizes the radicalization of an African American woman in Los Angeles after her husband returns from the Vietnam War, experiences racism in America, and is falsely imprisoned. From 1977 to 1979, both films were exhibited at various festivals across the United States, although not in Ethiopia. Why they were not screened in Ethiopia may be because by 1976, conflicts between political factions of the provisional revolutionary government had led to the beginning of the infamously violent "Red Terror," making the political climate difficult for screening a film as politically provocative as *Harvest: 3000 Years* (Cowcher 2018:50). Scholarship on Haile Gerima typically compares him to other African and African American filmmakers. What is surprising is that nobody has comparatively analyzed the content and

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aesthetic form of *Harvest: 3000 Years* and *Gouma*, even though the two films were made within a year of each other and were the two most significant Ethiopian movies of that decade.

Another aspiring artist, Solomon Bekele Weya, made a short film titled "Rotten Existence" while he was a student in Germany in 1968. Bekela Weya later attended film school in Paris from 1975 to 1978 and made the feature drama *Aster* in 1991–92, which he began working on while the Derg was still in power and finished just after the EPRDF came to power. All three of these directors—Michel Papatakis, Haile Gerima, and Solomon Bekele Weya—began their educations abroad in the late 60s, made films through the 70s and 80s, and then mentored the next generation of filmmakers in the 1990s. Their careers, which span three regimes, are indicative of the continuity of Ethiopia's cinema tradition across generations as well as its internationalism. All of these movies were concerned with the issues of economic class, the question of justice, and the role of indigenous traditions in the lives of ordinary people, but the directors approached these themes with very different cinematic styles.

Hirut (1964), filmed in black and white, tells a story of a young woman named Hirut who falls in love with a popular singer named Gugsa. Hirut meets Gugsa near her home in the beautiful lakeside resort town of Debre Zeyit, where he is giving a concert. Their romance is developed cinematically through a montage of tender moments and pastoral scenes. After Gugsa's return to Addis Ababa, they briefly exchange letters. Then Hirut realizes that she is pregnant and tries to communicate this to Gugsa, but surprisingly receives no response from him. To avoid the embarrassing stigma of her pregnancy, she leaves her family's house to conceal herself with a friend's family in the countryside, and then runs away to Addis Ababa hoping to find Gugsa. When she arrives in Addis, she has nowhere to go and collapses, exhausted, on the street. She is rescued by a lady who manages a bar, and after giving birth she must remain at the bar as a prostitute. The rest of the film chronicles her life over the next seventeen years as she makes an effort to improve the condition of her daughter and herself. With the help of some of the men who admire and come to respect her, she eventually is able to own her own bar, educate herself to become a typist, and send her daughter away to school in Asmara. At the end of the film, when her past as a prostitute is revealed in a local newspaper after she is in a car accident in Asmara—the stigma of which causes her daughter's fiancé to break off their engagement—she is reunited with Gugsa. She learns that he had been in jail for killing someone in a car accident. The film concludes happily with the mother, father, and daughter together as a family in Asmara. Overall, the movie presents a sympathetic portrait of Hirut as she elevates herself to become a successful, educated, modern woman. The cinematography and editing of scenes suggest the hypocrisy of patriarchal culture by juxtaposing shots of Hirut and other women trying to make a living with shots of lascivious men leering at the bar. Once she is raped, and another time physically assaulted. Other men have a more enlightened attitude, and they support Hirut's

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transformation. The film also foregrounds a modernizing Ethiopia, with many shots of the developing cities of Addis Ababa and Asmara (including a shot of the newly built African Union building and the not-yet-completed Commercial Bank of Ethiopia), new modes of transportation (air travel between Asmara and Addis Ababa), new technologies of communication (Hirut's frequent phone calls to her daughter), new forms of culture (westernized clothing styles and music), and new employment opportunities for women (her taking classes to become a typist.) The movie foregrounds both economic and geographic mobility as well as a sense of national unity between Ethiopia and Eritrea, as Hirut moves easily back and forth between Addis Ababa and Asmara—not coincidentally the two cities with the most movie theaters (Plastow 2017). At the time the film was made, Eritrea was constitutionally part of Ethiopia, though the Eritrean Liberation Front had just begun to campaign for independence.

