

LOOKING AT ETHIOPIA: HISTORY, PHOTOGRAPHY, AND POWER

By

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by

Jaime Baird

This thesis is dedicated to Brian, Hayes, and Marley.

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Visual imagery has played an important role in the formation of Western perceptions of Ethiopia. This thesis addresses historical and contemporary visual representations in maps, books, and photographs in order to explore how looking at imagery defines not only what is known about Ethiopia and Ethiopian people, but also how that knowledge operates in specific cultural contexts. By focusing on how these images are used and understood in Western culture, it will be demonstrated that meaning is generated in both individual and social situations.

This study is organized into five chapters, including an introduction, and a brief conclusion. Chapters 2 through 4 each deal with a specific methodological approach for *looking at* visual imagery. As an introduction for modes of looking, my analysis in chapter 2 explores how visual representations can be read as texts. In chapter 3, I further this approach to include the subjectivities that are embedded in the imagery, and the different power structures that encode them with meaning. Chapter 4 utilizes a

combination of looking techniques as presented in the previous two chapters, while simultaneously projecting the process of looking *back* onto the image—in other words; the image as a “thing” that develops its own history or histories in different viewing contexts.

Visual representations are always viewed through a filter of cascading contexts, a system of interlocking looks or gazes that converge and diverge at different points and locations in history. Numerous contexts are embedded within the representation itself, and, to some degree, these embedded contexts are stable, and can be read. At the same time, other and equally significant contexts are created by the trajectory of the representation as it moves around acquiring meaning in different and often remarkably singularized ways. By addressing the history of Ethiopia as a history of the way Ethiopian people have been represented, I also hope to show that these two trajectories of the photographic image—the photographed subject and the photograph as subject—are contingent and intertwined.

Ethiopia has been exceptionally well-represented in the Western popular media, particularly during the 20th century; however, Ethiopia is virtually absent from academic studies of African visual culture. This thesis is intended, therefore, to fill a gap not only in the history of photographic practice and Africa, but also to serve as a contribution to Ethiopian and African visual studies in general.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: SCOPE AND CONTENT

I want a History of Looking (Barthes, 1981: 12)

Drawn against an austere backdrop of dry greenish haze, the man's face in figure 1.1 stands alone, isolated, it would seem, not only from the rest of his body, but also from the surrounding material world. Transformed into an *objet d'art* by the magic of the camera, the man in the photograph becomes an icon of timeless beauty—a symphony of color and form wrought from the palate of real life. Figure 1.2, however, presents a very different picture. The latter example shows Emperor Haile Selassie I, who ruled Ethiopia as absolute sovereign from 1930 until he was deposed by the Marxist Derg regime in 1974. Depicted in ornate coronation regalia and wearing an elaborate crown, Haile Selassie is presented as the classic embodiment of steadfast imperial power. These two images are paired here as an abridged representation of the two dominant discursive spheres Ethiopia operates within—thematically and historically.

As portraits, both photographs are a very particular kind of visual representation. Portraiture is always given special mention in the history of photography, usually because of the power of presence it grants to unique human life. Walter Benjamin, for example, writes that “in the fleeting expression of the human face, the aura...beckons for the last time.”¹ This, Benjamin realizes, is “what gives them their melancholy and incomparable beauty.”

¹ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3. Ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002): 108

No matter how many times they are reproduced, photographs of human subjects carry a trace of the subject's "aura" or individual biography. Additionally, photographs, like all visual representations, are always viewed through a filter of cascading contexts, a system of interlocking "looks" or "gazes" that converge and diverge at different points and locations in history. Numerous contexts are embedded within the representation itself, and, to some degree, these embedded contexts are stable, and can be read. At the same time, other, and equally significant contexts are created by the trajectory of the representation as it "moves around" acquiring meaning in different, and often remarkably singularized ways.² This study focuses on representations of Ethiopia and Ethiopian people. By addressing the history of Ethiopia as a history of the way Ethiopian people have been represented, I hope to show that these two trajectories of the photographic image—the photographed subject and the photograph as subject—are contingent and intertwined.

