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## **Publishing in Ethiopia: problems and prospects**

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**PUBLISHING IN ETHIOPIA:**

**PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS**

by

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A Master's Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment for the Award of  
the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

of Loughborough University of Technology

September, 1991

Supervisor: Professor J P Feather, B.Litt, M.A., Oxford, M.A.,  
Cambridge, PhD, Loughborough, FLA, Head of Department  
and Professor of Library and Information Studies

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## **DEDICATION**

To my father, whose devotion and encouragement I always cherish and to my mother whose death I was told of while working on this dissertation.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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## **A B S T R A C T**

### **PUBLISHING IN ETHIOPIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS**

by

Gizachew Woldeyes

This dissertation is mainly concerned with the problems and prospects of publishing in Ethiopia. A theoretical base is given as an appropriate take-off in Chapters 1 and 2 where the components of publishing and the processes involved are discussed for an appreciation of the state-of-the-art. Chapter 3 examines publishing in Africa, highlighting some critical problems in the African context. The role of multinationals and the cycle of dependency, copyright and the context of inequality and international collaboration are assessed. Chapter 4 introduces the social, political and economic make-up of Ethiopia with a close treatise of its literary tradition. The role of the church as the vanguard of the country's literary tradition and education is accounted. Chapter 5 presents the historical development of the printing industry and explores in detail the present state of publishing. Chapter 6 is a general discussion of the major problems facing the publishing industry. These include: paper supply, manpower, repair and maintenance, authorship and other related matters. Chapter 7 presents the prospect of publishing in the framework of the proposals suggested for consideration and a conclusion.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **COMPONENTS OF PUBLISHING**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Publishing is an integral part of the intellectual and cultural system of a society. The system comprises institutions and the various means of the media; radio, TV, and the press, playing a leading part. The complexity of the level of advancement of the intellectual and cultural system of a society depends on the level of the technology achieved. The higher the technological advancement, the wider it is to reach a mass audience to enhance the level of the intellectual and cultural system of the society having international implications through imports and exports of books and other media products. The highly industrialised nations have achieved various accessibility alternatives to develop their intellectual and cultural system. Hence, publishing plays only a small part in the system. Print production as a medium of communication in modern societies is being challenged and even conventional ways of producing print materials are being altered by new means of composition.

In developing countries, however, the intellectual and cultural system is rudimentary and often limited to a small educated minority. There are still countries at an early stage working towards total literacy. Thus, publishing has yet to go a long way to play a significant role in the development of the cultural and intellectual system of these countries.

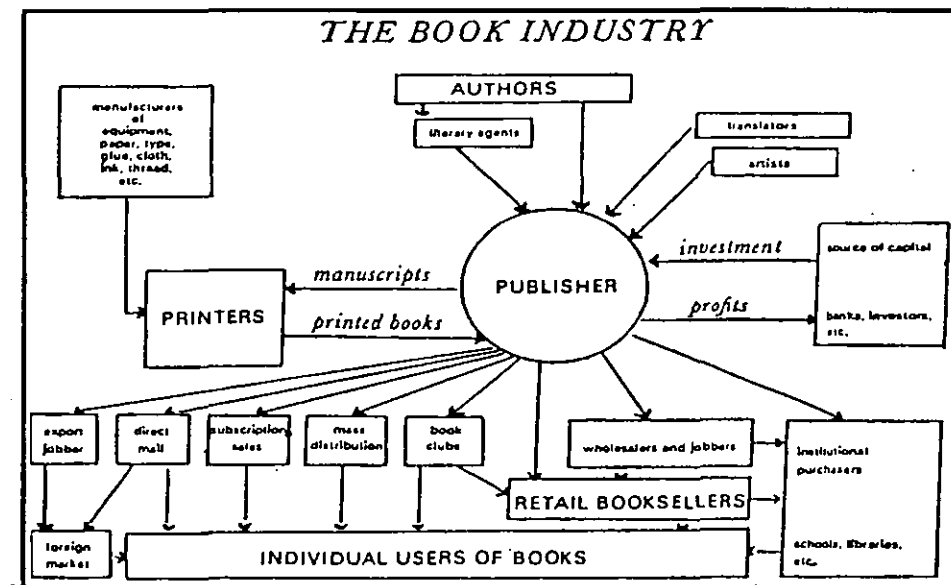
The simple dictionary meaning of publishing is to make public the words and pictures that creative minds (authors) have produced, that editors have worked over, that printers have reproduced and book-sellers made available to the reader. It is a formidable succession of activities, none of which, by itself, can be called publishing.

First and foremost, a manuscript has to be transformed into a book form

and then distributed to its intended market to complete the process of publishing. The intermediary in the chain of activities is the publisher.

Thus, the role of publishing in society as an important element in the development and dissemination of knowledge cannot be seen without an understanding of the elements involved in the integrated process of publishing.

Publishing is the whole intellectual and business procedure of selecting and arranging to make a book and of promoting its ultimate use (1).



Source: Philip G. Altbach, *Publishing in India*  
(Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975)

As the diagram indicates, outstanding components in the publishing industry are the author, the publisher, the printer and the book-seller. It is now necessary to consider the individual role of each.

## 1.1 The Author

Leaving aside the writing of journal articles, pamphlets, research reports and the like, any person who writes a book of any sort is an author (2). A UNESCO definition of a book, adopted in 1964, defines it as a non-periodical printed publication of at least 49 pages excluding the cover pages, to help distinguish it from booklets, journals or pamphlets (3). No two books can be identical, although similarities there may well be and hence no two authors are alike. Authors are initiators in a chain of communication. The author has something he wants to communicate to his readers. What he writes becomes the content of the book and thus the product of his labour. When the content is put together and published in book form as a product, it is read by readers, the ultimate market. Full-time authorship is rare. Authors of most academic and scientific books are academics or scientists. For some authors, writing is an occasional activity and, for others, it is a highly professional occupation. Between these two extremes lies a variety of other types of people, all of whom are authors. In the rank of authorship, therefore, there are those who enjoy prestige in society because of their high level of imagination to stimulate many people to take an interest in a particular subject.

The general practice is for an author to submit a completed manuscript to a publisher for consideration. If the publisher is interested, a contract is drawn up and the book is published. The author is then entitled to a royalty of 10% to 15% of sales from his book.

If, however, the author decides not to submit his work directly to the publisher, he sends his manuscript to a literary agent. Since the First World War, the literary agent has risen with increasing rapidity to become one of the most important factors in publishing (4). The advantages of a literary agent are many. He knows the state of the market better than the author is likely to; he has regular contacts with publishers and knows the kinds of books in need. He will negotiate the contract with the publishers for better deals and the preservation of authors' rights and

benefits. He will, in general, stand between the author and the publisher for any emerging disputes. Literary agents are of particular importance to authors in the event of the presentation of their works in films, serials, dramatic or broadcasting programmes. Agents with the right connections may be able to put up to their authors an idea for a book to be written for a particular publisher (5). For all their services, the agents are paid by the author a 10% commission from the earnings of the book.

A mention of authors' rights and benefits calls for an important element in publishing: copyright. The essence of copyright is the understanding that intellectual works should be encouraged. In the sharing process, copyright entitles the author to stop others from copying or exploiting his works without his permission.

Creative works, also known as intellectual property, can be categorised under headings such as literary, musical, dramatic, audio, video recordings, computer programmes, ~~radio~~ and television broadcasts, to name the familiar ones. Copyright protection is secured as soon as a book is written and the completion date established by depositing a copy of it at an authorised national body. The justification of copyright is any person who creates something should be entitled to own it: a person who writes a book should be as much entitled to the ownership of what he has produced as a person who manufactures any marketable object. This creates the stimulus to innovate; an act to encourage authors to create and for others to invest in the exploitation of the creative works (6). Generally, copyright in a work published during the author's life-time extends for fifty years after the author's death, although in some the term is shorter and in others longer.

## **1.2 The Publisher**

The publisher is the middle-man between the author and the reader. From a social view-point, therefore, the publisher is the person who moves

things along from the rather solitary work of the author to the very public aspect of multiple readership (7). It is the publisher who gives the author and his creation public life standing at a point of intersection between inner and outer demands. It is the multiple aspect of the publisher's functions that brings about the important change from an author having written a book to the publisher and the publisher producing thousands of copies of a title for millions of readers (8).

He is the author's primary partner in giving an opinion about the manuscript and perhaps working with him on it. He judges the chances of financial success of a book and arranges the possible financing of it. As a rule, there are factors that influence the decisions of authors in choosing their publishers. First is the confidence that the author has in the publisher, both intellectually and financially. He also considers the list of authors whose books are published by the publisher, the format in which the publisher will present his book and the efficiency of the publisher.

The publisher, on his part, determines which books to publish and the overall planning. This he does with the production and distribution personnel and with the editors with whom he discusses individual manuscripts for substance and quality, a major criterion in the decision process. The role of the editor in the decision-making is significant. It will be considered in the following chapter.

Skill in decision-making not only on the choice of titles or authors but also the number of print runs is a crucial matter in the publishing industry. In publishing, a low print run means a high unit cost per book, while a high print run lowers the unit cost of the book. For example, the unit price of paperbacks is cheaper because of high print run. Therefore, for a publisher, it is important to understand the direct relation between price and print runs.

There are, of course, other considerations which come into play in determining the income of a publisher. The detail will be much beyond the

scope of this chapter. However, the complexity of the book trade can be appreciated by the number of new titles issued in a year.

According to *The Bookseller*, March 1, 1991, UK publishers output for the period July to December, 1990 is reported to be 35,720 new titles at a total published price of £753,972.75. The book publishers also vary in size and variety. There are 4,000 entries in Whitaker's *UK Publishers and their Addresses*. They include private societies, associations and institutions. The members of the UK publishers' association, about 400 companies, account for at least 90% of the national turnover (revenue from sales) (9).

### 1.3 **The Printer**

With the manuscript accepted and the contract agreement signed between the author and the publisher, the former, often through his literary agent and the latter with the recommendation from the editor, the manuscript will then proceed to the printer. The publisher also sends the style directive - a printed statement of the publisher's house rule plus instructions about the particular typescript in question, in line with any special requirements of the author, if any. Apart from the more obvious and conventional considerations, the particular taste of the production department of the publisher has considerable influence upon the final appearance of the book.

Once work is started, each successive step in the manufacturing of the book depends upon the specific instructions prescribed by the publisher including delivery schedules and the number of proofs required. The final output is what the publisher wants the book to be and the printer's job is to fulfil this.

#### 1.4 **Bookselling**

It is often said that to produce a book is one thing but it is another and more complicated to sell since books are sold in a variety of ways and outlets. The most difficult task of all that a mortal man can embark upon is to sell a book (12).

The publisher's sales practice is to send his sales staff on a continuous round of the book shops or to contact them through other means. Selling starts long before the publication of a book; that is as soon as the sales or the publicity office issues something relating to the book which can be shown or talked about. These include jackets, book proofs, special packages and gimmick manufactures relating to the book or its author. Proof copies are also sent to columnists and other publicity outlets. The average allowance is an appropriation of 5% of turnover for direct spending on all advertising and publicity material (13). These include displays, posters, circulars and a direct approach to the public in newspaper or magazine space or air time to attract attention.

The main publicity device is the publisher's catalogue which gives a full description of each forthcoming book based usually on the jacket blurb and mailed to book shops.

As publication day approaches and invoicing of subscription orders gets under way, books are offered at a reduced price if ordered by the customer of the book-seller before publication day. The purpose is to stimulate subscription orders and to encourage the book-seller to order in advance at the lower price. These discounts are special subscription terms designed to recognise the book-seller's commitment to share the risk on an untried venture. This is a proper and equitable ground for special considerations.

The subscription orders thus collected give the publisher an indication of probable trade reception of the book and may thus influence the print order. The tentative date of publication, usually six months, may be

shifted backward or forward, according to the response which the publisher receives through his sales office. This means no print order will be forwarded until the publisher receives sufficient advance subscription promises from customers to cover his cost.

Publishers' recognised customers are of three kinds. First, there are library suppliers, empowered to allow libraries a 10% discount on all purchases. Second, there are the wholesalers, who take a narrow percentage between the margins allowed to them by publishers and those they pass on to the retail book-seller. They depend on volume and offer the facilities of centralised buying, supply and accounting to small book shops or to customers overseas. They are qualified for extra discounts averaging 7% to 10% of published prices (14) and their bulk purchase saves the publisher much invoice and packing costs. Third, there are the retail book-sellers, who buy books from publishers for sale to the casual trade and to any school, library or to other customers. The standard trade terms allowed to booksellers are a discount of one-third of the published price (15).

Retail book prices in the United Kingdom are fixed by the Net Book Agreement (NBA) since 1900 and survived referral to the Restrictive Practices Court in 1962 (16). The agreement exists to promote a stable and diverse industry and to encourage book shops to continue holding a wide variety of stock. It prevents their being under-cut and possibly put out of business by large chains with more purchasing power and who can secure bigger discounts.

There are also other outlets for books. Estimates made by Euromonitor for the year 1979 of UK sales by type of distributor at retail selling prices give a sum of £256 million (48% of the whole market) to book shops. Leaving aside the institutional market of sales to schools and libraries, which accounted for £133 million (25%), wholesalers had sales of £122 million (23%), book clubs £70 million (13%) and library and education contractors, £85 million (16%) together (17).



It is clear from these figures that books are sold by a wide variety of suppliers to a wide variety of purchasers.

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly give a preliminary understanding of the important role of the four major components of the publishing industry. The author is aware that there is still much more to be said as a published book is very much the product of a chain of a great many ideas, expertise and decisions of many people interconnected within the various niches in the publishing industry.

The next chapter is an extension of this chapter, aimed at considering the process of publishing to shed a further light onto the state-of-the-art.

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE PUBLISHING PROCESS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Until the rise of the mass market for books, publishing was a simple cottage industry. An author would approach a bookseller-printer, roles not yet differentiated, and contract for the printing and selling of his books. The costs were borne, wholly or in part, by a patron of the author who thus ensured that the book would reach the cultural and social elites of the day (1).

As the market for books expanded due to higher levels of literacy and a decline of the price of books as a result of economies of scale and improved production methods, there now developed differentiated departments, each assigned with specific tasks in the making of books (2). The whole process could thus profitably be conceived as involving a chain of decisions peculiar to each department and made by each, in turn, as the book comes its way.