The movie appeared in the mid-1960s, at a moment when gender roles in Ethiopia, as across the world, were changing. Educational opportunities for girls were expanding, and new ideas about modern womanhood and education led many Ethiopians to raise questions about traditional values (Bizuneh 2001). Throughout the 1970s and 80s, newspapers such as the *Ethiopian Herald* and *Addis Zemen* debated changing gender roles, as did a new magazine distributed in Ethiopia called *African Woman*, "for the modern women of Africa." The subject of the victimized or morally courageous prostitute was featured in many Ethiopian novels written at that time, such as Tesafaye Gesse's *Yeshi* (1963), Assefa Gebremariam's *Endewetach Kerech* (1956/1965), and Pawlos Gnogno's *Setoch Amba* (1965). Most importantly, the short novel *Setegna Adari (A Prostitute)* (1964), written under the pseudonym of a prostitute named Enanu Agonafir (but actually written by a male author, Negash Gebremariam), tells a story that is similar to the movie. As in *Hirut*, the protagonist in *Setegna Adari* is forced into prostitution by her social circumstances, but rather than accepting her fate, she tries to change her life by going to school. Historically, the rapid urbanization of Addis Ababa at the beginning of the twentieth century led to an increase in prostitution often connected to drinking houses, like the one where Hirut works, and this was exacerbated during the Italian occupation (Pankhurst 1974). Women were also professionalizing as performers in the state theater; the early generation of female performers in the 1950s were also sometimes associated with drinking houses (Ashagrie 2012). By the late 1980s, newspaper editorials complained of "male chauvinism in Ethiopian theaters," signifying public desire for progressive reform.[5] We can interpret the movie *Hirut* as a progressive film, since it presents Hirut as a sympathetic and courageous character against conservative judgement. Although the film did receive some criticism for its somewhat idealized representation of the prostitute which overlooks the realities of poverty and sexual violence, such an idealized vision productively raises questions for its audience about socio-economic mobility across class, since Hirut both falls and attempts to rise. The story about education and opportunity situates the movie at the nexus of Ethiopia's

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social transformation in the 1960s, where new ideas about both gender and socioeconomic equality would soon dominate the conversations of Ethiopian intellectuals.

Gouma (1974) is a very different kind of story, based on the indigenous cultures of Ethiopia and set in one of the most ethnically diverse regions—Wello, famous for being a mixture of Amhara, Oromo, and other ethnicities, where intermarriage between Orthodox Christians and Muslims is not unusual. The film's title is an indigenous concept shared by many ethnic groups across the different religions, perhaps originating from the Oromo language. The promotional poster and advertisements for the film translated the word to mean "blood ransom," although one could also translate it as "reparations." At the same time, the film also represents Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity when the main character travels to its most famous church in Lalibela, in effect unifying the culture around the cinematic gaze upon an iconic monument. The movie begins by intimating the life of the town with long establishing shots of the local market, church, and religious schools, crowded with trade and activity. It then focuses on a market scene where the film introduces the characters and where the tragic victim of the story, Zewude, is given his first bullet by his uncle to use for hunting. Zewude goes hunting with his friend Tariku after his father gives him the gun, but since he is not skillful enough with the weapon to successfully kill anything, he becomes disappointed and gives the gun to Tariku. As Tariku tests his own hunting skill, he accidentally kills his friend Zewude. In response to the tragedy, Zewude's uncle, played by the popular actor Debebe Eshetu, tries to take his revenge by killing Tariku. But the community, after some deliberation, coerces him into the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism, the *gouma*, instead of the death penalty. Following this tradition, Tariku must travel to humbly beg for money and give it to Zewude's family. Cinematically, in contrast to the beginning of the movie which was filled with people, the latter part of the movie follows the main character, Tariku, alone in bare scenes as he travels the country. Though it is uncommon in Ethiopian films for the camera to follow a single character for such a long time, *Gouma* does this, artfully mixing its linear narrative with other imagery. Occasionally, Zewude's uncle appears on his horse with his long lash as a means to harass Tariku on his route. The film also blends realism with surrealism in a dreamlike sequence when Tariku imagines Zewude's uncle dressed like a priest on the horse, causing Tariku to faint from fear. In Orthodox Christian folklore, the devil may sometimes disguise himself as a priest. In contrast to the uncle, who represents punitive unforgiving justice, the figure of Zewude's father represents merciful forgiveness.

In this way, the movie participates in debates occurring in Ethiopia at that time about the justice system and makes a clear statement opposing capital punishment.[6] One critic praised *Gouma* for truly capturing Ethiopia's "heritage," concluding that the film is "Ethiopia in translation." Even in praise, the criticism evokes the dialectic of modernism and tradition, as the critic is simultaneously nostalgic and ironically bemused about the traditions

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represented in the film that he or she characterized as "recording… the culture… during this fast fading transitional period."[7] The conclusion of the film brings together a variety of cultures and a forward-looking sense of freedom and justice. The movie *Gouma* hence presents indigenous tradition not (as one might assume) as the antithesis of modernity but rather as a foundation for a progressive Ethiopia.

Haile Gerima's *Harvest: 3000 Years* dramatizes the conditions of poor peasants under the rule of an exploitative landlord. In contrast to the linear plots and mostly realist cinematography of *Hirut* and *Gouma*, Gerima utilized a non-linear montage technique to provoke political consciousness by juxtaposing scenes of agricultural labor with the watchful eye of the "lord" as he lounges on his veranda. The film cuts back and forth, contrasting the laziness of the landlord and the hard work of peasants while ironically exposing the landlord's hypocrisy as he accuses a peasant for being the lazy one. The montage technique uses point-of-view shots to startle the audience into questioning the image on the screen, sometimes showing the fantasies of the characters in counterpoint to their realities. For example, one of the peasant laborers imagines himself sitting in the lord's chair on the veranda, thus inverting the power dynamic in the previous scene. In another scene, a girl dreams of gender equality, suddenly declaring to the camera as if speaking directly to the audience that she is "not afraid." The plot of the narrative turns when the "madman" who lives under the Italian-built bridge attacks the landlord, because the land used to be his before the state gave it to the lord. The "madman" then hangs himself under the bridge, and the film ends with a montage of faces and voices of different kinds of labor, emphasizing the theme of labor's universality over the millennium, *Harvest: 3000 Years*.