The photograph in figure 1.1 was taken by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher and it appears in *Faces of Africa*, the newest edition in their line of popular "coffee-table books" about culture and life in Africa. In situ the caption reads:

Surma, Ethiopia: Barchini, with his chiseled features and long elegant body, was one of the handsomest and *most seductive* men we met in Surmaland. After painting his body with beautiful chalk designs on the banks of the Dama River, he would turn around and *gaze at us intensely, seeking our approval*. We were so *disarmed* by his powerful expression that sometimes we would *forget to press our camera shutters*.³

² The edited volume, *The Social Life of Things* is perhaps the best collection of essays that address the way things, in this case commodities, move around and acquire meaning in different contexts. Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Appadurai's introductory chapter and Igor Kopytoff's contribution were particularly useful for the present study.

³ Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, *Faces of Africa* (Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2004): 86.

Like many other “ethnic” groups in Africa that have become victims of their own iconicity—the Nuba for Leni Riefenstahl, the Himba in Namibia, the Maasai in general—in Beckwith and Fisher’s work, the “Surma” have become the perennial sexy savages, ever-ready emblems of natural beauty and virulent receptacles of “authentic” primal yearnings and desire.⁴ This caption is far more explicitly exoticizing than the stylized explanatory texts tacked on to most of Beckwith and Fisher’s more “documentary” flavored works, yet the image of Ethiopia it promotes is not exceptional in their oeuvre.

Early on in its history, photography was adopted as a tool for exercising very different kinds of power. For over 150 years now it has been used variously to exploit, flatter, categorize, remember, identify, measure, study, and control real people with real lives in an array of localized and international contexts. Some of the most probing discussions of photographic history are, in fact, rigorous social critiques, addressing how the camera and its product became not only an avenue towards voyeuristic revelry, but also a surveillance apparatus, and a means to generate essentializing racial and class-based categories. Photography also has a long history as art, as well as a reputation for disrupting the very systems by which artworks have traditionally acquired cultural, economic, and political value.⁵ In his erudite study “The Body and the Archive,” for

⁴ For a critique of Leni Riefenstahl’s photographs of the Nuba of Sudan, see Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism,” in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (London: Vintage, 1996): 71-105; for an excellent study of representations of the Himba, see Michael Bollig and Heike Heinemann, “Nomadic Savages, Ochre People and Heroic Herders: Visual Presentations of the Himba of Namibia’s Kaokaoland,” *Visual Anthropology* 15 (2002): 267-312. In her work on the Samburu, Sydney Kasfir discusses the iconic status of the Maasai in the Western world. See “Slam-Dunking and the Last Noble Savage,” *Visual Anthropology* 15 (2002): 369-385 and “Samburu Souvenirs: Representations of a Land in Amber,” in Ruth Phillips and Christopher Steiner, eds., *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Postcolonial Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999): 67-83.

⁵ See Rosalind Krauss, “Photography’s Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View,” *Art Journal* 42, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 311-319; Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography,” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (Leete’s Island Books, 1980): 199-218; Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, ed. Howard Eiland and

instance, Alan Sekula reveals photography's "paradoxical status," as a "double system...of representation capable of functioning both *honorifically* and *repressively*" simultaneously.⁶ Control over how these concatenated powers are exerted and yielded, and the processes by which they both limit and provoke reality, he then argues, should never be underestimated.

Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher's photographs of Ethiopia exemplify how dangerous photography can be when its power is wielded with little to no regard for the message it communicates to both Western and non-Western audiences about life and culture in Africa. Their work is certainly *honorific*: indeed, their books usually begin with a proclamation about how grateful they are to have been able to capture so many beautiful images, followed by a statement about how they want to "give something back" to Africa by "celebrating" its unique and, above all, "ancient" cultures. Their work is also *repressive*—they omit anything deemed inauthentic, obscuring the complexities of modern life in Africa in order to supply the world market with the prototypical image of the *non-Western*. In his review of their previous major publication, *African Ceremonies*, Anthony Appiah eloquently notes:

Certainly you would never guess from "African Ceremonies" that by the year 2020 half the population of Africa will live in cities. The focus of salvaging a disappearing past means that there are no state openings of parliament, no weddings in white in modern Christian churches, no graduations from the continent's universities.⁷

Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002): 101-133; Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980) 199-216; and Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3-64.

⁶ Sekula, *Ibid*, 6.