How does the book come its way is the question this chapter will consider. The publishing process comprises four salient elements, namely: editorial, design, production and sales distribution and marketing. It is now necessary to show each individual stage of the process and the principal tasks performed.

#### **2.1 Editorial**

The author takes the first step by submitting the manuscript to an editor of a publisher. The procedure for reviewing, evaluating and deciding to publish a manuscript differs from one publisher to another. Some editors

decide on their own whether a book is suitable. Other editors may be required to get sales or marketing inputs into the decision to publish. Generally, there is a discussion and it is a question of who is most committed to the book and how passionately. If one person feels very strongly, that can sometimes be enough and usually the person is the editor, and sometimes even unanimous enthusiasm is not sufficient because the price may be too high (3).

After the manuscript is examined, the decision is taken by the editor whether he should read the work himself or employ an external reader who may have a speciality in the particular subject area or can even reject the manuscript immediately.

If the book is non-fiction, and of particular subject, it will be sent to an external reader specialising in that field. Besides 'specialist' outside readers, general external readers are also employed by publishers. 'General' readers are often ex-publishers, sometimes themselves authors expected to know about the market for general books and to be able to know and to distinguish between good and bad writing and provide a detailed summary of the book content (4).

The comments are then evaluated by the editor. If readers, however, indicate that the books has a potential to be published with proposed amendments such as style, length, etc., the editor will resolve the matter with the author. In so doing, the editor makes constructive and valuable material contributions to enhance the work.

In deciding whether a books is publishable or not, the editor ensures that the book is suitable for the publishing house 'list'. That is, a title must be compatible with the established tradition and particular style of the house. Other matters of consideration include the prestige of the author in his profession, his reputation among general readers, previous track record, originality and timeliness of the subject matter of the book, and its commercial prospects (5).

It is necessary for the editor to have a clear knowledge of the target audience or readership, their tastes and current fashions for the potential sales of the book. Furthermore, the editor must see to it that the physical form of the book, word length, illustration, type size, binding style and production quality are analysed in terms of probable cost and the range of price within which the book must be sold.

The editor has a further responsibility to prepare a publishing proposal circular with justification to, as well as financial statements outlining the expected sales revenue against the costs of producing the book and those of authors' royalties to give the desirable profit margin. The tasks of editors vary from publisher to publisher, while evaluating manuscripts and signing promising authors is a primary editorial function. In any case, complex and highly illustrative books involve editors at every stage in the production process. Hence, editors must possess a high degree of creativity, patience and readiness to accept or initiate ideas.

## 2.2 **Estimating**

Upon securing the approval of editorial reports, the process of estimating will proceed. This involves a thorough discussion and consultation with the production staff to assess the manufacturing cost; and the sales staff to ensure their support for the project and to draw a tentative first print quantity and a forecast of sales in order to calculate the potential income and to guarantee adequate profit margin. The editor should know the 'get out' point: how many copies a specific book must sell before it pays for itself and starts to make some profit for the firm (6).

After the estimate is approved by all concerned departments, the editor will announce to the author that the decision has been reached to publish his book.

### 2.3 **Contract**

The editor negotiates with the author regarding the signing of the contract before the manuscript starts on its way. If the author has a literary agent, then the negotiation will be between the agent and the editor with the agent presenting the contract which favours the author, usually specifying the advance to be paid, the basic royalties and other matters.

When agreement is reached, the contract will then be signed by both author and publisher. There are instances when contracts may have been signed long before the book was written and financing of the author undertaken while work was in progress (7).

### 2.4 **Copy Editing**

All parties satisfied, the manuscript proceeds to the desk of the copy editor in the publishing house. Copy editing is the mechanical marking of a manuscript so that it is in literal and literary form ready to go to the printer (8).

The copy editor's job is to discover and mark out all usages that may hinder the reader, such as mis-spelled words, missing or excessive punctuation, inconsistencies and unintelligible abbreviations in the text.

When there is due reason for querying an author's assertion, the copy editor queries all that seems wrong or dubious. The copy editor also marks the typescript for the printer, showing clearly any alterations or changes using the standard marks that the printer understands. The copy editor thus makes valuable contributions to the text, often with the consent of the author.

## 2.5 **Production and Design**

A copy of the manuscript is sent to the production department for the designer to take over. The designer will then decide the type in which the text is to be set, the type area on the page, the general lay-out and other related matters. These details settled and the method of reproduction selected, sample pages are set in type from the designer's lay-outs. Upon approval by the editors and others concerned, the copy-edited typescript proceeds to the printer. Jacket design, together with the wording which will appear on it, will be sent for preparation and proofing. The 'brasses' with which the title and author's name and publisher's imprint are stamped on the binding will also be ordered at this stage.

Meanwhile, proofs of the book will arrive from the printer. Two copies will be sent to the author - one to correct and return and the other to keep. A third copy is read by someone - the copy editor - in the publishing house. Authors are often reminded that corrections are expensive and should be kept to the minimum. Alterations made by authors in excess of the percentages allowed of the total setting cost are charged against authors (9).

When the author's corrected proofs come, his alterations and that of the publisher's proof-reader will be incorporated and returned to the printer. With all proofs corrected and final decisions on the print quantity taken, orders will be given to the printers and binders for the manufacture of the book. The production department keeps an intensive check-list of all successive steps up to delivery to the warehouse.

## 2.6 **Subsidiary Rights**

The contract signed between the author and the publisher determines the scope of the publisher's subsidiary rights to licence the exploitation of the book in different media reproductions or translations by other

national and/or foreign national firms or individuals. The rights department of the publisher may be involved with a title before the author has signed the contract if assessment of the rights sales potential is likely to affect the author's advance and royalty (10).

## **2.7 Sales and Marketing**

The publisher's sales practices and the various sales outlets have already been considered in Chapter 1. Here, it is proposed to deal with the relationship between the sales department and the editorial department who have great affinity and mutual respect. Hence, it is likely that some ideas may overlap.

The sales department plays a major role in the formation of a publisher's list, not only in influencing decisions as to which book to accept or reject, but also in depicting trends and seldom suggesting specific titles. They indicate unrealistic print runs because they know the market situation better.

The sales department promotes the publisher's new books. A key event for presenting a new list to the sales force is the sales conference. Such a conference is held twice a year in the UK, in May for the fall list and in November or December for the spring list (11).

This is an occasion for someone, usually the editor, to inform the sales staff about the new title and prepare them for the campaign. The sales department requests for additional reprints and organises the sales of 'remainders'. Remainders are those copies of a book which are left when sales have come down to an extremely low level or have ceased altogether (12). Remainders are handled by a 'remainder' merchant: a specialist wholesaler who purchases 'unwanted' books from publishers at very low prices and resells to the general public at a reduced price.



## 2.8 **Publicity and Promotion**

The aim of the publicity and promotion is to make the media, the book trade and consumers, conscious of the publisher's new product and to stimulate demand. People purchase books through having read a review or through personal recommendations. They may go to a book shop and enquire or simply through an instance of 'impulse buying', that is, buying a book on sight, on impulse.

The publicity and promotion department may be involved at the publishing proposal stage where during the evaluation of the book, the decision on the promotional material and the publicity and media coverage is taken. The budget for promotion is proportional to the expected sales revenue. Since the book trade is the key vehicle for selling the publisher's output, publicity and promotion is directed at the book trade itself.

First, the book's advance bibliographic information sheet is prepared and mailed six to nine months ahead of publication, so that wholesalers and suppliers will enter the title in their catalogues to secure advance orders, often with the cover which is another promotional item. The catalogues are produced to present the publishing house and its products with readily understandable and accurate details for orders. Most important of all promotional forms is the review copy which is sent out to literary editors of noted newspaper and relevant magazines and journals. Air time is another strategy to get authors' exposure through radio and TV programmes. Exhibits, usually in connection with conferences or conventions of some organisations and book fairs also help to popularise new titles.

Another means used for publicity of new titles are 'point of sale' material: posters, copy-holders, leaflets, badges, etc., designed to attract attention to major titles targeted at a specific reading audience. When a title receives extensive and commendatory notice in the press and on the air, not only is the current sale increased, but the potential motion picture, television and reprint rights are enhanced (13). The

publisher thus ensures, through his publicity and promotion staff, a substantial sale of his books to book shops and wholesalers.

## **2.9 Final Print Quantity and Publication Date**

The decision about the print quantity will be taken upon the return of the final proof. Response rates of subscription sales or advance orders are considered and evaluated. Other issues fixed at this stage are the price of the book and the publication date.

The decision of a suitable time for the publication date is influenced by a number of factors, one of which is the balance of the publisher's list - he will not want to publish all his major titles in the same month (14). The list has to be spread throughout the year.

Maximum care is taken in the decision process on matters of print runs, price and publication date, since the whole effort is to get profit after return covers manufacturing cost, author's royalty and overheads.

## **2.10 Invoicing, Warehousing and Despatch**

As soon as sales start, orders begin to reach the publisher's office for which invoices are prepared. Meanwhile, books are delivered to the warehouse from the printer on a date as per initial arrangements with the warehouse manager of the publisher.

The books are then checked out in accordance with the orders received and distributed to arrive in book shops in time for publication.

## **2.11 Publication Day**

Publication day is the day when all the work on the book that comes out on

that day has been completed and the book is in the shop waiting for customers. It is a day when the lengthy process of changing a manuscript into a book has come to an end and the book becomes a part of the back-list of the publisher.

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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **PUBLISHING IN AFRICA**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The state of publishing in Africa can only be seen against a background of the general context of many social and infrastructural elements, a wide diversity of languages, a high level of illiteracy, poor transport and communications facilities and chronic balance of payments problems in most of them.

Since 1957, independence was achieved in almost all African countries excepting Liberia and Ethiopia. The independence of the latter was challenged only briefly from 1936 to 1941, when occupied by Italy and, of course, South Africa, currently in struggle for liberation. Mozambique and Angola, Portuguese colonies, attained their independence in the mid-1970s; Zimbabwe and Namibia as recently as the 1980s.

Many of the past thirty years have been years of great economic uncertainty, of economic paralysis hard hit by the world-wide recession of the early 1980s and the debt crisis with its attendant devaluation of currencies and lack or scarcity of foreign exchange. To these problems may be added civil war in a number of countries and the widespread drought and famine. Over the past two decades, a sizeable portion of the region has been the scene of political and military conflict. In some, the violence was sparked by liberation struggles. In the wake of independence, violent internal conflict burst forth in many of the new nations, stemming from the pluralism of African societies and the difficulties of post-colonial political consolidations. Diversity in languages and culture also hindered the process of national integration.

Civil and military strife and the political fragility which it reflected had several negative effects. First, it forced African governments to give high priority to short-term political objectives. Regimes concerned with ensuring the political loyalty of intellectuals; political and intellectual fetters placed on intellectual activities and '... tuned only to what is appropriate to government authorities' (1). Second, it triggered large-scale displacement of the intellectual potential of the nations. In the 1970s, the number of refugees who had fled across national frontiers in Africa rose from 750,000 to over 5 million, accounting for about half of all refugees world-wide. In eight countries (Angola, Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Rwanda and Zimbabwe), the number of refugees' flights numbered at least 3% of the total population (2). Third, civil strife induced a diversion of resources to military spending while the share of GNP devoted to military purposes remained fairly constant for the regions as a whole in the 1970s (2.9%) the proportion nearly doubled among the poorest group, rising from 2.3% to 4.3% of GNP (3).

These and other obstacles, some of them of near impossible dimensions, should be critically considered in assessing the realities of over all development prospects in general in Africa and of the publishing industry in particular.

### **3.1 The Beginnings of Publishing in Africa**

Africa's association with publishing and literature has been on record long before the first European landed on the continent. Much before the widespread use of paper, Egyptians are noted for using papyrus discovered on the banks of the River Nile, since the 10th century, when Cairo was one of the major cultural centres of the world of Islam (4).

Other countries, such as Algeria, are noted to have a long literary history as early as the 18th century. Another African country, Ethiopia, has a rich history of manuscript production. Ethiopians, in fact, had

produced written works in their own languages even before the earliest literature appeared in Western Europe (5). As to when exactly the first printing appeared in Africa, there are differing opinions.

Some historians claim 1516 as the beginning of the first press whereas others quote 1583. Still others argue that printing by movable type first emerged at the turn of the 17th century in West Africa introduced by the Portuguese Jesuits in Congo (Zaire) or Luanda (Angola). Yet a widely accepted opinion puts 1787 as the year and Capetown (South Africa) the place for the first letter-press printing set up by a German settler, John Christian Ritter, who was reported to have printed his first almanacs in 1776 (6).

There is, however, scholarly consensus that publishing in Africa may have its beginnings with the advent of Islam and by the 17th century, Arabic scripts were in circulation in the urban and trading centres of Western Sudan. Sudan, by Arab historians, still means 'Bilad a Sudan' with references to the Sudan which, in early times, included the areas presently occupied by Senegal, Mali, Upper Volta (Burkina Fasso) and Niger (7).

With the advent of Islam in the 11th century, both foreign and locally-produced manuscripts were available in centres of the trans-Saharan trade:

A small class of literate Muslims continued to exist in Western Sudan, and certain Fulani religious leaders, like Uthman Dans Fodir, authored numerous works (8).

This does not, however, mean that Islamic literacy has reached the people, since it remained exclusively within the domains of the scholars of the time due to limited distribution. Although Islamic culture and Islam had influence in commercial centres in places from countries in West Africa across the east, it, too, declined with the decline of the trans-Saharan trade in the 19th century as a result of subsequent changes in the direction of trade towards Europe.



Islamic philosophy and literary life having stayed in conformity with African local tradition to some degree, had to give way to a stronger and modern Christianity associated with a more attractive Western culture. Thus, Islamic literacy declined with a steady infiltration of Christianity in its place. The beginnings of publishing, therefore, is owed to the influence of Christianity and its missionary teachings, they being the first publishers to bring the printing press which began to operate in many parts of Africa since the early 19th century.