Harvest: 3000 Years has been valorized as a paradigmatic example of "Third Cinema"—a form of cinema that follows neither the formulaic style guidelines of Hollywood nor the idiosyncratic aesthetics of *auteur* cinema, but instead aims to be politically provocative, mixing dramatic and documentary techniques (Guneratne & Dissanayake 2003). It is generally associated with "third world" filmmakers and intellectuals who charted a political alternative to the first world (NATO) and the second world (Soviet bloc.) Although the concept of "third cinema" was originally theorized by Argentine filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gentino, its first book-length scholarly treatment was by Haile Gerima's Ethiopian colleague at UCLA, Teshome Gabriel. Gabriel's argument in his book *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (1982) is for cinema to contribute to the decolonization of the mind and a revolutionary transformation of society (Gabriel 1982:3). Gabriel and Gerima were friends and participated together in conferences about "third cinema" such as the one in Edinburgh in 1986 (Taylor 1987). Drawing from the anti-colonial philosophies of Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral as well as the methodologies of cultural theorists such as Louis Althusser, Gabriel's study comparatively analyzes a variety of films from various geographic locations from China to Chile in order to test the hypothesis that a

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film's style corresponds to its ideology. In doing so, he is attentive to intersecting issues such as race, class, nationality, and gender as well as aspects of film technique such as shot selection, point of view, pacing, and montage editing. His answer is somewhat more complex than the earlier manifestos by Latin American filmmakers, as his broad comparative analysis leads him to conclude that "style is only meaningful in the context of its use—in how it acts on culture and helps illuminate the ideology within it" (Gabriel 1982:41). However, although his study foregrounds the specificity of historical, geographic, and cultural contexts for artistic choices about style and content, he sometimes makes broadly (and perhaps problematically) comparative, transcultural claims. For example, perhaps reflecting his own Pan-Africanist commitment, he projects the specifically Ethiopian poetic form of *semenna-worq* ("Wax and Gold") onto the whole continent of Africa in his analysis of Ousmane Sembene's classic postcolonial film *Xala*. Citing Donald Levine's study of Ethiopia, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (1965), Gabriel explains that wax refers to the obvious and superficial meaning, whereas "gold" embedded in the artwork offers the "true" meaning which may be inaccessible unless one understands the finer nuances of folk culture (Gabriel 1982:79). Curiously, in his brilliant close reading of Haile Gerima's *Harvest 3000* in the same chapter, he never mentions "wax and gold," but instead emphasizes the blending of oral traditions and atemporal dream sequences to argue that the film's "triangular visual pattern" of characters and close-up shots encodes a revolutionary dialectic, inviting the audience to interrogate the structures of systemic injustice (Gabriel 1982:90–93). Ironically, at the same time that Gabriel was applying Ethiopia's "wax and gold" concept to other African countries, another Ethiopian intellectual criticized Donald Levine's hypothesis, accusing it of promoting the retrograde feudalist culture that Gerima's film protested against.

Obviously, these filmmakers did not work in a vacuum, and the cultural contexts for *Hirut*, *Gouma*, and *Harvest 3000* are complex. Emperor Haile Selassie pushed for the modernization and development of Ethiopian industry as he sponsored the emergence of an internationally educated elite, which in turn fostered a cultural interest in modernist art and literature. It also fostered the student movement that was sharply critical of the emperor and the backwardness it perceived in the state's feudalist organization. Haile Selassie I University was founded in 1950 and the Fine Arts School inaugurated in 1957. In his speech at its inauguration, Selassie pronounced, "We supported the establishment of this school because we think that modern artists will combine traditional methods and send their creative works to the modern platforms of the West, letting the world know that Ethiopians are also part of the modern world" (quoted in Giorgis 2019:76). As this speech indicates, and as Giorgis has explored in *Modernist Art in Ethiopia* (2019), Ethiopian artists faced a tension between exalting their traditions and aspiring to global modernity. On the one hand, artists and novelists were deeply self-conscious of how the uniqueness of Ethiopian culture was being consumed by European intellectuals and commodity culture that tended to

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Orientalize (in the sense of Edward Said's classic of postcolonial theory *Orientalism*) the iconography of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. On the other hand, intellectuals were becoming increasingly critical of their own culture and feudal political order as they became interested in the ideals of progress, development, democracy, and equality. The emerging print culture was both celebratory and critical of the possibility of an Ethiopian modernism as it debated whether that future would be embodied in its monarch and its church or required radical socio-economic transformation.