⁷ K. Anthony Appiah. "The Rite Stuff," *New York Times Book Review* (December 5, 1999): 13.

By assuming that African traditions are remnants of the past rather than dynamic processes subject to the flow of time and history, Beckwith and Fisher reinforce the notion that modernity is restricted to the Western domain.

Perhaps this is the appropriate juncture to mention that most of the photographs and other visual examples I re-present in this study are images *of* Ethiopia and Ethiopians created primarily *by* Westerners for Western audiences. Even the ones that were originally made in and for Ethiopia (discussed below and in the last chapter) are addressed as they operate in a predominantly Western context. As several recent studies of African art and visual culture have shown, Western and African representational systems are *not* mutually independent. For instance, in her work on the Samburu of Kenya, Sydney Kasfir brings to light the ambiguities and tensions that exist between Samburu self-representation (through personal adornment, weaponry, and comportment) and representations of Samburu in photography, postcards, the tourist trade, and even Hollywood movies.⁸ In Christopher Steiner's numerous explorations of "authenticity" and African art in the global market place, he utilizes Walter Benjamin's critique of mechanical reproduction in order to show how seriality produces its own aesthetic constructs, especially as images and objects move from one socio-geographic domain to another.⁹ And in her work on Malian Bogolanfini (mud cloth), Victoria Rovine illustrates

⁸ Sydney Kasfir. "Samburu Souvenirs: Representations of a Land in Amber," 1999, and "Slam-Dunking and the Last Noble Savage," 2002.

⁹ Christopher R. Steiner. "Travel Engravings and the Construction of the Primitive," in *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, ed. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995): 202-225; "Authenticity, Repetition, and the Aesthetics of Seriality: The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Postcolonial World*, ed. Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999): 87-103; and *African Art in Transit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

how the same symbols of African culture can mean vastly different things simultaneously to diverse people in multiple local and international contexts.¹⁰

In addition to being about representations of Ethiopia, this study is also about how knowledge of Ethiopia comes to reside in various inter-contextual milieux, or “archives.” The concept of the defined archive is much like that of a delimited discourse: it is a collection of information pertaining to this or that thing or governing concept, that comes together for the purpose of representing and exploring a particular idea. Some archives are existential, physical collections of things. Other archives are ideological, intangible, perhaps even fleeting formations that ebb and flow with the demands of change and history. An archive is also that which one has *access* to, the field of possibilities that exist from a specified vantage point.¹¹ Thus, this analysis is a kind of archive unto itself, a formation of information assembled based on my own access to representations of Ethiopia and Ethiopians. I hope that the absence of visual representations of Ethiopia by Ethiopians will therefore not be perceived as an omission, but rather an avenue for further research.¹²

Ethiopia: An Overview

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (figures 1.3 and 1.4) is organized into a bicameral parliament system made up of the House Peoples’ Representatives (HPR) and the House of the Federation (HF). The former is comprised of 548

¹⁰ Victoria Rovine, *Bogolan: Shaping Culture through Cloth in Contemporary Mali* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

¹¹ For an archivists perspective of “access” to archives, see Angelika Menne-Haritz, “Access—the Reformulation of an Archival Paradigm.” *Archival Science* 1 no. 1 (March 2001): 57-82.

¹² The majority of research conducted for this study was carried out in the George Smathers Libraries at the University of Florida, in Gainesville, Florida; I also made one brief trip to the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia University in New York, and worked extensively on the internet.

representatives from nine “ethnically divided” states and two administrative councils.¹³ The latter consists of at least one representative from each one of Ethiopia’s “Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples” (which basically means one representative from each “ethnic” group). The authority to appoint the Prime Minister rests with the party that wins a majority of seats in the HPR, and although the HPR has significantly more political power, the two houses meet together annually, and the HF is permitted to voice opinion on matters pertaining to the general running of the country as well as issues related to human rights.¹⁴ Representatives from both houses serve a term of 5 years.