Most of the works published were translations of the Bible along with hymn books, devotional literatures and evangelical in the local languages. Although the missionaries had vested interests in their services, there is no mistaking the fact that they have played a significant role in the development of the publishing industry in Africa and the creation and promotion of technical skills required:

A real contribution has been made by Christian publishing houses in Africa, both in a publishing and a distribution role. On the publishing side, emphasis has been given to Bible translations ... in the area of distribution, Christian publishers and book-sellers in African have used mobile units moving around in areas where people actually lived (9).

### **3.2 Multinationals and the Cycle of Dependency**

Publishing in Africa cannot be seen outside the context of the general trends in international publishing. A number of elements in publishing apply to the book industry, irrespective of geographical boundaries and the level of economic development achieved. Such matters as copyright conventions, the cost of paper, which is of particular importance in Africa, the growth of multinational corporations in the publishing industry, the growth of new communications technology, making publishing possible on an international scale, and the use of 'low labour cost' nations for composition and printing reflect the global interdependence of

publishers. The international network of knowledge distribution is one of considerable complexity. Publishing, film distribution, news networks and, recently, data bases and computer firms, are all part of the system by which knowledge is distributed throughout the world. As late as 1978, 34 industrialised countries representing 30% of the world's population produced 81% of the world's titles. 37% of all British books are sold overseas and 20% of these are educational books (10).

The policies of the industrialised nations and major aid-giving agencies affect and largely influence the nature of publishing in Africa since the publishing industry has long been in the hands of multinational publishing firms based in the industrialised nations. In many respects, therefore, publishing in Africa depends on the industrialised nations which hold the bulk of the world's resources, particularly in the areas of publishing.

The cycle begins with the reality that the publishing technology, the world's book market, the expertise and many aspects of publishing are centered in the industrialised nations. Most major periodicals have their origin in the United States, Great Britain and France, the centres of international knowledge network. Major Western publishers, like Macmillan, Longman, McGraw-Hill, Prentice-Hall, have branches in Africa. The orientations, policies and the ideas of the home offices generally predominate in the branch offices of these multinational publishers. The major world languages, English and French, play a dominant role in international publishing, giving Western publishers a significant role in the cultural, intellectual and economic life of the African nations. The trend in book translations illustrates this:

... of the 50,428 entries in the 1977 edition of UNESCO's Index translation, more than half were produced in eight industrialised nations (11).

English and French are dominant languages in the translations of materials of which African countries are a part of the net users. Africa, with 10%

of the world's population, produced a meagre 2% of the world's output of books in 1981. According to UNESCO accounts, Africa's production has risen from 1.1% of the global output in 1955 (12). Since these figures include the titles published by British publishers under the imprints of their local branches in Africa, the total number of books produced by indigenous publishers should be far below.

As in most other economic relationships, the terms and conditions determining intellectual trade relations between industrialised and developing countries are also reflected in the African publishing scenario. Books, expertise and equipment are exported to Africa. Commercial relationships of dependence built up over centuries of colonialism and the foreign aid phenomenon are part of the equation. As one observer stated, it is difficult to see how a responsible book industry can develop in Africa without the organisational activities of foreign firms in training a cadre of personnel and creating a workable network of book distribution:

Although the firms and their shareholders probably do not consider themselves primarily humanitarian agents of technical assistance, a powerful case can be made that their actions in their own self-interest are highly effective means of bringing to Africa specialised publishing experience and talent the continent needs to fulfil its own role in the world of books (13).

Patronising as these words may sound, it is quite obvious that no foreign publisher operates in Africa for philanthropic reasons and it is likely that, for several more years to come, multinationals have yet a significant and dominant role to play in Africa and dependency is very likely to continue.

### **3.3 Indigenous Publishing**

Printed materials are not the only artifacts of a culture but one of the

many elements of a modern society. However, when seen in the context of the African situation and its present level of development, they have a very crucial role to play in the modernisation process, while, on the other hand, they help to interpret and understand the old cultural heritage. To establish an indigenous publishing house is an act of liberation and, therefore, a necessity because it breaks the control, indeed, the monopoly, which the Europeans have had over world literature, for which reason they have controlled the mind of the African (14).

This statement is further asserted by Abiola Irele, who said:

The vast majority of books read in Africa ... are written by foreigners and published abroad. Even works by African authors, literary or otherwise, continue for the most part to be published outside the continent and have to be subsequently imported. It has been estimated that something like 90% of the books and publications sold in Nigeria originate from abroad. When it is considered that the publishing industry in Nigeria is one of the best established on the continent, the situation in the rest of Africa can be imagined (15).

It is often argued that multinationals dominate publishing in Africa, working to their advantage. By virtue of their ease of access to strong financial backing, years of experience and expertise and their superb state-of-the-art equipment, they have enjoyed advantages in the African market. In so doing, however, they also filled the great need in supplying the text books immediately required when public education was established in Africa. They have also provided training and the technical bases required in the publishing industry. Indigenous publishing is a very recent development in Africa. There were no private indigenous publishing enterprises until the late 1950s or early 1960s. The pioneering Nigerian indigenous firms, Onibonoje Press of Ibadan and the Mbari Artists' and Writers' Club and Mbari Publications, were founded in 1958 and 1961, respectively. In Francophone Africa, the first indigenous publishing house was Editions CLE (Centre Littérature Evangélique) in Yaunde, Cameroon, founded in 1963. Since then, however, a number of

publishing houses have developed. The Library of Congress estimated an increase of 5.9% in titles received from the African continent in 1988. The most recent editions of African Books in Print lists 604 indigenous publishers active in the continent (16). As some of these firms may be short-lived due to problems which we shall consider later, there are undoubtedly others uncounted and yet issue many privately published titles as well.

According to the 1983 African Books in Print, a list of 18,700 titles were available in English, French and other African languages from about 600 publishers. Approximately 60% of these publishers have their base in English-speaking African countries, excluding South Africa. Nigeria and Kenya take the lead in the number of private publishers. The annual new titles total between 1,500 and 2,000 (17). Nearly one quarter of these deal with economics and natural sciences and a further quarter with education and literature. Around 20% of all titles are published in African languages: Swahili, 21.8%, Shona, 20.8% followed by Yoruba, 12.8% and Malgaey, 12.2%, respectively.

African Books in Print reported 1,800 titles for 1982. Breakdown of the titles by subject area and the percentage share is as follows:

NO.	SUBJECT AREA	PERCENTAGE
	Literature	18.20
	Natural science and technology	12.44
	Economics	11.77
	Education	9.60
	History	7.10
	Languages	6.96
	Religion	6.08
	Politics	5.68
	Children's literature	5.00
	General	4.05
	Social Sciences	3.98
	Law	2.70
	Ethnology	1.55
	Book-keeping	1.55
	Geography	1.28
	Art	1.15
	Philosophy	0.81
TOTAL		99.90

Source: IFLA Journal, 10 (1984) 4

Indigenous publishing in Africa is characterised by scarcities of almost all the elements of publishing. The chronic problems start with the general state of affairs of government policies. If government policy favours private enterprise, the expectation is that the necessary conditions will be provided. If there is a tendency to centralisation or monopoly by the state, then private enterprise is not encouraged:

Some African regimes ... from a desire to maintain a low level of political and intellectual mobilisation, have discouraged publishing and book-related activities. This is more common ... in the very poor nations where some dictatorships have feared that the development of an independent publishing enterprise may lead to dissent and instability (18).

On the other hand, insufficient investment capital continues to be a major problem. Commercial channels are not developed and, if there are any, they are generally dominated by European books whose costs are beyond the reach of the reading public of Africa. According to the UK publishing statistics, the average price for all books published in the second half of 1990 was £21.12 which was 3.2% ahead of the average price in the same period in 1989 (£20.45). The average price of new books rose in the same period from £21.11 to £22.46, an increase of 6.% (19).

Financing is very difficult as banks are reluctant to consider publishing an essential component of development and therefore deserve loans. There is not enough paper and printing presses are expensive. Low literacy rates diminish the potential market for books and limitations in the distribution channels do not encourage publishing. Africa's population is primarily rural and widely dispersed. Inadequate communication and poor transport facilities affect the distribution of books. Although production costs could be kept low with larger print runs, distribution problems limit the size of printing thereby resulting in high printing costs. As one publisher said:

We publish the smallest editions at the greatest cost; on these we place the highest price and then we try to market them to people who can least afford them (20).

Another feature of the distribution problem is illustrated by L. O. Nnaji, who described deliveries as:

Instances of non-delivery, duplicated delivery, muddled delivery, wrong delivery or part delivery are a common feature (21).

This problem is associated with lack of adequate numbers of trained personnel, not only in the distribution and book-selling but also in the technological aspects of printing and publishing. Training facilities for these occupations hardly exist, although they are needed everywhere in Africa. Added to this is the existence of a linguistic diversity, making it even harder for authorship and book publishing in Africa. The few African authors often prefer to go for the multinationals for the benefits and prestige it is likely to bring them and the international market for publicity on a world-wide scale.

Despite these and other related problems, however, the prospects for publishing in Africa has some bright hopes. Kenyan publisher, Henry Chakava, for example, estimated that Kenya imported only 50% of its book requirements in 1982 (22). Data for Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that the highest developed indigenous publishing on the continent is in Nigeria, with 161 publishers, followed by South Africa (84); Kenya (43); Ghana (35); Tanzania (33); Zaire(26); Zambia (23); Zimbabwe (23); Cameroon (14); Malawi (13); Malagacy Republic (13); Senegal (9) and Cote d'Ivoire (7) (23).

Indigenous publishing is thus a reality in a number of African countries. The problems and obstacles they face are quite staggering. With all optimism, however, the years ahead can be seen as full of challenge but also of promises.

### **3.4 Copyright and the Context of Inequality**

It has been stated that publishing is part of an international system dominated by the industrialised nations and the assertion that Africa is in a position of dependency in the system. One single element of the



publishing industry that indicates the international basis of publishing is the arrangement of copyright. It involves international legal agreements, national laws and a range of differing approaches. This is not an attempt to discuss the legal aspects of copyright. The concern here is to raise issues relating to copyright as they affect African countries in particular and the Third World in general, and how it relates to the growth and transmission of knowledge.

There are two international unions of countries for copyright. The Berne Convention, mostly involving the developed nations, gives the author of a book published in a Berne country copyright for his lifetime and for fifty years after his death in all other Berne countries. His foreign language rights for translations, performing rights in plays, radio and television broadcasting and recording are protected for the same period of time.

The Universal Copyright Convention, containing less detailed obligations, provides for a minimum of copyright of twenty-five years from first publication and permits 'compulsory licences' for translation and reprints only after seven years from first publication. Some countries in Africa which became independent during the last thirty years have joined the UCC rather than the Berne Convention. Others which would have liked to join the UCC are tied to the Berne Convention due to commitments made in their colonial days.

Almost all the world's knowledge output is done in a few of the industrialised nations with the United States, Great Britain, Japan, France, West Germany and the Soviet Union taking the lead. Major universities, with their well-equipped libraries and laboratories, are located in these countries. They attract the best scholars and train a significant number of highly-educated personnel of the Third World. Major publishing houses and the market for books and periodicals are in industrialised nations. Language is another key factor in the international knowledge network:

English is the first language of 345 million people and the second language of another 400 million. It is the native language of 12 nations and the semi-official tongue of another 33 countries (24).

Major scholarly books and journals are in English and other European languages thus making African countries dependent on these nations which publish in the major international languages. Lack of expertise to translate materials from English and other European languages is a problem. Securing permission to publish translation works under the framework of international copyright system is another problem. As one observer said:

Copyright protects the 'haves' ... it is a form of monopoly that gives basic control over knowledge to the creator of that knowledge or the designer (25).

There is also the socio-cultural aspect of book export / from the industrialised nations to Africa since it is directly linked to their foreign policy goals. It is, therefore, very much in their interest to continue their role as centres of the knowledge creation and distribution system. Thus, African countries remain utterly handicapped in negotiations that affect their fundamental interests. Their position is weak because they hardly master the information that vital negotiation terms require.

This is to indicate that the international network of knowledge creation and dissemination is both complex and unequal giving a considerable advantage to the industrialised nations. The multinational publishers are well established and their interest in maintaining the *status quo* and control over the creation and dissemination of knowledge is considerable and copyright is one of their means.

... the Third World are the countrysides of the urban-industrialised publishing centres of the West. And just as with most countryside populations, we are perennially treated to avowals of concern for our development from the metropolitan powers ... to no avail (26).

Generally, African countries are consumers of new technological innovations in printing and composition. The new technologies are the continuation of the pattern of inequality and continue to place African countries in a position of dependency. At the moment, there seems to be no choice but to keep abreast as much as their resources and the international situation allows. They cannot choose otherwise and ban all outside knowledge and cultural and political influences and remain cut off from the international scientific, intellectual and cultural communication system.

### 3.5 **International Collaboration**

Books, journals or other printed materials are provided only from two possible sources. They are either produced locally or they are secured through international trade or aid. The ultimate objective for any country, however, is to develop a certain degree of self-sufficiency in book production. Seen from the context of present-day Africa, this objective sounds as remote in most African countries as is the provision of food, shelter and clothing. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Africa faced with shortages and inadequacies of these basic essentials, governments are reluctant to invest funds or pay attention to developing the publishing industry.

The problems that African countries face today in the publishing industry are much similar to those of the last two decades. Africa accounted for 1.9 per cent of the number of titles published world-wide in 1955; in 1977, it fell to 1.7% (27). But it is doubtless to say that African governments are not aware of the significant role of books for socio-

economic development. A shortage of books can delay development. This notion has been appreciated in the deliberations of many international and national conferences. One record of a Commonwealth Education Conference has this to say:

Books are a basic and vital component of the educational process; the lack of books accelerates the dangerous downward spiral whereby inferior education hinders development, which, in turn, means the provision of inadequate educational facilities, which, in turn, results in aggravated difficulties in development (28).

UNESCO has played a pioneering role in bringing about an increased awareness of these issues and has been taking steps since 1968. In 1968, a meeting on book development in Africa was convened in Acra to help formulate a programme of action. The meeting was part of a long range programme adopted by UNESCO to assist African countries to take advantage of the advances in the publishing industry. UNESCO helped participants of the Acra meeting recognise that Africa's book shortage was a severe impediment to economic and social progress and established regional targets for book development.