The conversation was inherently international, in part because these intellectuals were developing a new critical consciousness while studying abroad, but also in part because they were participating in broad international movements to end colonialism and racism as well as the poverty and oppression that they saw within their own political system. After the Organization of African Unity was established in Addis Ababa in 1963, black intellectuals and politicians from around the globe such as Malcolm X and Eric Williams visited Ethiopia's capital city. The poet laureate of Ethiopia, Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, famously endorsed a Pan-Africanist ideology and synthesized Ethiopia's cultural diversity (Beer 1977; Admassu 2010). In the 1960s, in both local publications such as the *Addis Reporter* and the Ethiopian Student Association of North America's journal *Challenge*, intellectuals debated what a "modern Ethiopia" should be. Such periodicals might at the same time cite both the literary modernism of T.S. Eliot and the anti-colonial politics of Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). For instance, Giorgis analyzes a provocative essay published in 1969 in the *Addis Reporter* titled "The Hyphenated Ethiopian" that expressed what it called the "age of tension" for a new class of Ethiopians drawn to western culture and critical of the backwardness that they perceived in their own society, but also resistant to western imperialism in solidarity with other Africans and celebratory of their Ethiopian identity (Giorgis 2019:84–87).

In this context, students debated what should be the function and purpose of "art." On the one hand, the more conservative journalists in Ethiopia might criticize artists for not properly celebrating their traditions and presenting a positive image of their society. On the other hand, artists such as Gebre Kristos Desta reacted against what they perceived to be the "orientalizing" tendencies of European museums and connoisseurs who fetishized the "Byzantine" style of the Ethiopian church art (Giorgis 2019:132). Similarly, as Elleni Centime Zeleke explores in *Ethiopia in Theory* (2019), articles in the journal *Challenge* attacked both art that represented the Ethiopian monarchy and art that adopted the solipsistic expressionism of western Europe for not being politically transformative. Significantly, alongside these discussions of the function of art, another article in *Challenge* criticized Donald Levine's *Wax and Gold* for furthering the "fantasy of Ethiopian exoticness" and for promoting the "dominant feudal culture" (Zeleke 2019: 114). Part of the conversation about the goal of transforming Ethiopia into a more equitable society was the debate over the nationalities question.

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As many scholars of Ethiopia's political history such as Bahru Zewde (2014) have observed, the Ethiopian student movement increasingly recognized the history of Amhara imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and called for the equal participation of Ethiopia's many "nationalities," citing the works by Fanon and Nkrumah as well as those by Lenin. However, considering the implications of the right to self-determination, debates among Ethiopian intellectuals abroad became heated and divisive over whether Eritrea had the right to secede if it so desired. In the context of such critical conversations about Ethiopia's imperial past, as Donald Donham has revealed in *Marxist Modern* (1999), indigenous customs from various ethnic groups might be reinterpreted as instruments for reforming a progressive state.

How do we read the movies of the late 1960s and early 70s in the context of these heated debates and transformative cultural developments? Indirectly, the films register the concerns of intellectuals regarding an indigenous Ethiopian modernism. Significantly, none of them were about the iconic and patriotic Ethiopia of the monarchy or the Byzantine iconography of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; none of them told of the exploits of kings and queens or recited lines from Ethiopia's famous national epic, the *Kebre Nagast*. Instead, they focused on class conflict and indigenous cultures. Most explicitly and directly, Haile Gerima's movie attacked the feudal system through its politically provocative montage technique. Similarly critical of the political order in his country, Solomon Bekele Weya's short "Rotten Existence" (1968) is about a man who, though educated, cannot find a good job due to nepotism among the upper classes—a social issue that was cited a decade later as a cause for the revolution in John Markakis and Nega Ayele's *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (1978). However, in contrast to the montage technique in Gerima's film, other filmmakers employed the more linear, neo-realist style that was popular in western Europe in the 1960s. Made a few years earlier, *Hirut*, telling the story of a woman forced into prostitution, foregrounds the hypocrisy of a society toward one of its victims. When it screened in 1964, *Hirut* was criticized by Berhanu Zerihun for its choice of topic for Ethiopia's first movie, considering all of the other stories that needed to be told. In response to the suggestion that the movie portrayed Ethiopia in a negative light, its screenwriter and co-producer Ilala Ibsa argued that cinema is like a mirror, showing both the good and bad aspects of society.[8] The movie *Gouma* successfully struck a balance between valuing traditions and advancing modernity. One might read *Gouma* as an attempt to implicitly resolve the question of Ethiopian identity by synthesizing a progressive vision of justice with an indigenous culture and by blending together symbols of Ethiopia's diverse cultural heritage.

Revolutions, 1974–1992

In September, 1974, Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed by a coalition of university students, teachers, trade unions, and the military. Motiving the

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revolution was a desire for a more modern, democratic, and socially equitable society. Many of those in leadership positions were influenced by various Marxist theories they had studied not only in the Soviet Union but also in France, Great Britain, and the United States (Zewde 2014). Political factions soon came into conflict, each promoting a different Marxist approach. The All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (MEISON) decided to work with the provisional military council, known as the Derg, to effect revolutionary change, while the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) argued that the Derg stood in the way of a genuine democracy of the people. The conflict led to the infamous "Red Terror" in 1976, when the Derg regime began killing and torturing members of the EPRP and then later also began purging MEISON's ranks of dissenting individuals. In 1977, Ethiopia switched its military alliance from the U.S. to the USSR. This relationship with the Soviet Union also included cultural exchange, support for filmmakers, and film festivals (Nikolayeva 1986).