Since 1991, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and his primarily Tigrayan people’s party, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) have governed Ethiopia—at times with an iron fist. Rebel fighters from the EPRDF were instrumental in toppling the previous regime, a Marxist military junta known as the Derg (Amharic for “Council”) which had taken power from Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1974. The Derg left Ethiopia deeply wounded, yet Ethiopian people have moved on with their lives and scholars in Ethiopia and abroad are now beginning to confront this difficult era in their work. As Bahru Zewde emotively notes in the second edition of his *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, “Now that the Darg [sic] is over, a requiem of that past has become possible.”¹⁵

¹³ According the Ethiopian parliament website, the nine states are “delimited on the basis of the settlement patterns, language, identity and consent of the people concerned.” <<http://www.ethiopar.net/index.htm>> Last accessed 6-22-05.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1991*, 2nd edition (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2001): xix.

Bahru, like many other writers of Ethiopian history, begins his book by stating, “Ethiopia is an ancient country...,” which it is, in some respects.¹⁶ During the 1st century CE, a powerful kingdom known as Aksum, or Axum, developed in what is now northern Ethiopia.¹⁷ Situated just 100 miles from the Red Sea, Aksum was a thriving commercial hub and traded with Arabia, Egypt, and India as well as several other African societies and kingdoms closer to the interior, including Nubia. The Aksumites were highly organized; they minted currency, and employed a written language, called Ge’ez. Originally Ge’ez was written in boustrophedonic Sabeian (ancient Arabic) characters, but the script underwent several “indigenizing” changes following the translation of the bible into Ge’ez from Greek in the 4th century.¹⁸ In fact, this event—the translation of the bible into Ge’ez—is the first recorded use of the word “Ethiopia” (Æthiopia, or Aithiopia) by historic Ethiopian peoples.¹⁹ By many accounts, ancient Ethiopia “lost contact” with the “outside world” after the decline of Aksum sometime in the 7th century. Nevertheless, the sustained presence of Ethiopian priests, clerics, and pilgrims in the Holy Land during the European Middle Ages, and in Rome during the European Renaissance, assured that Ethiopia wasn’t completely forgotten abroad.

Modern Ethiopia has really only existed since the late 19th century. After a great deal of civil strife and disunity, three provincial rulers—Téwedros, also referred to as King Theodore (r. 1855-1868), Yohannes (r. 1872-1889) and Menelik II (r. 1889-

¹⁶ Ibid, 1.

¹⁷ For a history of Ethiopia see Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians* (Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); *The Ethiopian Borderlands* (Lawrenceville, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: The Red Sea Press, 1997); and *A Social History of Ethiopia*. (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1990).

¹⁸ Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 24-25.

¹⁹ Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 1.

1913)—successively managed to unify large portions of the country.²⁰ Their domain, just like that of their predecessors, was concentrated in the highlands areas of northern and central Ethiopia. It was Menelik II, who, under a great deal of political and economic pressure from the “outside” world (namely Italy and Egypt), decided to expand Ethiopia’s borders in order to increase the amount of arable land under the highland nobility’s control. More land meant more crops, more revenue, and more money to buy ammunition and guns for defending Ethiopia from the onslaught of colonial powers that had already gobbled up most of the rest of the African continent. Many of the outlying provinces incorporated into Menelik’s empire had functioned as independent kingdoms or emirates for centuries. Menelik’s conquest also brought lowland “pastoralists recognizing no boundaries” into the organized Ethiopian empire for the first time.²¹ However, because many of these groups were removed from the capital and other commercial areas by the natural landscape of the Great Rift Valley, imperial rule was essentially indirect.

Ethiopia’s decision in 1994 to divide the country into ethnically divided states was an attempt to recognize the incredible cultural diversity of its people. Official business and general education is transacted in Amharic, yet there are 83 different languages spoken in Ethiopia, with 200 separate dialects. The climate ranges from cool and breezy in the rainy highlands, to scorching hot in the often desiccated lowlands, and the range of lifestyles in Ethiopia is usually credited to its amazing topographical variation. The capital city, Addis Ababa (“New Flower”), sits right in the middle of the country, at the

²⁰ Richard Pankhurst and Denis Gérard, *Ethiopia Photographed: Historic Photographs of the Country and its People Taken between 1867 and 1935* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1996): 17.

²¹ Zewde *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 20-21.

very edge of the mountainous region where altitudes begin to slide down, and temperatures begin to rise up. Thus, due to its relative accessibility, Addis Ababa and the markets along the city's periphery have long been a meeting place for numerous cultures and peoples who otherwise have little in common.