UNESCO has been encouraging the need to ensure that foreign publishers participate in the promotion of the African book industry by co-ordinating their investment policies with indigenous publishing houses. It has facilitated the availability of financial, material and expert aids on bilateral and multilateral levels. It has encouraged the establishment of national book development councils through short-term missions of experts upon a request from member-states under the United Nations Development Programme. Another achievement of UNESCO to help publishers has been the establishment of an International Copyright Centre in Paris in 1971, to help the arrangement of licences for reprint and translation rights.

Although it is now possible within the established procedure for African countries to get 'compulsory licences' to reprint or translate educational

books, there are limitations on the process: it generally takes at least three years for a 'compulsory licence' to allow publications from English, French or Spanish. Each licence is issued only for the country in which it is to be used and the books are not to be exported (29).

Whatever the limitations, the role of UNESCO in facilitating conditions for better understanding of the needs and interests of developing countries in the current arrangement of the international copyright system has been successful. Great Britain was the first to accept the application of the new provision (30).

Among the sources of aid in one form or another to African book development are the United States Agency for International Development, the British Overseas Development Administration, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Canada and Sweden. Among the agencies and institutions that are actively engaged in helping Africa in this field are WHO, FAO, UNICEF, Franklin Book Programmes, Ford Foundation, the British Council and the Book Development Council of Britain.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ETHIOPIA**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Ethiopia is old, old beyond all imaginings. The much sought-after cachet the 'cradle of mankind' is Ethiopia's honour with the spectacular discovery by Richard Leakey in 1974 of the 3.5 million years' old almost complete hominid skeleton which proved that Ethiopia was the home of Man's earliest ancestors. Dr Donald Johnson of Cleveland University said of the discovery:

Here was an ape-brained little creature with pelvis and leg bones almost identical in function with those of modern humans. Now I know with the certainty provided by this extraordinary fossil that hominids had walked erect at three million years BC (1).

This is to say that Ethiopia as the homeland of the 'missing link' long sought by palaeoanthropologists has much to give about our past and to understand more about many things of which mankind is yet unsure with its profoundly unique historical background as one of the oldest nation-states in the world.

#### **4.1 Location and Area**

Ethiopia stretches south and west from the Red Sea coast to form the hinterland of the Horn of Africa. Its boundaries extend from latitude 3°N to 18°N and from longitude 33°E to 48°E so that its east-west and north-south dimensions are approximately equal, enclosing an area of 1,251,282 sq. km (2). Its western neighbour is Sudan; it shares a border with Kenya in the south; and to the east and south-east lie the Republic of Djibouti

and Somalia, respectively.

#### 4.2 **Climate**

Ethiopia lies within the tropics but the wide range of altitude produces considerable variations in temperature conditions which are reflected in the traditional zones of the 'dega' (the temperate plateaux), the 'kolla' (hot lowlands) and the 'woinadaga' (the intermediate frost-free zone). The average annual temperature in the 'dega' is about 16°C, in the 'kolla' about 26°C and the 'woinadaga' 22°C (3).

#### 4.3 **Population**

Ethiopia's first census was held in 1984 when the total population was found to be 43,349,924. The annual growth rate is 2.9%. The population is expected to reach 58.1 million by 1995. More than 50% of the population are aged 20 years or less. Nearly all the major human settlements are in the highlands accounting for 70% of the population (4). Although no precise figures are available, thousands of Ethiopians have fled the country following the internal upheavals and the wars on the Eritrean and Somali fronts and other political reasons since 1974.

#### 4.4 **Language**

There are about 50 (5) different ethnic groups speaking 83 languages and 200 dialects (6) each ethnic group having two or three distinct dialects. As a consequence of the large number of languages, many Ethiopians are bilingual and even trilingual. Amharic is the official language both in the media and the education system. With the coming of the British in aid of Ethiopia in the war of liberation from Italian fascism and in recognition of the United States as a major world power, English officially replaced French in all Ethiopian public schools in 1941 (7).

Thus, English continued as the official language of instruction at the junior and senior secondary schools as well as at the colleges and universities. French, Italian and Arabic are also used in some schools and the business sector.

#### 4.5 **Politics and Economy**

Ethiopia's history as an independent polity has a long history with the existence of a kingdom at Axum in the north of the country around 500 BC (8). The political authority subsequently shifted to the south until 1930, when Emperor Haile Sellasie assumed the throne. He ruled the country from 1930 to 1974 when he was deposed by a military regime which stayed in power until 1991. At the time of writing this dissertation, the military regime has been disrupted and its government dismantled by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a Tigrean-dominated rebel group, which has been fighting the fallen regime since 1975. Although there is optimism that the political situation of the country will stabilise to pull the country back from the brink of its present national annihilation, hardly anything can be said of the new government as its policies are not yet clear.

The country's economy is largely based on agriculture, providing some 80% of exports and engaging over 75% of the working population. Agriculture contributes 48% of the GDP and 90% of exports with coffee alone accounting for 66% (9). Industry accounts for about one-sixth of the GNP and employs less than 10% of the work force. Services account for one-third of the GNP and employ about one-eighth of the work force. Ethiopia is rated by the United Nations as one of the world's ten poorest countries. The World Bank's 1978 estimate was US\$120 per head GDP which, with Male, is the lowest in Africa (10).

#### 4.6 Religion

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, a confession associated with the Coptic Church of Egypt, is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world, established in the 4th century. About 35% of the population is Christian followed by Islam estimated to have 35% to 50% of the population with its adherents spread over more ethnic groups and geographical regions (11).

#### 4.7 Literary Tradition

Ethiopia has a long history of manuscript production based on the Orthodox Church which continued to the present day, with parchment preparation, calligraphy and illustration as part of the long training of fully-qualified priests.



Illuminated bibles, hand-painted on parchment by priests and monks and bound within wooden covers. They are written in Geez.

(Source: Under Ethiopian Sky. Editions HL 1983).



Until the mid 19th century, 'Lessane Geez' (the tongue of the free) - the classical 'Ethiopie' - which developed out of dialects of the South Arabian immigrants, was the normal medium of literary expression in Ethiopia. It was used for inscriptions in pre-Christian times and soon after the conversion of Ethiopia to Christianity in the 4th century (12).

PHOENICIAN	SOUTH ARABIAN	OLD GEEZ	AMHARIC	HEBREW	GREEK	ARABIC
𐤀	𐩀𐩁	አእ	አ	א	Α	ا
𐤁	𐩀𐩂	በ	በ	ב	Β	ب
𐤂	𐩀𐩃	ገ	ገ	ג	Γ	ج
𐤃	𐩀𐩄	ደ	ደ	ד	Δ	د
𐤄	𐩀𐩅	ሀ	ሀ	ה	Ε	ه
𐤅	𐩀𐩆	ወ	ወ	ו	Υ	و
𐤆	𐩀𐩇	ገ	ገ	ז	Ζ	ز
𐤇	𐩀𐩈	ሀ	ሀ	ח	Η	ح
𐤈	𐩀𐩉	ሀ	ሀ	ט	Θ	ث
𐤉	𐩀𐩊	ገ	ገ	י	Ι	ي
𐤊	𐩀𐩋	ሀ	ሀ	כ	Κ	ك
𐤋	𐩀𐩌	ሀ	ሀ	ל	Λ	ل
𐤌	𐩀𐩍	ወ	ወ	מ	Μ	م
𐤍	𐩀𐩎	ሀ	ሀ	נ	Ν	ن
𐤎	𐩀𐩏	ሀ	ሀ	ס	Ξ	س
𐤏	𐩀𐩐	ወ	ወ	ע	Ο	ع
𐤐	𐩀𐩑	ሀ	ሀ	פ	Π	ف
𐤑	𐩀𐩒	ሀ	ሀ	צ	Ρ	ظ
𐤒	𐩀𐩓	ሀ	ሀ	ק	Σ	ق
𐤓	𐩀𐩔	ሀ	ሀ	ר	Τ	ر
𐤔	𐩀𐩕	ሀ	ሀ	ש	Θ	ش
𐤕	𐩀𐩖	ሀ	ሀ	ת	Τ	ت
𐤖	𐩀𐩗	ሀ	ሀ	י	Ι	י
𐤗	𐩀𐩘	ሀ	ሀ	כ	Κ	כ
𐤘	𐩀𐩙	ሀ	ሀ	ל	Λ	ל
𐤙	𐩀𐩚	ወ	ወ	מ	Μ	م
𐤚	𐩀𐩛	ሀ	ሀ	נ	Ν	ن
𐤛	𐩀𐩜	ሀ	ሀ	ס	Ξ	س
𐤜	𐩀𐩝	ወ	ወ	ע	Ο	ع
𐤝	𐩀𐩞	ሀ	ሀ	פ	Π	ف
𐤞	𐩀𐩟	ሀ	ሀ	צ	Ρ	ظ
𐤟	𐩀𐩠	ሀ	ሀ	ק	Σ	ق
𐤠	𐩀𐩡	ሀ	ሀ	ר	Τ	ر
𐤡	𐩀𐩢	ሀ	ሀ	ש	Θ	ش
𐤢	𐩀𐩣	ሀ	ሀ	ת	Τ	ت

Old Geez and its near neighbours

Source: Under Ethiopian Sky. Editions HL 1983\_

The earliest literary records consist of inscriptions of Geez written on hard surfaces, mainly stone, metal and clay. Monumental writings on walls of rock and granite stelae, religious votive writings on clay vessels, iron implements, gold, silver, bronze and iron coins were the main media we know of, both during the pre-Christian and Christian eras (13).



The inscription on the stone of Ezana

Source: Ministry of Education, 1976

In Sir W Cornwallis Harris's, 'Highlands of Aethiopia' (1844), there is a list of more than 100 works extant in Ethiopia. Subsequent copies have brought to light fresh copies of the same works. A conspectus of all manuscripts known to exist in Europe, over 3,200 in number (14) are to be found in the British Museum and others are to be found in the chief libraries of Europe. R. E. Littman (15) describes two collections at Jerusalem, one of which contains 283 manuscripts. In 1893, together with the Bible, some 40 Ethiopic books had been printed in Europe (16). The books produced were chiefly translations of theological treatises, hymns in rhymed verse and the royal chronicles first from Greek and then from Arabic - the latter versions of Coptic or Syrian devotional works.

One of them, 'Wedasse Maryam' (Praise of Mary) has virtually attained canonical status in the Ethiopian Church; another, 'kebre Negest' (Glory of Kings) enshrines the Solomon-Sheba legend and contains the traditional and legendary history of the Kingdom of Axum (17). Of law, the most important literary monument is the 'Fetha Negest' (Judgement of Kings), a compilation of legal provision made in the 16th century on which Ethiopian law was largely based (18).

Hagiology was an important part of Ethiopia's early literary tradition. In the great collection of 'Meshafe sinksar' (the Book of the Saints), the

history of saints has been issued for each day of the year - each saint has a day in Ethiopia, such are those of 'Mabasion' and 'Gabrekirstos', edited by Budge in the Meux Collection (London, 1899) (19). Mystical commentaries on scripture such as the book of the 'Mystery of Heaven and Earth' by Bahailu Michael in the 15th century represent philosophy. The 'Treatise of Zara Yacob', composed in 1660, is by far the most important in its endeavour to evolve rules of life according to nature. The author reviews the codes of Moses, the Gospel and the Koran and decides that all contravene the obvious intentions of the Creator (20). He also gives some details of his own life and his occupation of scribe.

The period when Geez began to give way as a spoken language to Amharic cannot be exactly determined. It has, however, survived as the literary and liturgical language up to the late 19th century when Amharic crept in to even church services.

Looking at the situation in retrospect, the paradox of an illiterate nation, until only the last decade, possessing its own ancient alphabet, can simply be explained by the complexity and intricacy of the Ethiopian history itself. The fall of Ethiopian literary heritage can be accounted to, *inter alia*, the following reasons. First, it was restricted to the church and the imperial court until the 20th century, with literacy far away from the doorsteps of the masses. Second, commercial and other links were weakened as a result of internal disorders and political rivalries. third, Ethiopia's contact with the outside world was severed by the Muslim conquest of Egypt in 639-642 (21). Thus, Ethiopia was isolated from the rest of the Christian world, restricted to defending itself against the encroaching Muslims from the north and east, as well as pagan invaders from the south. This isolation further stifled the development of the already limited literacy environment.

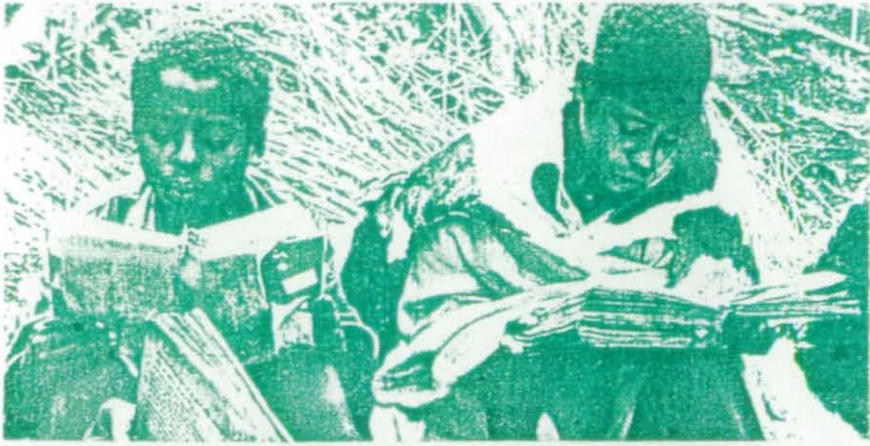


#### 4.8 **Traditional Education**

Although the access was largely to the clergy and the nobility, particularly in the early years, Ethiopia's education was the charge and trust of the church up to the beginning of the 20th century. We do not know precisely when and under what circumstance the Ethiopian Church assumed responsibility for education but it is certain that for many centuries the Church was the only regular educational agency (22). The right assumption that historians accept is with the introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia in the 5th century AD, the Church assumed responsibility for education in the country (23).