The Ministry of Culture created a government-owned film corporation in 1975. One purpose of the Ethiopian Film Development and Control Board was to promote its ideology and transform Ethiopian aesthetics. The director of *Gouma*, Michel Papatakis, made two documentaries: *Yalafew Shekim ena Yemimetaw Guz/The Past Burden and the Journey Ahead* (1975) in collaboration with the Czechoslovakian Television Agency and the Liepzig Film Festival and *Tigil, Dil, Dil Tigil/Struggle, Victory, Victory, Struggle* (1978) about Ethiopia's war with Somalia. Broadcast in multiple Ethiopian languages and also screened at the film festival in Moscow, the film galvanized support for the war. Teferi Bizuayehu made *3002: Wondimu's Memories* (1976), which reflected on the progress of the revolution and which Berhanu Shiberu has praised as a wonderfully experimental "fictional documentary." It screened at the Pan-African FESTAC cultural festival in Lagos in 1977. Later, to strengthen the film works, this board and the Ambassador Theatre merged to create the Ethiopian Film Corporation in 1986. The company made many documentary films, including *Kalkidan* (1986), *Gimbata* (1986), *Wedebochachin* (1986), and *Kedirk gar Tigil* (1986). Other films such as *Nigat Beiteya* (1981), *Jimir* (1985), *Yebegoch Eregna* (1983), *Addis Ababa* (1985), and *Yehamer Eregna ena Zimarew* (1983) were produced in collaboration with East Germany, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia. During the final years of the Derg regime, two fictional dramas were produced by the Ethiopian Film Corporation: *Behiwot Zuria* (Berhanu Shiberu 1989) and *Aster* (Solomon Bekele Weya 1991/92). *Aster* was begun during the Derg regime but was completed in 1992, with post-production and an early exhibition in London, after the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) had overthrown the Derg in 1991.

It is understandable that the trauma of the Red Terror and the extremely repressive measures of the government would lead scholarship and journalism to characterize the Ethiopian Film Corporation as a tool of propaganda for the state (Jedlowski 2015; Thomas et al. 2018; Ashagrie 2020). As has been thoroughly described by historians, the political repression of artistic expression was severe. However, this historical understanding of repression has

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shaded analysis of the international education and creative drive of the early filmmakers. Under the Derg, the Ethiopian government sent thousands of young men and women to universities abroad to acquire skills and knowledge that they could bring back to their countries. This includes the filmmakers Berhanu Shibiru, Tamir Abera, Tiruwork Abera, Abebe Ketsela, Nigatu Merdassa, Ermias Woldeamlak, Yilma Girma, and others. In the interviews we conducted with them, there was a remarkable consistency in their accounts of their experience, despite the fact that they all attended schools in different countries and at different times. The experience that they all recollected with the most fondness was the camaraderie with filmmakers from around the world, as those film schools had become hubs for third-world students from El Salvador, Cuba, Senegal, Ghana, Kenya, and elsewhere. And the filmmakers trained not only in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, but also in western Europe and other African countries. For example, Solomon Bekele Weya studied photography and film in Paris from 1975 to 1978. In 1975, the Kenyan government, with support from West Germany, built the Kenyan Institute of Mass Communication (Barasa 2010), and some Ethiopians were trained there. Others trained in Ghana at its National Film and Television Institute, which was quite active in the 1970s and 80s (Diawara 1992:118). Although the Derg increasingly censored the media after 1976, such censorship was neither simplistic nor absolute, as theaters continued to import foreign movies, and even the USSR's Pushkin Center in Ethiopia would sometimes include American movies as part of its English-language instruction (Tessore 1989). International collaborations during this time involved not only communist countries, but also western Europe, such as the post-production for *Tigil, Dil, Dil Tigil* in Munich, Germany. Meanwhile, filmmakers participated in various cultural festivals in Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Libya, Cuba, China, Soviet Union, West Germany, and Sweden. Hence, Ethiopian filmmakers identified with a broader international movement of filmmakers who were at that time theorizing alternatives to the hegemonic Hollywood style and experimenting with new international forms such as Third Cinema and *cinema verité*.