For the purposes of this study, the word Ethiopia always refers to modern Ethiopia. If I am intentionally referencing the history of what is now Ethiopia, I will say historic Ethiopia, ancient Ethiopia, or the lands where Ethiopia is today. It should also be noted that when referring to Ethiopian people, it is considered appropriate to address them by their "first" name. Thus, the proper way to refer to Bahru Zewde in the third person is Bahru, not Zewde. Throughout the remainder of this work, I will use the Ethiopian rule for referring to Ethiopians, whilst all other individuals will be referred to by their surname. The only exception is Haile Selassie I, who I will refer to often as Selassie. Also worth mentioning are the plethora of Anglicizations of Ethiopian names and words. For the sake of consistency, I have opted to use the versions of words most frequently encountered in current research on Ethiopia, though when citing photograph captions or excerpts from texts, I retain the form of the words as they appear in situ. An example of the latter is the word "Surma" used above. "Suri" is actually more politically correct, not to mention that the Suri usually refer to themselves as "Chai" or "Tirmaga."²² All of the place names, group or "ethnic" names, as well as names of individual people mentioned here are *re-presented*—it is never my intention to use terminology that has been deemed offensive, and if I do so, I do so in ignorance. Whenever I am aware that something I am re-presenting is "false" or derogatory, I will point out the correct term in the text, or in a

²²Jon Abbink, "Paradoxes of Power and Culture in an Old Periphery: Surma, 1974-1998," *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After*, ed. Wendy James et al. (Oxford: James Curry, 2002): 157-158.

footnote. For example, Barchini is a corruption of the Suri name “Barchinoy.”²³ I do not, however, have an answer for why the name was changed in Beckwith and Fisher’s book.

Ethiopia and the History of African Photography

Four dominant lines of inquiry have defined most studies of the history of photography in and of Africa: 1) “local” production—photographs made by and for African people living in Africa; 2) contemporary art photography; 3) post-colonial re-readings of colonial photography; and 4) the use value of historic photographs as primary source material, and the use value of both new and old photographs in contemporary contexts such as exhibitions, textbooks, scholarly publications, classrooms, and fieldwork situations.²⁴ Extensive work in the latter has been carried out by Christraud Geary, who advocates methodological diligence when utilizing historic photography, claiming, quite accurately, that “impressionistic” approaches can lead to “serious errors” in representation.²⁵ Corinne Kratz, with her exhibition “Okiek Portraits” and the subsequent book in which she analyzes the exhibition’s path from Nairobi to Atlanta, has also provided a valuable resource for understanding that photographs of Africa and Africans have a powerful political dimension—in Africa and in the West.²⁶ Post-colonial

²³ Jon Abbink, personal communication, June 2005.

²⁴ These categories are not meant to be all-inclusive, instead, they are intended to be a useful summary of the study of African photography thus far.

²⁵ Christraud M. Geary, “Photographic Practice and its Implications for the Use of Historical Photographs as Contextual Evidence,” *Fotografia e Storia dell’Africa*, ed. Alessandro Triulzi (Naples: I.U.O, 1995): 103-129; “Old Pictures, New Approaches: Researching Historical Photographs,” *African Arts* 24 no. 4 (October 1991): 36-39, 98; *Images from Bamum: German Colonial Photography at the Court of King Njoya, Cameroon, West Africa, 1902-1915* (Washington D.C.: National Museum of African Art, 1988); Geary, ed., *In and Out of Focus: Images from Central Africa, 1885-1960* (London: Philip Wilson, 2003). Another very useful study worth mentioning is David Killingray and Andrew Roberts, “An Outline of Photography in Africa to ca. 1940,” *History in Africa* 16 (1989): 197-208.