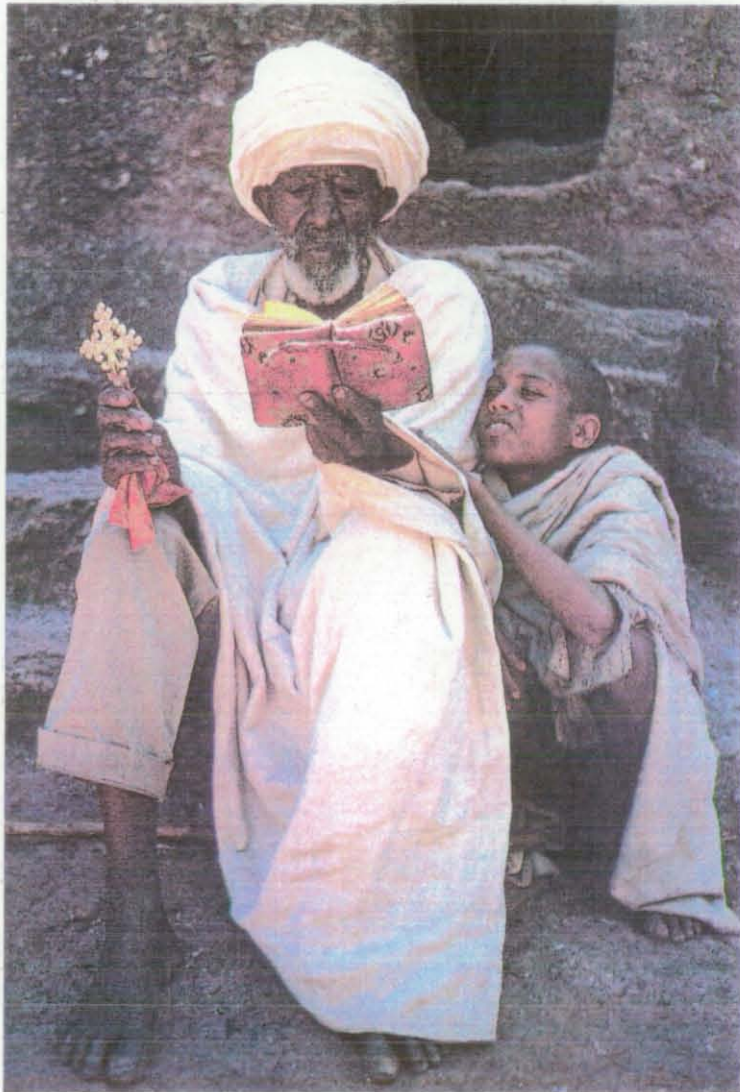
The church developed and spread a system of learning not only in Geez but, later, also in Amharic. It, too, reflected very strongly the close relation between the monarchy and the Church and its involvement in a developing feudal society for which it provided spiritual justification. The church is paid a high regard not only for the role it has played in the development of the traditional school system which, over the centuries, served as a focal point for learning but also for the preparation and production of the nation's religious and government leaders (24).

These traditional institutions of learning are situated in monasteries, a churchyard, under a tree or sometimes in a compound of an important official. The teachers lived on rewards of gifts of money, food, clothing or any other property, depending on the social and economic status of the parents of the students. There are almost 225,000 priests and 20,000 such churches and monasteries. At least one school is attached to each church or monastery (25). Every churchyard has a 'merigeta' (guide master) for the conduct of religious services and for the running of the church school. Excepting Sundays and other holidays, the 'merigeta' is engaged in teaching, seated on a small stool with a stick beside him and the book of Psalms of David in his hand while his pupils, in groups of two or three, sit on the floor before him (26).



Students in a priest school reading the Sacred Book

Source: Ministry of Education, 1976



An old priest reads the scriptures to a young apprentice deacon

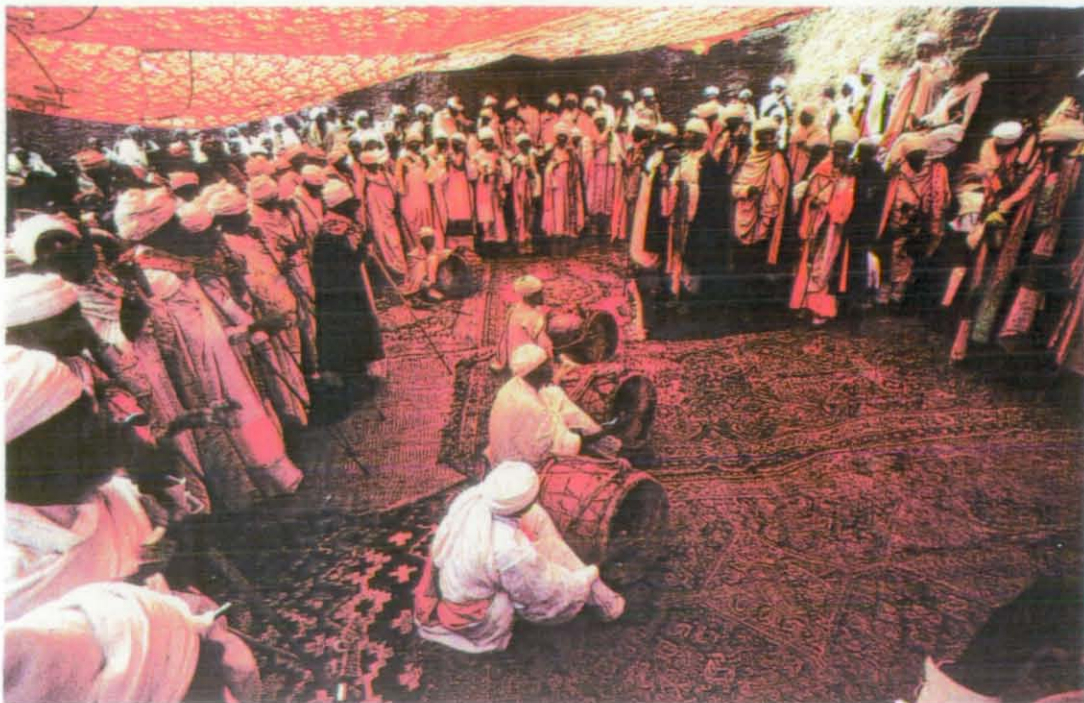
Source: Under Ethiopian Sky. Editions HL 1983

The curriculum consists of Geez, Amharic literature, church music, some world history, civil law, theology, calligraphy, painting and book binding (27).

At the primary stage, 'Nebab bet' (House of Reading) students learn the syllabary and then read and commit to memory the Geez version of sections from the Epistle General of St John. They are normally introduced to numbers at this level with some attempts at writing. At the middle school level, the pupils continue to learn religious prayers, spiritual songs, all committed to memory. This is the level required of all deacons serving the church. This takes two to three years (28). Higher education in traditional schooling is reserved for the very few who intend to become 'Leeq' or 'debtera' (a select group of scholars). This has three areas of specialisation: 'Zema bet' (music), 'kene bet' (poetry) and 'meshaf bet' (school of texts) (29).

The school of music (Zema bet) consists of three branches. The first deals with the spiritual lyrics and compositions of Saint Yared, an Ethiopian scholar of the 6th century AD who invented Ethiopian musical notations (30). The second stage requires the trainee to master eucharistic hymns and songs for commemorations and funerals. The third is the practising of the liturgical chants in the rudiments of religious dances with the accompaniment of the systrum and the drum. Each of these trainings takes two years of learning and exercise (31).





The clergy leaning on prayer sticks celebrate the birth of Christ with  
the drums and chanting

Source: Under Ethiopian Sky: Editions HL 1983

The next stage of higher education is the school of poetry (Kene bet) where the candidate is taught not only in the rendering of Geez words, phrases and sentences into Amharic and the building of a new vocabulary, but he will also be acquainted with the tradition, rules and regulations of the establishment as well as those of the community. In seclusion, he sits quietly, contemplates and composes an original poem embellished with his own secular and spiritual world outlook even with pun and sarcasm (32).

The curriculum in the school of poetry (kenebet) requires the teaching of Geez, grammar and 12 distinct styles of composition, 9 years to study Geez philology and grammar and 4 years to master the techniques of composition. The school of poetry also teaches philosophy ... from Plato, Aristotle, Diogenes, Cicero and other western classics ... the ontological treatises of the Ethiopian scholars, Zara Yacob and Wolde Hiywot, dating back to the 17th century are also used (33). The third level of specialisation is the school of texts (Meshaf bet) which has a syllabus in the interpretation of stories and passages in the Old and New Testament, the study of

literature, fiction and books on monastic life. Many of the scholars who complete the third level will have taken a total of 30 years to learned pursuits (34).

This accumulation of knowledge over such a long period of time puts the traditional scholars in a special place in society. Thus, until the introduction of modern education, this group of traditional intelligensia was in high demand, both at the courts, as secretaries, administrators, writers, or interpreters of the law and at the church as custodians of the monophysite orthodox doctrine and as scribes, teachers and choristers. Even today, these traditional learning institutions play a dominant role in pre-primary education where students are taught reading and writing before they transfer to government established public schools.

#### 4.9 **Modern Education**

The process of establishing a modern system of education which differed fundamentally from the traditional religious-based system cannot be said to have begun in Ethiopia until the early twentieth century. A departure from the traditional church system implied the establishment of a centralised state power requiring access to new knowledge which could only be acquired through establishing broader and continuous relationships with the external world. There are evidences that missionary penetrations in Ethiopia date as far back as the 16th century when Portuguese Catholic missionaries established schools in some parts of the country but were expelled for politico-religious reasons (35). The relationship between colonial powers and missionary activities was the basis for the successful venture of European missionaries in the rest of Africa for modern education to take root, whereas in Ethiopia, missionary influence was not without resistance.

"This was because ... the strength of Orthodox Ethiopia's Christianity ... greatly limited the impact of European missionaries who were in consequence far less successful in Ethiopia than in many parts of Africa" (36). They were confronted with a Christian authority hostile to other creeds. Thus the Catholic and Protestant missionaries were very rarely

able to establish a permanent structure of mission activity ... they were rarely permitted for short periods to undertake evangelising work among non-Christians, and then only when it suited the purpose of the Orthodox Church (37).

At the beginning of the 20th century, many factors contributed to promote new patterns of education. A central state authority was established and provided with an expanding and permanent urban seat of power. This encouraged the arrival of foreign embassies. The economy developed new features of commerce which required educated Ethiopians basically with some skills in foreign languages to handle external relations. This initiated the wider activities of mission organisations and encouraged the expansion of missionary education in the subsequent years. Encouraged by further development, the then Emperor Minelik, known as 'father of modern Ethiopia', opened the first regular school under secular authority in 1908 in Addis Ababa (38). Although this move by the Emperor caused conflict with Church authorities and the nobility, it, however, contributed to some mobility in the system and promoted the growth of an educated elite who were to be influential in the later years. Added to this was the efforts of the missionaries. By 1935, 43 mission schools operated by 10 mission organisations were in existence in Ethiopia (39).

Commenting on the activities of the Swedish Evangelical Mission, Edward Ullendorff stated:

... and here, it is perhaps, the Swedish Evangelical mission that deserves to be singled out for praise, for many of Ethiopia's outstanding men received their early training in its schools (40).

Although the development of education suffered a brief set-back as a result of the Italian invasion of 1935, the years following liberation with the help of the British in 1941 showed a modest advance. According to Sylvia Pankhurst, the number of students in 1935 was 4,200 whereas in 1949, the student population grew to 52,965 to reach a further scale of 140,946 in the 1950s (41). In the subsequent years, a system of education from primary to a university level, together with several technical and

vocational schools, was established. In 1954, the first degrees were awarded from the University College of Addis Ababa. In that year alone, there were 400 elementary and 11 secondary schools (42).

With the number of schools and students growing, the approximate age category for different levels of institutions evolved. Schooling also consisted of 12 years, divided into six years of primary school (1-6), two years of middle school (7-8) and four years (9-12) of secondary school. National examinations are held at the conclusion of sixth, eighth and twelfth grades and secondary education is concluded with the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate. The curricula are based on European, particularly British, models. The alien character of the curricula was due to the lack of locally-written text books and absence of qualified native teachers.

During the early 1970s, a dramatic progress on record was in the area of student enrollment. 1974 was a crucial year in the history of Ethiopia with Emperor Haile Sellassie deposed and a military government in power. Hence, the priorities of the government in the subsequent years were slanted towards defence and security with a stifling effect not only on education but on the overall development efforts. Educational expansion languished and Ethiopia trailed almost every other nation in Africa (43).

In the 1980s, however, the number of schools and students continued to grow. Primary schools grew from 2,754 in 1974 to 8,584 in 1989 with the number of students from 859,800 to 2,855,846, respectively (44). Junior secondary educational schools increased from 420 in 1974 to 1,092 in 1989 with the number of students from 101,800 to 447,600, respectively (45). The senior secondary schools showed growth from 112 in 1974 to 278 in 1989 with the number of students from 81,300 to 426,400 for the respective years in caption (46). In the various higher educational institutions, total student enrollment showed a substantial increase from 6,657 in 1974 to 17,707 in 1989 (47). The number of teachers has also shown a dramatic increase. In 1974, the number of teachers in primary schools was 18,640. In 1989, it went up to 65,993. Those of the junior and senior secondary schools grew from 6,180 in 1974 to 21,234 in 1989 (48).

This increase in student numbers should be seen with caution as the number of schools and teaching and non-teaching staff had not at all levels kept pace with the growth in student enrolment. The impact on the quality of education and the supply of educational materials is quite obvious. A case in point is the pupil-teacher ratio. For example, the junior secondary pupil-teacher ratio in 1974 was 1:32, whereas in 1989, it was 1:43. The ratio in the senior secondary schools was 1:28 in 1974 whereas it was 1:40 in 1989 (49).

To redress this problem, the option for the government was to introduce a two- and a three-shift system in most of the country's schools.

The most positive development in the national educational endeavour was the campaign to eradicate illiteracy from the country. In 1974, the literacy rate was 7%. By 1989, the figure had grown to 76%. For the success achieved in the national literacy, Ethiopia was selected for the International Reading Association Literacy Award in 1980 and for an honourable mention in the Krupskya Literacy Award in 1982, during the annual UNESCO Literacy Prize Ceremonies (50).