The copious amount of documentary films, including the documentation of the political activities of the corporation, could lead one to assume that the company's productions were mere propaganda films. In many cases, this was true, as evidenced by the promotional film "Our Seaports" (1986) by Solomon Bekela Weya, advertising the new infrastructure at Massawa and Assab. However, other documentaries might challenge the government, such as the controversial film by the same director, *Kedirk gar Tigil* "Struggle against Drought" (1985), which was an observational documentary about the famine in 1983–85. Some Derg officials accused this film of being anti-government. In interviews, the director Bekele Weya recounted how it was emotionally difficult for him to make because he witnessed people starving, and he wanted to show that truth in his film. Moreover, documentary filmmaking could be experimental. Bekela Weya's next film "Quench" (1986), made with support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency,

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foregrounds women from a small village who receive technical training in new water equipment. Before making "Quench," he and some of his crew lived for a time with the mostly Oromo-speaking village in Arsi, getting to know the people. Significantly, when the crew began shooting the movie, eight of the women in the village participated both in front of and behind the camera. Unlike the earlier documentary "Struggle against Drought," which was shot in the observational style, "Quench" involved some deliberate staging of scenes that required multiple takes, so the women's participation was essential. In one scene, a slow-motion effect was used to express the toil of women climbing up and down mountains to carry water.

The two major fictional dramas produced by the Ethiopian Film Corporation were *Behiwot Zuria* (1989) and *Aster* (1992). Berhanu Shiberu has described his film *Behiwot Zuria* as "social criticism," translating the title as "Life." Filmed in 16mm black and white, it was the first feature-length fictional drama for which the entire film crew were all Ethiopians. The film tells the story of Almaz, whose husband, Kebede, has gone abroad for education, while she remained in Ethiopia with her son and worked as a secretary in a government office. But when her husband returns from abroad, he brings another woman with him. This event is the first triggering point for Almaz's gradual decent into insanity. The movie exposes the double standard regarding how men and women are treated in society, as people disparage Kebede's girlfriend for her behavior, but leave him untouched. While the girlfriend is alienated from society, outcast and alone, Kebede stays with his wife and continues his bad behavior by starting a secret sexual relationship with their housemaid. This transgression prompts Almaz to slap him in a scene that was criticized by the censorship officials who asked how a wife could possibly strike her husband, but the director Shibiru insisted, and they kept the scene. Almaz then leaves her husband to live with her son, while Kebede declines into a life filled with sorrow living in various hotel rooms. After some time, Almaz manages to start a new relationship with an honest attorney who had won a case over a corrupt judge, but then the vengeful judge kills both the attorney and Almaz's son. This final tragedy is the tipping point which causes Almaz to go insane. She leaves her house and wanders through graveyards and market places. In a graveyard, she meets a writer who tries to convince her that she is not crazy. He argues that it is society's attitude toward individuals that is really at fault, and that each individual must struggle to maintain their own integrity in the face of the contradictions woven into the fabric of society, but he is unable to convince her. In this way, the film comments on the conflict between modern and traditional attitudes toward marriage and the socially constructed double standard. Throughout the movie, Almaz is presented as a woman committed to traditional morality as she resists a romantic entanglement with her boss who entices her with a promotion, suggesting an analogy between men's treatment of women and their corrupt behavior at work. In the final scene of the film, we see all the characters going their separate ways: Almaz continues to wander in her madness; Kebede continues his life in hotel rooms; and Kebede's

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ex-girlfriend from abroad remains on the streets alone. This montage is backed by a song titled "Mela" which, ironically, means "solution."

Aster is significant for being the first feature-length 35mm color film to be made from start to finish by an entirely Ethiopian crew, including its final stage of post-production supervised in England by its director. Set in the 1960s, the movie is narrated as a series of flashbacks, where the protagonist tells her life story to a friend during the dinner party for her wedding anniversary. The movie cross-cuts between the night when Aster tells her story and the fragments of her past. At the beginning of her life story, as a ten-year-old girl, she lives with her widowed father who is a factory worker. Her father marries another woman, but while her father encourages her to get an education, her stepmother demands her help in the household. Thus, from the outset, the movie dramatizes conflicts in values and in class positions. When Aster becomes an adult, her stepmother tries to poison her, and while Aster is in the hospital, her doctor falls in love with her. They soon marry and drive to the lake in Hawassa for their honeymoon, which is shown in a series of scenes filled with romantic interaction such as playing in the water and enjoying the beach. The possession of a car and trip to a distant lakeside resort indicates the doctor's class status. One shot in particular has been remarked upon for its elegantly rendered mise-en-scène and camera movement which showcases both the cinematographer Abebe Ketsele's technical skill and the director's background as an artistic photographer. Aster and her husband are positioned at the center of the frame, cuddling each other passionately, while faint sunset is used as the backlight casting a silhouette of the characters. The movie's cinematography suggests how the culture of romance was changing in Ethiopia, as the panning and tracking shots show other romantic couples around them at this resort. In a later scene, the camera frames Aster reflected in a mirrored door while taking a shower, revealing her naked body above the waist. In Ethiopia, showing naked bodies is still debated today and is usually prohibited, so the decision to keep this scene was in some ways transgressive. Such images of bourgeois romance establish the setting for a critique of class prejudice and social discrimination in Ethiopia that remains a popular theme in Ethiopian movies still today.