²⁶ Corinne Kratz, *The Ones That are Wanted: Communication and the Politics of Representation in a Photographic Exhibition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002). In *The Ones*

reinterpretations of colonial photography, also addressed by Geary, is a field that developed in tandem with a parallel shift in anthropological practice and theory, perhaps best exemplified by Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other*, the History of Anthropology Series edited by George W. Stocking, and several essays by James Clifford.²⁷ Clifford in particular emphasizes the need to realize that there is always a degree of “translation”—or innate interpretation—involved in any kind of representation, no matter what form it eventually takes. The collection of essays edited by Elizabeth Edwards in the much cited *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1940*, are perhaps the best example of work along this trajectory.²⁸

Although I have grouped them separately here, contemporary African photographers—and writing about contemporary African photographers—often spans more than one of these four categories. For instance, South African photographer Santu Mofokeng “retrieves” old apartheid-era photographs of South African families in order to

that Are Wanted, Kratz meticulously analyzes the problems, challenges and successes of her exhibition “Okiek Portraits,” which premiered in Nairobi in 1989 and subsequently traveled to several US museums. The exhibition itself was initially conceived as a means to confront ethnic tensions between the forest dwelling Okiek and their Maasai neighbors.

²⁷ Fabian, Johannes, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). The primary goal of Fabian's analysis to show how, through what he calls the “spatialization of time,” non-western cultures have been represented as living fossils, or as contemporary historical records of the modern West. Fabian also discusses how this form of knowledge becomes a form of power over the “Other” and his critique is intended to highlight the political complexity of representational practices in general. There are currently ten volumes in the History of Anthropology Series (volumes 9 and 10 are edited by Richard Handler). The volumes most relevant to this study are: *Observers Observed: Essays of Ethnographic Fieldwork* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); and *Romantic Motives: Essays on Anthropological Sensibility* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). James Clifford's work is primarily intended to be a reexamination of the processes of representation. See “The Others: Beyond the Salvage Paradigm,” *Third Text* 6 (Spring 1989): 73-78; and *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Literature, Ethnography, and Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988). The latter volume is a collection of essays by Clifford published in journals and edited collections between 1979 and 1986.

²⁸ Elizabeth Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

“rewrit[e] the historical relationship between image, archive and citizenship.”²⁹ His *Black Photo Album/Look at Me 1890-1950* encompasses “local practices” at several levels, yet Mofokeng’s work is also operating in the mainstream “Western” art world. Today, there are several contemporary photographers working “locally” in Ethiopia, though to date, the only Ethiopian photographer to have broken into the mainstream is Aida Muluneh (figure 1.5). A graduate of Howard University and a resident of Washington D.C., Aida was included in the 2003 exhibition *Ethiopian Passages: Contemporary Art from the Diaspora*, curated by Elizabeth Harney for the National Museum of African Art.³⁰ Aida has also directed and produced a feature-length documentary film, *The Unhealing Wound*. The film tells the story of the thousands of Ethiopians, some now in their 20s who were resettled in Cuba as children after being orphaned during the Somali-Ethiopian war.³¹

Interest in the first category—photographs produced in Africa by Africans—is on the rise, largely due to the growing presence of academic African art in the international domain. The recent attention lavished on Malian studio photographers Seydou Keïta, and Malick Sidibé, for example, typifies the new focus on “contemporary” African art; yet, as Lauri Firstenberg notes in the catalogue for the recent blockbuster exhibition *The Short Century* (which included Keïta, Sidibé and Mofokeng), “the emergence of these photographic sources has contributed to greater public awareness of twentieth-century

²⁹ Lauri, Firstenberg, “Postcoloniality, Performance, and Photographic Portraiture,” in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (Munich: Prestel, 2001): 177.

³⁰ Elizabeth Harney, *Ethiopian Passages: Contemporary Art from the Diaspora* (Washington D.C.: National Museum of African Art, 2003). Aida was born in Addis Ababa.

³¹ <<http://www.pastforwardfilms.com/thestory.htm>> Last Accessed 6-22-05.

African modernity.”³² The most comprehensive source currently available dealing with localized African photographic practices is Revue Noire’s 1998 *Anthology of Photography in Africa and the Indian Ocean*.³³ Dizzily broad in scope, the book “mak[es] use of the little research that has already been conducted,” to “present a collage of views” rather than any sort of conclusive statement about “what African photography is.”³⁴

Two essays in the volume deal with the history of photography in Ethiopia. One of the two is “Tinted Portrait Photography in Addis Abba,” contributed by Guy Hersant, a French born contemporary photographer who began his career after encountering studio photographers in Bamako, Mali (including Sidibé).³⁵ Hersant introduces several 20th century portrait studios and photographers who utilized the Armenian derived practice of re-touching photos and photo negatives with India ink and/or colored crayons and paints. Hersant writes that today the practice continues “in the more modest quarters” of Addis Ababa.³⁶ The other essay, “Court Photographers,” is by Richard Pankhurst and Denis Gérard.³⁷ The two have also co-authored a book, *Ethiopia Photographed: Historic Photographs of the Country and its People taken between 1867 and 1935*.³⁸ The latter is

³² Firstenberg, “Postcoloniality, Performance, and Photographic Portraiture,” 175.