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## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **ASPECTS OF PUBLISHING IN ETHIOPIA**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

An illiterate society with a history of immense literary tradition may sound hard to believe. As it is stated in Chapter 4, Ethiopia's literary heritage was by far confined to the domains of the court and the clergy. This was partly due to scarcity of writing materials. It took years to produce manuscripts by hand. It also demanded the slaughtering of many sheep and goats to obtain parchment and a long time and skill to process it for a single manuscript. What is more important, however, is Ethiopia remained isolated from external influences, unlike other African countries where missionaries played a leading role in the development and expansion of literary infrastructure as Gibon rightly said:

Encompassed on all sides by enemies of their religion, the Aethiopians slept near a thousand years forgetful of the world by whom they were forgotten (1).

The invention of printing was a revolution that contributed much to mankind. Ethiopia, however, was unlucky to have missed the opportunity of the revolution not only to develop its rare and limited wealth of manuscript collections but also to lay the foreground for a sound publishing infrastructure in the years that were to follow.

#### **5.1 The Development of Printing: A Historical Perspective**

Ironically, the first printing press with Amharic type was introduced in 1863 by a certain Father M. Biancheri, a Catholic missionary, in the

country's Red Sea port of Massawa, to print religious books in Geez and Amharic (2). Other studies even take the date as far back as 1516, when a certain Andrea Corsali, an Italian, established a printing press in a trading centre on the banks of the River Awash, in the eastern province of Ethiopia but was interrupted at his death (3). It is not known, however, whether this was merely a plan, an actual attempt or an expedition to collect manuscripts to print them in Europe for there is evidence that before the printing press was first brought to the country, Geez and Amharic books were printed in Europe. A book of Psalms was printed in Geez in 1513 in Rome by a German typographer from Cologne with an Ethiopian Monk, Aba Tesfatsion of Malabso who helped in the making of type fonts for small printing machines with Geez characters (4).

By 1886, there came the Swedish Evangelical missionaries who established their printing press at Emkullu where a certain Insenberg, a Swedish missionary, together with two Ethiopians, Woldemichael and Mengesha Birru, began to publish books in Amharic and Tigringa (5). In 1900, a French Franciscan, Father Marrie-Barnard, opened a rehabilitation centre in Harar, eastern province. Later, he opened a small printing press and started to produce a magazine which he sent to Europe to inform his European donors of his humanitarian activities. In 1905, he bought a printing press from a French firm and started to print visiting cards, business envelopes and public notices that attracted the commercial interests of the surrounding areas. After a brief visit to Europe in 1909, he moved the printing press to Dire Dawa with a further expansion of services. When he left Ethiopia in 1914, the printing press continued operation.

In 1905, a certain Kavadia, a Greek merchant, established a printing press in Addis Ababa, when the first ever Amharic newspaper was published. Emperor Menelik, impressed by Kavadia ordered the purchase of a printing press from Europe which was to become the first of its kind to be owned by the government. The printing press named 'Merha Tibebe' (Guide to wisdom) (6) continued to publish governmental decrees, proclamations and public notices and a weekly newspaper 'Aemiro' (intelligence) began to appear

(7). Shortly afterwards, another printing press was established by Lazarist missionaries in Dire Dawa.

The year 1923 opened yet another chapter in the development of the printing industry when the then regent Teferi, later Emperor Haile Sellassie, initiated the establishment of a larger printing press which opened a new era by producing the second newspaper on regular weekly basis with a circulation of 500 copies (8). The name of the newspaper was 'Berhanena Selam' (Light and Peace) a name the printing press itself bears to date.

Private commercial presses followed suit and all of them continued to produce the much needed literature, newspapers, government ordinances, regulations and religious texts. Gradually, their impact began to be felt, particularly when books in Amharic began to appear largely for the newly-established schools.

On the eve of the Italian invasion in 1935, there were seven printing presses (9). As the number of printing presses increased so also the production of volumes of poetry, moralising tracts and critical novels very largely in the Amaharic languages and often dedicated to the Emperor's coronation anniversaries. As no publishers existed, the usual procedure was for the authors to contract the printers, pay all the necessary capital and arrange for their own distribution and sales.

Among the many critical thrusts of the then Ethiopian literary trends was 'ARAYA' published in 1949 by Girmachew Teklehwariyat, a Western-educated hero thwarted by intrigues in courts and government circles when he returned home and tried to put his newly-learned Western skills at the service of his people. Historical fictions based mainly on the complex and commanding figure of the 19th century Ethiopian Emperor, Thewodros II, was also well represented particularly in 'AND LENNATU', 1967 (His mother's only child) by Abe Gubegna, and 'Yetewodros Enba' 1966 (the tears of Theodros) by Berhanu Zerihun. Didactic and socially committed writing was common. Some touch on social issues such as prostitution as in the

short story, 'Abonnash' by Tadesse Leben, 1959. Another was a novel that sympathetically examined the dilemma of a woman faced with the challenge of survival: 'Setinna Adari' (Fallen woman), 1963, by Negash Gabra Mariam. Haddis Alemayehu's novel, 'Fiker Esk Mekabir' (Love unto the grave), 1958, was a story of two people belonging to different social backgrounds. Other noted authors of the period were Mengistu Lemma and Tadesse Liben who explored the conflict between old and new values and acculturation and alienation themes and a general antagonism of the newly-emerging 'modern' Ethiopia.

Since 1974, major printing presses were nationalised and were brought under a broad control of the Ethiopian Printing Corporation, although there were some printing presses in private hands. Michael Traber in his findings estimate the number of commercial printing presses in the country to be nineteen (10). However, the number is likely to exceed far from this estimation as most government institutions have their own printing presses and his figures do not include those small scale presses in some other provincial cities. According to a recent survey, there are twenty privately owned commercial printing presses in Addis Ababa and its surroundings (11). Be that as it may, the Corporation has monopolised the printing work in the country as it is mandatory for all government institutions to use no private printing presses other than those under the Corporation for works beyond the skill and capacity of their own printing presses. As a result, most of the private printing presses have gone bankrupt or are on the verge of closing down in recent years because of the fierce competition existing in the printing industry (12).

## **5.2 Publishing in the Ethiopian Context**

The concept of publishing in its modern sense is quite new in Ethiopia, although it had a promising start prior to the revolution. Very few people know of the publisher and the process involved in publishing in Ethiopia today. There is confusion about the function of the publisher and the printer. This is possibly because it is relatively easy to



understand the processes that comprise printing than publishing. It is common for people to think in terms of printing when asked to fill questionnaires on publishing. That is why, this author believes, the four major printing presses are considered in the classified World Directory of Publishing as publishing houses (13). Kay Hale's observation of the situation is not far from the above assertion. He said:

The publishing situation in Ethiopia is so disorganised that except in the case of church or mission publications, book-sellers find it difficult not only to find the publications but to get information on what is available (14).

Kay Hale's reference was surely to the formative days of publishing and book-selling in the country before 1974.

According to Carol Bundy, the first attempt was made to establish an indigenous publishing house in the late 1950s but it remained an enterprise in name only as it published only one soft-cover geography book for children before closing down (15). In the decades that followed, the various missionary societies have published religious books and pamphlets in English as well as in Amharic and some local languages. They have also sponsored text publications for educational purposes in mission schools and for sale to the public. In 1963, a British publishing house, Oxford University Press, opened a branch office in Addis Ababa and published texts for the Ministry of Education in addition to other literary reprints but the office closed down immediately after the revolution in 1974.

### 5.3 **Publishing Concerns**

There are a number of government departments, ministries, statutory corporations and mass organisations who publish occasional brochures, periodic reports and journals for non-commercial purposes. Although they contribute to the overall volume of reading materials produced, it would be misleading to consider them as publishers. For the purpose of this

study, therefore, a publishing house is taken to mean, as explained broadly in Chapter 1, an institution involved in the business of co-ordinating the production of a book from the initial contact with an author, in-house or otherwise, through the editing process, printing, binding, publicity and arrangement for distribution or for sales (16). According to this criterion, there are three types of publishers in Ethiopia today. There is also a fourth category - author-publisher - which we shall consider accordingly as it is the main stay of literary publishing in the country. The following is therefore the list.

- Educational Materials Production and Distribution Agency (EMPDA)
- Kuraz Publishing Agency
- Addis Ababa University Press, and
- Author-publishers

We shall now consider each of them.

#### 5.3.1        **Educational Materials Production and Distribution Agency (EMPDA)**

The provision of school textbooks to the education system is a key contribution of any publishing industry, since texts are a key to learning ... just as important as teachers (17).

The Educational Materials Production and Distribution Agency, hereinafter called EMPDA, is the country's sole educational materials publisher set up under the Ministry of Education in 1975 with the following objectives.

- to plan, prepare and publish and print textbooks, reference materials and other educational publications such as charts, maps, wall pictures (18).
- to make published materials available for adults who are engaged in active production or for those who did not get the

opportunity of going to school (19).

The Agency has an editorial, design and illustration and production divisions. It has a printing unit designed for experimental editions of 3,000 to 10,000 copies. Of late, its printing unit has been strengthened with assistance from the Swedish International Agency for Development (SIDA). Thus, the Unit is now equipped with computer-aided phototype setter, offset camera, printing, binding and other related machineries. It is now capable of handling some 45% of the country's textbook printing requirements while the remaining 55% is handled by other government printers (20).

The writing of texts is undertaken by the Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education. The manuscripts are then submitted to the editorial board of EMPDA for final approval for publication. The task of copy editing, proof-reading, design and printing is handled by EMPDA. 250 titles of student texts, teachers' and curriculum guides have been published and distributed over the years since EMPDA was established in 1975, according to its report issued in 1989 (21). According to the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs Statistical Office of the United Nations, the number of titles published by EMPDA was 37 (22). The following table shows the number of text books and other related materials produced by EMPDA from 1975 to 1986.

**TEXTBOOK PRODUCTION**  
1975-1986

Calendar Year	Textbooks for Formal Education	Experimental and Other Publications	Total
1975-78	12,510,000	2,500,000	15,010,000
1979-82	20,884,000	1,727,150	22,611,150
183-86	13,953,000	4,949,672	18,902,672
TOTAL	47,347,000	9,176,822	56,523,822

Source: Textbook Publishing. EMPDA. Addis Ababa, 1989

## **Adult Literacy Materials Production**

EMPDA has a close working relation with the Department of Adult Education of the Ministry of Education in publishing books and reading materials for use in literacy programmes. During the period 1975 to 1986, EMPDA published and distributed a total of 39,998,176 books and other instructional materials in Amharic and fourteen other major national languages to carry out the National Literacy Campaign (23). EMPDA is the sole responsible agency for the entire process of procurement, (whether by local manufacture or purchase abroad) production of materials for which policy decisions have given authority, distribution of all types of supplies to the primary, junior and secondary schools. It has a staff of 300 (largely technical) and commands a recurrent budget of nearly 18 million Birr (about US\$ 7 million) and its current production programme embraces funds totalling nearly 50 million Birr (about US\$ 18.5 million) (24).

With support from the World Bank and the Swedish International Agency for Development (SIDA) it is envisaged that EMPDA will gradually relieve the Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education from the actual writing of text materials. This, it is assumed, will enable it to contract and commission textbook writers from the Curriculum Department and other institutions of higher learning, a practice that has not existed so far. Efforts are also being made to increase the number of children's books and supplementary reading materials for the post-literacy programme.

### **5.3.2 Kuraz Publishing Agency**

This agency was established by the government in 1981 basically for the mass production of Marxist classics in both English and Amharic for mass distribution with a high government subsidy. The Agency has a staff of 300. It is a relatively better established Agency developing a sound organisational infrastructure. Since its establishment in 1981, it has published and distributed 175 titles of four million copies (25), about

2,000 copies per title. The books published are of three categories: namely, children's books, Marxist literature and general knowledge. Of these, 50% is Marxist literature, 30% is of general knowledge and 20% children's books (26). The major supplier of import books, of which the Agency is the sole agent, is the USSR. Import books from the USSR are both in English and Amharic. While orders from Western suppliers are paid in foreign currency, the purchase from the USSR are paid in Ethiopian currency (27).

The Agency has a total of 53 distribution centres throughout the country. 35 retail shops are run by its own employees while 18 centres are run by Urban Dwellers Associations on commission (28). A total of Birr 21,300,000 (about US\$ 8 million) worth of books were sold through these retail shops during 1981 to 1990 (29). The Agency also sends books to Ethiopian communities abroad. The Agency accepts manuscripts from all types of authors. It has a team of editors who go through all the routine editorial work and submits its decision to the board for a final approval in accordance with the criteria set up by the Agency. Successful authors are paid royalties. There is no fixed royalty. Payment is spread over a period during which the book is sold. As the books take longer time to sell, so also the payment.

### 5.3.3 **Addis Ababa University Press**

As S.I.A. Kotei rightly stated:

The greatest volume of scholarly publishing in Africa nowadays originates from research undertaken in African universities (30).

This assertion is true. The Addis Ababa University has been engaged in preparing and publishing teaching materials for the various faculties and departments for quite a long time. Research findings undertaken by the

various faculties and colleges are published in the form of theses, proceedings, reports and journals. Advance in research was made when the University introduced a master's programme in several subjects in 1978 and subsequently its first doctoral programme in 1985. From 1980 to 1987, a total of 319 theses were submitted (31). The University uses its own printing unit to handle its publishing requirements.

#### 5.3.4 **Author-Publishers**

Writing on author-publishers, a common phenomenon in developing countries, Adodoadji said:

There is a conspicuous mushrooming of publishing activity by this category of publishers in the book industry to the extent that their role and contribution to local literature can not be left unrecognised; in fact, various publishing directories have not listed them, although their output constitutes the bulk of indigenous literature (32).

The term author-publisher normally describes authors who publish their own work. In Ethiopia, it is quite common. Most noted authors including those new ones coming into authorship get their works printed and bound at their own expense and distribute them themselves. They store their published works in their houses and handle sales through friends, acquaintances and book vendors. Their background varies from the intellectual in the University to the talented self-employed writer in the village. Some are angry writers whose manuscripts have been rejected by the publishers for failing to meet their 'standards'. Usually they write fiction, poetry and autobiographies and translations. Some of them are teachers who write text books or supplementary materials designed for particular national examinations. Since they normally publish a few hundred copies, they are not financially rewarded. It is also not possible to keep track of their titles.