The rest of the film stitches together the fragments of her life where Aster is gradually overwhelmed by the class prejudice that she experiences after they are married. Aster recounts how, because her father was a factory worker, she was treated badly by her husband's family and friends. Her husband's more conservative brother disapproved of the marriage, and in one scene, when they visit her husband's family's house, the family treats her with disrespect and turns their backs on her. After they have children, her husband has an affair with another woman, played by the famous actress Elizabeth Melaku, and this incident leads to the surprise tragic ending when Aster aims a gun at her husband. Bekela Weya's decision to end the movie tragically without resolution and without a clear moral position proved to be controversial. This lack of resolution is emphasized by the freeze-frame technique. After Aster shoots the gun at her husband, the film freezes its

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frame on Aster until the captions of the film end. Freezing the frame on her image invites the audience's active participation in the judgement of Aster's life and of the general class issues of the country.

We can read both films as "social criticism" that, in the words of the filmmakers, presents a "mirror" in which to see class conflict and changing gender roles in the context of a modernizing state. As *Aster* is set in the past during the Haile Selassie era, one could infer that it was a revolutionary socialist film critiquing class prejudice in an overtly didactic way that would resonate with the ideology of the Derg era when it was made, or one could even speculate that the film slyly uses the past to allegorically hint at a critique of the present. Ironically, however, *Aster* was criticized for the opposite reason —for not being didactic enough and for being too open-ended. Both movies, *Behiwot Zuria* and *Aster* have morally ambiguous endings which invite the audience to decode what they are seeing on the screen and imagine possibilities. One can compare and contrast these two films with many of the contemporary Ethiopian movies made since 2005 (Tadesse 2016; Thomas 2020). Although the themes of class conflict and gender roles in a changing society are still common today, in contrast to the moral didacticism often communicated through character dialogue that one finds in most twenty-first-century dramas, the two Derg-era films have a highly visual style and are remarkably open-ended. This raises questions for how one understands the functioning of censorship and the role of the state in guiding artistic work in Ethiopia, questions that are admittedly beyond the scope of this essay. From 2002 to 2018, when the movie industry was growing rapidly, all films had to be licensed, and they could be censored, but arguably many filmmakers tended to be cautiously conservative in their style and morally didactic in their stories because they feared public opinion and because they believed such movies would be more commercially successful as much as they worried about the expectations of the Addis Ababa Bureau of Culture and Tourism which licensed the films. In contrast, those Ethiopian filmmakers trained abroad in the 1970s during an artistically innovative period in world cinema might understand the purpose of revolutionary socialist film to be to provoke questions and self-reflection in their audiences. As Eyerusaleam Kassahun has shown in her study of stage theater during the Derg regime, there is an interesting contradiction in the perception of this period (Kassahun 2015). On the one hand, the regime is remembered for its two-stage cross-checking of political issues, where the censorship authority checks the art works both at their first stage, which is the writing of the script, and again at the second stage, before the public performance of the work. On the other hand, the period is noted for being one of the most productive and innovative periods of Ethiopia's theater history, when the theater was most successful at reaching beyond the capital city to the rest of the country. Kassuhun situates this period in the long history of how politics and art in Ethiopia have been in constant dialogue for making a visible impact on each other, starting from the inception of modern theater in Ethiopia when the first play written by Teklehawariat Teklemriam in 1921 commented on Lij Iyasu's government.

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Obviously, state censorship of media was not something new in Ethiopia introduced by the Derg, but it had long been a feature of the royal administration (Reta 2013:103–4). While the government has utilized various mechanisms to control the arts, at the same time the artists applied various ways to counter or circumvent those mechanisms such as the "wax and gold" technique mentioned earlier. The movie *Behiwot Zuria* ends with a poet failing to convince a mad woman of the true cause of her tragic life, and *Aster* ends before the audience knows whether her shot actually killed anyone.

Legacies

After the EPRDF came to power in 1992, one might be tempted to say that there was a ten-year gap in film production. The Ethiopian Film Corporation was eventually liquidated in 1999. So, one might assume that the new generation that began making video films after 2002 were discontinuous with the previous generation of filmmakers who trained abroad at socialist film schools. Indeed, such a narrative is explicitly stated in an *Ethiopian Business Review* magazine article celebrating the new movie industry (Mekonnen 2013). However, the scholarly work of Ashagrie, Jedlowski, and Thomas suggests a different story. In fact, the members of the Ethiopian Film Corporation formed the Ethiopian Filmmakers Association, and many of them, such as Abebe Ketsela (the cinematographer for *Aster*), found jobs in the state-owned Ethiopian Television (ETV) where they managed and trained a new generation of media professionals. Film producers shifted from celluloid to U-matic formats because it was cheaper, and also post-production could be completed inside the country. Many of the crew for *Aster* went on the next year to make the film *Tzetzet*, directed by Tesfaye Senke on U-matic and produced by the wealthy Rukiya Ahmed.