³³ Revue Noire. *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*. Paris: Revue Noire, 1999.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 6-7.

³⁵ Guy Hersant, “Tinted Portrait Photography in Addis Ababa,” in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999): 136.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 136.

³⁷ Richard Pankhurst and Denis Gérard, “Court Photographers,” *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999): 118-133.

³⁸ Richard Pankhurst and Denis Gérard, *Ethiopia Photographed: Historic Photographs of the Country and its People Taken between 1867 and 1935* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1996).

a hodge-podge of imagery compiled from photographs in the archives at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) at the University of Addis Ababa, as well as books, magazines, and a surfeit of often un-named private collections.³⁹ The *Revue Noire* article is of particular interest because it introduces the Boyadjians, a family of Armenian photographers who worked for the Ethiopian imperial court for three successive generations.

Bedros Boyadjian arrived in Addis Ababa in 1905, set up a studio, and soon became one of Menelik II's first court photographers. His eldest son Haigaz worked for Empress Zawditu (r. 1916-1930), as well as Haile Selassie (r. 1930-1974), and Torkom, or Tony—Bedros Boyadjian's youngest son—became Haile Selassie's photographer when Haigaz retired.⁴⁰ The portrait of Haile Selassie in figure 1.2 was most likely taken by Haigaz Boyadjian. The Boyadjians were skilled at the kinds of re-touching techniques discussed by Hersant, yet many of their photographs also demonstrate a high degree of compositional sophistication. Figure 1.6, attributed to Bedros Boyadjian, is a stunning triple portrait of Lij (honorific title meaning “child”) Iyasu, Menelik II's unfortunate successor (never actually crowned, Iyasu was chased into exile not long after assuming power), Iyasu's father Ras Mika'él, standing severely in the center, and another noble, Ras Hapte Ghiorgis, on the left. A diagonal streak of shadow glides from the top left corner of the composition to rest on the border of Ras Mika'él's dark, wide-brimmed hat. The matching outfits and hats of the figures, as well as the “props” visible behind, below

³⁹ *Ethiopia Photographed* is a bit cumbersome as a research tool, primarily because the photographs are not attributed or cited as well as they could be, and Pankhurst has rewritten all of the photograph captions to fit the thematic organization of the book.

⁴⁰ Richard Pankhurst and Denis Gérard, “Court Photographers,” 124-125.

and beside them—the painted curtain in the back, the dirt floor, and the rock wall and fence-like structure stretching up and to the left from behind Iyasu—creates a balanced amalgamation of planned geometry and organic bucolic respite.

Pankhurst has written two other articles about the history of photography in Ethiopia: one appears in Elizabeth Edward's *Anthropology and Photography* and addresses the “political impact of the camera” in Ethiopia from its introduction in the mid 19th century through the reign of Lij Iyasu, which ended in 1916.⁴¹ The other article appeared significantly earlier (1976) in the *British Journal of Photography*, and presents most of the same information contained in the introductory remarks for the later *Ethiopia Photographed*.⁴² Lastly, an article by Shiferaw Bekele summarizing the content and condition of the IES photographic collection was published (in English) in the Italian compilation *Fotografia e Storia dell' Africa*, which followed a symposium of the same name held in Naples in 1992.⁴³ These sources—Shiferaw's inventory, the book and article by Pankhurst and Gérard, the two additional articles by Pankhurst, and the essay

⁴¹ Richard Pankhurst, “The Political Image: The Impact of the Camera in an Ancient Independent African State,” in *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992): 234-241. In his concluding remarks, Pankhurst does mention the deposition of Haile Selassie, which occurred in 1974. On September 11, 1974 (Ethiopian New Year's Day), British journalist Jonathon Dimpleby's film, *The Hidden Famine*, was aired on Ethiopian National T.V. spliced with imagery of Haile Selassie “handing meat to his dogs as well as luxurious living at court.” Selassie peacefully abdicated the next day. Dimpleby's film contained devastating imagery of starvation and suffering in Ethiopia's Wollo province.