#### 5.4 **Copyright, Legal Deposit Law and Institutional Bases**

Ethiopia is a non-signatory to any of the international copyright Conventions. It has, however, a national copyright law under the Literary and Artistic Ownership (33). A recent development has been the Legal Deposit Proclamation, No. 50 of 1976 which makes it mandatory for all printed matter to be deposited in three copies at the National Library (34), although materials published outside the capital are not always despatched or claimed. Since publishing and book-selling are strictly regulated and controlled by the government, there are no publishers and book-sellers' associations. There are, however, two associations: namely: the Ethiopian Library Association and the Ethiopian Writers Association.

Like all other professional associations in the country, the Ethiopian Writers' Association was in theory a voluntary association independent of party and state; in practice it was a party creation to serve the state purposes. The Association was created in the model of the Soviet Writers' Union of which John and Carol Garrard wrote:

the Union was to act as both 'patron' and 'muse' to the country's literati. As patron, it would secure the loyalty of its members ... and as muse it would determine the form, content and method of their work. At the forefront of writers' minds should be the Leninist principles of reverence for the party and propagation of its ideology (35).

The Association determines the course of literature on party line. It ensures the prohibition of publishing to those that did not belong to it or confirm to its demands. Under such circumstances, the option for most liberal authors was the genre of silence.

This is a clue to the magnitude of the problems involved in authorship in Ethiopia which we will consider in detail in the following chapter which deals with the problems of publishing.

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## **CHAPTER 6**

### **PROBLEMS OF PUBLISHING**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

On the importance of books, Cabutey-Adodoadji wrote

A book is the basic medium for the presentation and transmission of thought and knowledge ... (1).

The author is the creator of the knowledge for the reading public. In between the author and the reader come publishers to handle the process of publishing as we have seen in the first chapter of this dissertation. For the publisher to play his intermediary role effectively, the existence of the author, the printer and the market are essential. These are the problem areas in the Ethiopian publishing exercise. We shall briefly consider the major constraints facing the author, the printer and other related issues.

#### **6.1. Printing**

##### **6.1.1 Paper**

Paper is an indispensable commodity in the production of print media. The cost of paper alone is estimated to account for 65% of the total cost of production (2). The local paper factory imports all the raw materials such as wood-pulp, machinery, spare parts and chemicals at a substantial amount of foreign currency which has been a major constraint. The factory which was designed to produce 35% of the country's paper requirement has been hard-hit by the global increase in the price of pulp whose price per

ton has gone from US\$400 in 1987 to US\$900 in 1990. As a result, the factory's annual output, which was 12,500 tons of paper in 1987, has steadily reduced to 9,000 tons in 1990 (3) since government restrictions did not allow increase in foreign currency accordingly (4). Added to this is the problem of spare parts and other printing essentials to maintain and run the machineries which were installed in 1970 (5).

Further restrictions on import permits have also affected the import of papers which covers 65% of the national paper requirements for local consumption (6). On import restrictions, Oluwasanmi and his colleagues have this to say:

Tariff restrictions on the importation of paper ... can only be justified if the industries they aim to protect, the local paper mills, keep pace with local demands (7).

A survey conducted in the twenty privately-owned printing presses in Addis Ababa indicate that the presses used only 18.3% of their production capacity on average in 1990 due to paper problems. Almost all presses work on one shift when a three-shift system was the original design (8).

The country's staggering problem of paper supply can best be seen if we compare the *per capita* consumption in a few African countries and the major industrial countries in the following tables.

**Paper Production and Consumption  
Capacity in Some Developing Countries  
(1988)**

COUNTRY	PRODUCTION (ton)	PER CAPITA CON-SUMPTION (kg)
1 Egypt	180,000	11
2 Nigeria	170,000	4
3 Algeria	160,000	8.2
4 Morocco	126,000	10
5 Kenya	102,000	5.2
6 Zimbabwe	90,000	10
7 Tanzania	69,000	1
8 Angola	30,000	2
9 Zambia	30,000	0.6
10 Ethiopia	15,000	0.5
11 Sudan	6,500	0.4
12 Uganda	5,000	0.4
13 Zaire	4,000	0.3

Source: Pulp-paper International, July, 1989

**Paper Production and Consumption Capacity  
in Major Industrial Countries  
(1988)**

COUNTRY	PRODUCTION (ton)	PER CAPITA CON-SUMPTION (kg)
1 USA	66,477,000	317.8
2 Japan	24,624,000	204.5
3 Canada	16,638,0000	246.7
4 Sweden	8,161,000	311.3
5 Great Britain	4,295,000	163.5

Source: Pulp-Paper International, July, 1989

The figures in the tables show the wide gap between the African countries and the industrialised countries both in the production and the consumption rate. Ethiopia's situation is quite staggering. The shortage is so acute that this author remembers the instructions from high government officials to conserve paper in every possible way. There are even times when examinations in schools were postponed due to shortage of paper. The magnitude of the problem in the printing sector can be imagined.

#### 6.1.2 ***Low Standard of Skill and Poor Storage Facilities***

Much of the improvement in the quality of printing and maintaining standards depends on the quality of the staff employed. Like other African countries, Ethiopia, too, lacks trained people in printing. This author recalls a situation where, given accurate and specific instructions about type size, spacing, lay-out and other requirements, the quality of the print was marred in the process of typesetting and binding. The printers do not even seem to realise that production costs can soar against their interest with extensive and repeated corrections - a common scenario in state-controlled establishments. The poor performance can also be accounted for lack of incentives, poor pay against rising cost of living, corrupt employment and promotion practices and generally lack of interest.

Even after printing, sheets are often incorrectly folded, collated and bound in the wrong order. Wrong binding materials are used. Wrapping is inadequate. Storage conditions are unsuitable as regards cleanliness, humidity, safety from vermin and insects and even before delivery, which is hardly met, print materials are in poor condition. As Altbach observed:

... standards of manufacture are often lower than the developed countries even when comparable equipment and materials are used (9).

### 6.1.3 **Repair and Maintenance**

Repair and maintenance services are often poor. They cause a major setback in the printing process. As a result, not only is the problem felt in the scarcity of technical skill for maintenance but also in the provision of spare parts, especially in a country of immense financial crises. The machines are old and break-downs are frequent. Local agents who supply printing machines and spare parts have now almost ceased rendering repair and maintenance services due to foreign currency restrictions. According to a recent inventory conducted at the four major printing presses under the National Printing Corporation, of the 21 printing machines, only 10 were capable for 60% of their original production capacity as they, too, have been in use for an average 10-year period (10).

When the military government launched the National Literacy Campaign in the late 1970s, the need for thousands of literacy reprints necessitated the purchase of modern off-set printing machines and other accessories at a cost of Birr 6,061,983 (US\$2,245,178) (11). However, as the technical skill to run and maintain these machines was not readily available, the results were far below expectations (12).

### 6.1.4 **Editorial and Proof-Reading**

Standard of proof correction is very low. The number of proofs required is high causing delays in delivery time much from initially scheduled. With the meagre supply of paper, delay in time and the amount of paper used for repeated proofs, the cost of production goes high. Proof-readers are often people who may have formal education but did not proceed beyond secondary schools. The few university graduates, although lacking formal proof-reading and editorial techniques and know-how do not stay on the job since printers do not think highly of their qualifications and are not prepared to retain them for the wages they demand contrary to what a noted publishing scholar said:

the job requires a sound education; a copy editor/proof-reader should have the academic background that will qualify him to become an acquisitions editor. The importance of a good copy editor/proof-reader can be seen in the fact that a poorly-edited book is a dead book (13).

Even in situations where there are prospective editors, the working environment is not conducive for a full-time exercise. Commenting on the lack of professionalism in the production process, Altbach has this to say:

Editors in the third world .. are typically compelled to divide their time among a number of equally pressing responsibilities, including administration work, copy editing and production with the result that there is neither incentive nor time to spend in active pursuit of new work (14).

## 6.2 **Authorship**

### 6.2.1 **Politics and Social Realities**

... Third World governments are often somewhat suspicious of the loyalty of authors, journalists and to some extent publishers (5).

With the advent of the military government which declared a 'socialist' state and the subsequent establishment of the Commission for Organising the Party of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (COPWE) in 1979 (16), the general principles of writing, publishing and disseminating all forms of information in Ethiopia was based on the:

socialist concept of the press as a collective propagandist, agitator and organiser of the working masses (17).



All forms of publishing fell under the complete control of the ideological department of the Commission. Newspapers, journals and general books that did not fit into the life stream of party ideology were banned. A system of close supervision requiring pre- and post-print censorship by a government agency in the Ministry of Information was obligatory. In addition to formal censorship, the publication media were controlled by supplementary means. Every newspaper, journal or book had to be affiliated with a particular government, mass or professional association and every association, youth, women, workers, etc., was infiltrated by the party cells which controlled and administered the publications. Thus, since 1979 centralisation and tight control were the rules of the Commission and subsequently of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia which was inaugurated in 1984 that governed the production and distribution of print matters. Even before the 1974 revolution, Ethiopia's authorship environment was never free from repressive censorship. Although there was some degree of tolerance the then government had its own drawbacks. It required of the author absolute respect and obedience to the *status quo* of the monarch and the church as one Ethiopian scholar observed:

The Emperor is anointed by the Lord. As he is God's delegate on earth, he must be obeyed without any impious questioning of his authority. The Church, too, as the voice of God must be listened to without question (18).

In pre-1974, authors would lose their jobs as they were part-time writers for attempts to write books that in any way challenged or discredited the *status quo* whereas in post-1974, they were subjected to arbitrary arrests, torture or even summary executions. There are times when authors simply disappear. A case in point is a certain Bealu Girma, a popular novelist and Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Information whose whereabouts is still unknown for a book he authored on the futility of the regime's attempt to subdue the secessionist movement in the northern part of Ethiopia which ironically led to the regime's downfall. Such instances are many and even those who happen to read such books, which are often banned but somehow get smuggled, could face no less than arrest if found

with them. The environment has been hostile that, if I may borrow James Gibbs's words, authors simply 'seal the fate' of their work and condemn it to oblivion until better times come.

#### 6.2.2 **The Dilemma of Economy of Scale**

Ethiopia today has a literacy rate of 76%. The figure indicates a potential reading public. The problem is the extremely low purchasing power of the population as the *per capita* income is the lowest in Africa - US\$120. One dilemma facing the book trade is the problem of decreasing cost with high print runs where there is no market. If, given a choice between food, clothing and buying books, most Ethiopians would leave out buying books. The dilemma before 1974 was the high rate of illiteracy - 93% (19) where the equation was how to maintain profit with a low print run for a very small market. In both situations, authorship has not been a rewarding undertaking; the same is true of publishing.

In the absence of established publishers where the author himself is a publisher in a market of uncertainty, the prospect for the author has been gleam. Even those few established authors whose literary work manages to reach the printing presses are often frustrated as a result of the poor performance in editing, printing and binding and the frequent delays they encountered. The problem is even more serious when the book comes out. The author himself handles the distribution often with no sales promotion or publicity. Sales are slow to pay the credit for publishing before authors get their benefits and government subsidy is unknown and so are bank loans. According to an official report from the Printing Corporation, about one million Birr (US\$370,370) credit has not been paid by authors because books were not sold (20).

### 6.2.3 **Multiplicity of Languages**

It has been stated in Chapter 4 that over 70 languages and 200 dialects are spoken in Ethiopia. Although Amharic is the official language, a large majority of the Ethiopian people have no comprehension of Amharic since more than 70% of the population comprise non-Amharic speakers (21). This linguistic diversity further limits the market for books. Writing on the problem of languages for indigenous publishing, Altbach said:

... multilingualism creates severe problems of building up publishing infrastructures in a variety of languages, particularly when resources are limited and there are many demands on them (22).

The rest of the languages have not been developed as they continued to occupy a position of secondary importance after Amharic which later in the years became a political issue by the various Liberation Fronts in the country. Of all the languages in Ethiopia only Amharic and Tigringa have written forms of their own, although thanks largely to missionary endeavour Galligna now has a written form (23). Since the languages are not used in schools, except Amharic, hardly any author attempts to write books in these languages. Since the launching of the National Literacy Campaign, however, 10 million booklets were published in 14 languages other than Amharic for post-literacy reading by the Ministry of Education (24).

### 6.3 **Distribution**

Distribution is one of the major problems in the provision and supply of books. The problem begins with printers who often fail to meet delivery dates. The shortage of trucks and lorries also has a negative effect on the distribution process. Because of this, mules and donkeys have to be used to transport books. In extreme cases books have to be carried by

people. Owing to the rugged terrain in much of the country, many parts of the country are poorly served by road. As a result of major construction programmes since the mid-1970s, the all-weather network which was only 10,000 km in 1974 has been extended to 18,000 km in 1987 (25).

### 6.3.1 **Textbook Distribution**

Textbooks and adult educational publications are distributed by the Educational Materials Production and Distribution Agency (EMPDA) of the Ministry of Education directly to regional school offices which then distributes to their respective district and sub-district school offices (26). Prints are scheduled 9 to 12 months earlier before the re-opening of schools for the next academic year in view of obvious delays in the distribution process. Distribution is on loan system, the practice being grades 1 to 2 loan free, 3 to 6 about US\$0.50, 7 to 8 about US\$0.75 and 9 to 12 about US\$1.00 for one year (27) for the whole set of prescribed textbooks. However, church and international community schools purchase the books from EMPDA. Out of the proceeds from the loan and sales, 30% is given to schools, 25% for provincial offices and 20% for regional school offices for use to expand library facilities in schools, while the remaining 25% is returned to EMPDA (28).

### 6.3.2 **General Book Distribution**

The sole agent for general book distribution is Kuraz Publishing Agency. The Agency, also owned by the government, as indicated in Chapter 5, has 53 book distribution centres, many of them in the major cities. According to the *African Encyclopaedia*, there are 183 towns with 2,000 or more inhabitants containing 11.3% of the total population (29). Compared to the number of these distribution centres, the accessibility is far from the need. The employees in the various distribution centres have no formal training.