Tzetzet (1993) begins as a love story and develops into a crime drama. One of the main characters, Yetnayet, has a sexual relationship with Tamiru, a married rich old man who pays for most of her expenses and spends most of his time with her while neglecting his wife and two children. The film begins with shots of Tamiru, Yetnayet, and Yetnayet's friend Mekides enjoying night clubs with live bands—a motif that became popular in later Ethiopian VHS movies. The nightclub scene also establishes Mekides's long-distance relationship with Henok, who was in England studying for his Ph.D. While Mekides is dancing, the music reminds her of Henok, and the camera shows her taking a letter from her bag and crying longingly. But then the plot turns after Yetnayet falls in love with Mekides's friend, Daniel, and begins to ignore Tamiru. When Mekides's boyfriend Henok returns to Ethiopia, they go with Yetnayet and Daniel to enjoy the spa town of Sodere. The crime occurs after they return from their vacation, when Henok is accused of murdering Mekides. After some courtroom drama, the trial is interrupted when noise outside the court leads to the revelation that Mekides is still alive and would like to enter the court. After some chaos, it is revealed that it was actually Yetnayet who was murdered while wearing a dress borrowed from Mekides with Mekides's ID in the pocket. It was a jealous Tamiru who arranged to have

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Yetnayet killed by a henchman. Tamiru is sentenced to prison, and Henok is released. In the final scene, Henok and Mekides are getting married as the credits roll. Like many Ethiopian movies made before and after, *Tzetzet* criticizes the abuse of power by wealthy men.

Many of these filmmakers continued to work on projects financed by international NGOs such as Berhanu Shiberu's "Time to Be Frank" with Oxfam Canada about HIV-AIDS. They were often hired by foreign media networks. For example, Abebe Ketsela worked on the BBC story "Schoolgirl Killer" which later inspired the international Ethiopian hit movie *Difret* (dir. Zeresenay 2014), whose executive producer was the American actress Angelina Jolie. They also wrote and directed some of the new digital dramatic movies such as Berhanu Shiberu's *Yemot Fiker* and *Agazi Operation*. Eventually, Berhanu Shiberu, Solomon Bekele Weya, Abebe Ketsela, and others all became teachers at private film academies such as Tom Photography and Videography Training Center, Master Films and Communications, and the Blue Nile Film and Television Academy. Abebe, who had received his training in Moscow, continued to maintain a studio space at the Russian embassy's Pushkin Center until 2014, where he advised the Alatinos Filmmakers Association which still regularly meets there to exhibit and discuss films as well as to debate film policy. Then, in 2014, when the country's first master's degree program in film was established at Addis Ababa University, Ketsela was recruited to be the instructor of cinematography. Bekela Weya had already been teaching classes in that university's modern languages and theater departments. One of Bekela Weya's students, Mekonnen Tesfaye, made a short documentary, "Filmography," about his mentor in 2013. All three continued to serve on juries at international film festivals around the world. One could say that almost all of the new generation of filmmakers working in Addis Ababa during the video film boom of 2005–2016 were at some point taught by this earlier generation of artists.

In conclusion, early Ethiopian cinema critically engaged with an emergent Ethiopian modernism in a context where topics such as class, nationality, and gender were intensely debated by intellectuals, leading to two revolutions. Usually trained abroad in richly diverse international environments, filmmakers challenged themselves to rethink the purpose of cinema and adapt it to the specific needs of their homeland. This generation then actively played a role in the education of the next generation. Although sadly, most of their work is now unavailable or inaccessible to the general public, it is our hope that our article might inspire an effort to restore and digitize these old films so that they can take their place alongside other works of literature and art that constitute Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage.

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Notes

1. In chronological order, examples of well-known books on African cinema in which Ethiopia is absent include Diawara (1992), Ukadike (1994a), Bakari and Cham (1996), Barlet (2000), Armes (2006), Diawara (2010), Şaul and Austen (2010), Harrow (2017), and Sawadogo (2018). See also Harrow's forum on "What's New in African Cinema" (2015). But since the work of Ashagrie, Jedlowski, and Thomas, Ethiopia is now included (a chapter by Jedlowski) in a new textbook on African cinema edited by Harrow and Garritano (2018).
2. Scholarly books on African cinema where Haile Gerima serves as the sole representatives of Ethiopian cinema include Harrow (1999) and Pfaff (2004). Journal articles on and interviews with Gerima and Salem Mekuria include Ukadike (1994b), Turner and Kamdibe (2008), Jackson (2010), Woubshet (2010), and a special issue of the journal *Black Camera* 4 (2): 2013 on Haile Gerima's movie *Teza*. For an annotated bibliography on Gerima, see Belachew (2013). A preliminary effort to open up scholarly dialogue on east African cinemas is Bisschoff (2015).
3. *New York Times* (July 12, 1949), 31.
4. *Addis Zemen* (July 28, 1965). The company was created by Ilala Ibsa, an economist, and Lambros Jokaris, a film teacher, along with eleven other stakeholders in Ethiopia, with $205,000, hoping to attract more shareholders.
5. "Ethiopian Chauvinism in Ethiopian Theaters," *Ethiopian Herald* (1989).
6. Some of the ideas for this interpretation of the film come from Menelik Merid, founding member and former president of the Alatinos Filmmakers Association in Ethiopia.
7. "*Gouma*: Ethiopia in Transition," *Ethiopian Herald* (June 2, 1974), 2.
8. Berhanu Zerihun, Review of *Hirut, Addis Zemen* (August 29, 1965).

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