### 6.3.3 **Author-Publisher Book Distribution**

Book promotion or publicity before publication date is unknown in Ethiopia. Reviews on the local Amharic dailies appear very rarely and then only long after the books are on sale. The common book-selling practice used by author-publishers is the large number of street vendors who are usually evening school students or school drop-outs. The vendors, who are known as 'Meshaf Azwari' (book circulators) carry books in brief-cases or in their hands and roam around the streets displaying to customers. Bus stations, train stations, cinema and theatre halls, pubs and tea-rooms are their frequent places. Some have permanent customers in government offices. Book prices are rarely marked. If marked, the vendors delete them and put their own prices usually two or three times the original price. Then, as Traber rightly said, 'the book buyer has to go through the traditional bargaining' (30). The bargaining is often common even with books having marked prices. As to how much of the sales the vendors earn depends on the agreement between the author-publishers and the vendors. There are no fixed rules. Of late, it has been observed that some stationers which sell books as a side-line are becoming useful to author-publishers for prompt payments which they did not get from their traditional vendors. The stationers have much quick stock turn-over in local book sales relatively than the vendors because of their proximity to schools and the frequency of customers who come for academic shopping.

### 6.4 **Demand For Reading Materials**

Commenting on the growing demand for books, Rita Pankhurst, a former Librarian of the University of Addis Ababa said:

Today's children in Ethiopia will ask a foreigner for a book rather than a sweet (31).

If at all the now-fallen regime deserved any credit, it would be the

achievement scored in the National Literacy Campaign which brought the percentage of literacy from 7% in 1974 to 76% in 1989, as indicated in Chapter 4. Today, the moving sight in any town is the huge crowds of adults and young people going to evening classes. With the dramatic increase in the provision of conventional education at all levels, the supply of reading materials is far from keeping up with the demand. The major problem is the shortage of foreign currency in a country which has been in war for 30 years and which had to pay for arms and petrol. The ideological orientation of the government forced the banning of all books and journals from the Western world restricting imports mainly to books and journals published in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The effect of ideology and foreign currency affected not only the importation of Western books and journals for the general public which are of high demand but also the production of locally-printed books (32).

As a result of scarcity of reading materials in Amharic and particularly English, the various libraries in the country are burdened with ever-growing responsibilities. But, because of the severe shortage of books, most public, educational and other libraries have adopted a strategy of strict rationing and control of the use of their stock. We shall now have a general overview of the library situation in Ethiopia.

## **6.5 Library and the Provision of Library Materials**

### **6.5.1 The National Library of Ethiopia**

The National Library of Ethiopia, established in 1942 (33), has been the main library resource at national level with branches in some parts of the country. The Library's Addis Ababa collection stands at 100,000 comprising the legacy of Italian books from the short-lived (1935-41) colonial days, United Nations documents received on deposit, various Ethiopian studies on manuscripts and locally-published books (34). Since 1979, there has been steady progress in the extension of services to the provinces with ten more libraries established. Well over 200,000 readers,

85% of whom are students, visit the National Library in Addis Ababa each year while the number of readers in the branch libraries exceeds half a million a year (35).

#### 6.5.2 **Institute of Ethiopian Studies Library**

It is a branch of Addis Ababa University Library. It is the leading research library for Ethiopian studies in the country. Its mother library, Kennedy Library, has an overall holding exceeding half a million volumes and receives some 2,500 periodicals (36).

#### 6.5.3 **Other Public Libraries**

The Addis Ababa City Council Library has created networks of public libraries through the Urban Dwellers' Associations. Some 60% of the city-wide 284 associations have some provisions for reading and three have grown into libraries with regular staff (37).

The British Council Library provides an invaluable public service. Although libraries are often busy catering for the needs of their readers, a greater variety of up-to-date, well-selected reading matter is in very short supply. The British Council Library is extraordinarily popular as the only source of up-to-date books on various subjects and general literature. In 1987-88, its 22,000 registered readers borrowed almost 200,000 books, or 8.8 books per reader, and 320,000 users visited the Library (38). Other Western countries, notably France through the Alliance Francaise also maintain libraries, although not on the scale of the British Council Library.

#### 6.5.4 **School Libraries**

The Ministry of Education ensures that secondary schools implement the

Ministry's policy that 30% of school income from textbook rental should be allocated to the library for acquisitions. Out of the twenty-one secondary schools in Addis Ababa, the nine well-established comprehensives have the larger, although often outdated, stocks (39). New schools receive an initial supply of books from World Bank funds. The average stock amounts to seven thousand volumes or one title per student (40).

#### 6.5.5 **Special and International Libraries**

Seventy government-related special libraries have succeeded in developing collections of four thousand volumes on average although periodicals present difficulties (41). There are two major banks whose libraries receive 200 periodicals and have a collection of over ten thousand books. About thirty special libraries have been established since 1974 (42) mainly in new ministries and other agencies. Several research institutes which receive foreign assistance are developing library resources. The Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission (ESTC), of which this author is a member, is developing its own information system and is working towards a network of scientific libraries.

Among older international libraries, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) is the most significant having the largest collection in the world on the economies of Africa - some 350,000 volumes (43). ILCA, the International Livestock Centre for Africa, has developed an in-house database which includes the entire book and microfiche collection of the library. It has compiled 25,000 documents on livestock development in sub-Saharan Africa. Some 1,300 periodicals are received with a collection exceeding 15,000 titles (44).

Like the educational system, the libraries in Ethiopia remain much short of the ever growing demand. They have had to compete with other pressing national needs for scarce government budgetary support other than those non-governmental organisations. They have been unable to purchase any titles for as long as ten years; donations mainly from the British Council



Library playing a major role relieving some of them from the crisis of acquisitions. There is still more to be done to narrow the widening gap between demand and supply as Rita Pankhurst rightly said:

were there ten times as many libraries, there is no question but they, too, would be equally full (45).

13. OLUWASANMI, p. 243.
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## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **PROPOSALS AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

The future prospect of publishing in Ethiopia was considered by this author in the framework of the economic liberalisation policy issued by the military government in the spring of 1990. As this dissertation was in progress, the issue was no more a change in policy but a change in the government itself, since the military government that ruled the country for the last seventeen years was overthrown in May, 1991 by a Tigrean-led coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front. Although the change of events in present day Ethiopia under the new rulers does not allow much to say as to what the general economic policy of the country might be, one thing for sure is true. There is <sup>now</sup> an opportunity for the country to end the longest internal conflict in black Africa - thirty years. During the last thirty years and especially the last fifteen years, the high-level military expenditure, about 60% of the national budget, certainly led to low growth (stagnation is a better word) by diverting funds from social programmes and economic development projects.

The other major problem was the absence of a civilian government which, in effect, meant the absence of the rule of law and the absence of freedom of expression and free flow of ideas. Now that the war is over, and a civilian government is in position, <sup>the</sup> this author has a cautious optimism that there will be a possibility of establishing a stable pluralistic and democratic political system to embark on the long overdue process of fundamental economic reform.

As the publishing industry is an integral part of the entire process of socio-economic planning, its prospect for development is very much subject

to government policy. If the government philosophy allows for private enterprise rather than overall state control, although there is still much that the government can do, especially in the area of textbook production and distribution, this must be the best situation as far as the general book trade is concerned. In a free enterprise economy, supply is regulated by demand and competition ensures the highest quality and value for money and the same stimulating effect on the state sector. Full advantage can be taken of investment in quality production. This, in turn, means that the publication will be more attractive and, therefore, of more worth to the reader and thereby stimulate his interest and encourage the life-long learning process. Quality material has a longer life and, as the unit price is low in higher print-runs, cost can be recovered through a nominal charge to be reinvested in reprinting. Therefore, the original investment can be recovered.

Pricing policy also determines the prospect of publishing. Educational publishing is essentially only part of the general book trade. A thriving book trade is essential to the educational, cultural, political, economic and social life of any country. Literacy is vital and books are essential in maintaining literacy. So, an effective book trade is dependent not only on books for schools but also for the private sector where libraries and book shops are essential in maintaining and stimulating literacy and the flow of ideas. As indicated in Chapter 6, the problems of publishing in Ethiopia are manyfold, calling for concrete and immediate remedies.

The following are some of the proposals that this author feels will lead to improving the book trade situation in Ethiopia in general followed by some action programmes for immediate attention.

## **7.2 PROPOSALS**

The problems affecting the publishing industry which have a direct influence on the educational endeavour and the socio-economic development

of the country brings the urgent need for the setting up of a Book Development Council at national level pursuant to the recommendations of the UNESCO-sponsored book development conference held at the University of Ife, Nigeria, in December, 1973. The Council should comprise the entire book community, i.e. publishers, printers, librarians, book-sellers and the various professional associations and government agencies relevant to the book trade in order to ensure an integrated growth of the industry. The Council will help formulate a national book development strategy in line with the economic, social, political and cultural priorities and requirements of the country. It will attend to the formulation of policies and plans to overcome difficulties encountered in obtaining materials and machinery, providing skilled manpower and devising new production and distribution techniques. The Council will maintain relations with UNESCO and through its national commission in the country will bring the book problem of the country to the attention of international, regional and national financing agencies so as to encourage training, material supply and the granting of long- and short-term interest loans for domestic publishing enterprises. Further reference on the scope, composition and its role can be made to the proceedings of the Ife conference which should be available at the National Commission Office of UNESCO in Addis Ababa.

### **7.3 ACTION PROGRAMME FOR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION**

#### **7.3.1 Reliable Data Compilation to Identify Needs**

Reliable data availability is a basic pre-condition to advise a practical and viable strategy for the development of the book industry for appropriate action. The first task of the National Book Council should be to collect such data. To begin with, the collection of the various reports, and proceedings of seminars and workshops undertaken by the

Ministry of Education and EMPDA. They should be critically examined and developed for initial action. They will help to provide a means of evaluation and feedback in addition to further surveys. The collection of data should lay the ground for the production of annual statistical data on books at national level. Lack of national bibliographic and other reference tools has been a problem often raised, particularly by librarians.

### 7.3.2 **Users' Need Assessment**

The types of books required for literacy, post-literacy and educational purposes and for pleasure or further advancement of knowledge have to be surveyed, assessed and determined. This will help to evaluate the place books have in people's daily lives and the contribution they make to their educational, intellectual and cultural enrichment and ensures that the books produced will respond to users' expectations.

### 7.3.3 **Manpower Resources Survey**

Trained manpower, professional and non-professional, is an essential component at the various levels of the publishing industry. The availability of personnel has to relate in terms of number and quality at each stage of the publishing process as we have seen in Chapter 2. The survey of trained manpower in Addis Ababa conducted by the Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission in 1988/89 could be of much help. On the basis of the survey, a training programme could be drawn up to meet the needs. Although the need for high-level trained manpower abroad has yet to continue, home-based short-term training on specified and general aspects of the book trade is cost-effective. The few elites in the profession should be encouraged and used to train the publishing personnel at home. UNESCO and other appropriate UN agencies can be approached for the supply of experts for short-term training programmes.



As indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, the whole process of publishing begins with the authors and/or translators. The development of local book publishing is unthinkable if we overlook the difficulties of authors and the environment in which we expect them to write. There is a need to provide authors and translators with the necessary facilities and incentives to encourage them. It may help to free prospective authors from other commitments so that they could work full-time. The government should sponsor contests or awards, such as the Haile Sellassie Prize trust in pre-1974 Ethiopia. Scholarships or visit programmes to regional or international writers' symposia and book fairs can stimulate authorship. They should be made free and guaranteed against any form of repressive measures if they are to play their due role by reflecting national values, enrich culture and enhance the intellectual and spiritual life of the nation. These incentives should aim at fostering a favourable climate for authors and translators.

At the moment, the equipment in the various printing presses are not <sup>un</sup>able to meet existing publishing demands although this, too, needs attention. What is more critical, according to the surveys, is the non-availability of paper, ink, films, plates and binding materials. These are essential to convert manuscripts into printed pages. Since all of them are imported, they require foreign currency. The only solution viable, until such time that the country develops its industrial capability, is to relax import restrictions and customs' duties. Care must be taken to develop a strong bargaining position to negotiate with suppliers. Introducing a system of variety reduction and standardisation may also help. Bulk purchase and direct contact with suppliers will help to reduce cost. Regarding papers, this author remembers a study conducted by FAO and SIDA some years which indicated that the bamboo resources of the western part

of the country could be exploited for the production of 100,000 tons of pulp. Further research could be conducted with co-operation from UN agencies for other alternatives, too.

#### 7.3.6 **Professional Associations**

The formation of authors' and translators' associations, free from all forms of political influences to guide and assist them and to develop their profession, must be given due attention. It will help to safeguard their interests, their rights and privileges in the society and promote their creative skills. It will set and maintain standards and harmonise their activities with the social values and norms. It will create contact with similar associations abroad for the exchange of ideas and experiences.

#### 7.3.7 **Creating a Reading Environment**

As there are different reading groups, ranging from the child reader through adult new literates to the high level, reading materials have to be prepared to suit the requirements and tastes of each group. A reading environment will exist only when the right book can be provided for the right person at the appropriate time and place. The creation of a reading environment starts in the family. Parents should encourage children to read books. Schools, too, have to inculcate reading habits through book clubs. School libraries can also have a great impact on a child's reading habit, especially as they give the child the freedom to choose freely from teachers and parental influences.

Efforts to promote reading should not be restricted to formal education but should be continued in life. Appropriate reading materials should be prepared for new literates and minority language groups in simple and easily readable type whose content corresponds to areas of known interest

and specific socio-economic contexts. Libraries and often public reading centres should be developed both in urban and rural areas by mobilising community participation. The distribution of reading materials both in the urban and rural areas should include books especially written on for women on subjects such as child care, nutrition and hygiene.

#### 7.4 **CONCLUSION**

Ethiopia is undergoing intense political, economic and social transformations which are expected to change the social and cultural framework of its people. In the process of this change, education, surely, will play an important role and hence publishing will be greatly required to support it. The logical development of this argument is that the national publishing industry is an essential component of the development process. Hence, the success in the implementation of the proposals largely depends on the commitment on the part of the government to develop the book industry in the country. Publishing needs government resources, not only to grow and develop, but it needs an awareness of its significant role and a policy instrument support particularly in the private sector. Independent effort by individuals or organisations does not achieve the desired goals. Integration of resources and ideas is the foundation behind success in any venture. It is here that a National Book Council will help to consolidate all efforts to lead to better results. In order for the Council to play its due role, it should be provided with legal backing as its mere existence by itself will have no value.

It is hoped that this study will give some clues to the problems and prospects of publishing in Ethiopia.

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