⁴² Richard Pankhurst, “The Genesis of Photography in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa,” *The British Journal of Photography* 41-4 (1976): 878-882.

⁴³ Shiferaw Bekele, “A Preliminary Report on the Photographic Collection at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (Addis Ababa),” *Fotografia e Storia dell' Africa*, ed. Alessandro Triulzi (Naples: I.O.U., 1995): 173-180.

by Hersant—are the only sources addressing historic Ethiopian photography currently available in English.⁴⁴

Organization and Goals

This study is organized into five chapters, including the present introduction, and a brief afterward. Chapters two through four each deal with a particular archive, or set of archives, as well as a specific methodological approach for *looking at* visual imagery. As an introduction for modes of looking, my analysis in chapter two will explore how visual representations can be read as texts. In chapter three, I will further this approach to include the subjectivities that are embedded in the imagery, and the different power structures that encode them with meaning. Chapter four utilizes a combination of looking techniques as presented in the previous two chapters, while simultaneously projecting the process of looking *back* onto the image—in other words; I will present the image as a “thing” that develops its own history or histories in different viewing contexts.

While my discussion focuses mainly on modern Ethiopia, and how photographs of Ethiopians move around and acquire meaning in different ways, the history of the West looking at Ethiopia begins at a much earlier date. Thus, in chapter two, I will address some of the earliest extant visual representations of historic Ethiopia and Ethiopians that are known to have circulated widely in the West. These are found on

⁴⁴ *Fotografia e Storia dell' Africa* includes several articles in Italian addressing photography in Ethiopia, as well as a fantastic article by Geary, written in English (Geary, 1992—not about Ethiopia). Unfortunately, I do not read Italian and the information contained in these essays is therefore not included in my study. Other than the sources mentioned here, I am not aware of any other writings specifically about photography and Ethiopia in any language. Richard Pankhurst, who is undeniably the leading expert on the topic, also doesn't reference any additional sources pertaining specifically to photography in Ethiopia in his bibliographies. I am, of course, not including the many texts which *include* photographs of Ethiopians taken by various missionaries, explorers, and other sundry travelers that are widely available in a number of languages, nor sources that have an alternate focus and only cursorily or tangentially reference photography in Ethiopia. A complete listing of the former is available in Pankhurst and Gérard's book *Ethiopia Photographed*.

antique maps and as illustrations in old travel and history books and can certainly be defined as “archival material” in the strictest sense of the term. In addition, most of the maps I will be addressing are part of the archival collections in the Map and Imagery library at the University of Florida. Although it would be wrong to assume that modern representations of Ethiopia represent a direct continuum of historic ones, it would also be dangerous to assume that these two eras of visual codification are discrete and unrelated.

In chapter three, I will move forward in time to the mid 1980s, a period that is recalled by many Ethiopians and Westerners as a tremendously difficult time in Ethiopia’s history. In 1985, the Derg had been in power for ten years, and due to massive droughts and lack of sufficient political infrastructure, millions of Ethiopians were dying of starvation. Nevertheless, Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher—with the blessings and assistance of the Tourism Commission of the Derg regime—managed to capture a glorious vision of Ethiopia unspoiled by the plight of the poor and hungry, but also untainted by the modern “Western” world. Beckwith and Fisher’s photographs and books also constitute a type of tangible archive, yet I employ their work as a platform to launch an analysis of representations of Ethiopia and Africa in a more ethereal archive—the popular Western imagination.

My analysis in chapter four is structured around representations of a single individual—Emperor Haile Selassie I—yet I use the various contexts in which his image appears to reveal the diffusion of “Ethiopia” as a concept over an extended space and time period. Chapter four also analyzes contemporary representations of Haile Selassie as they appear in Rastafarian visual culture. It is in the latter category that the photographic image manifests itself ultimately as a “thing” that appears to have the ability to dissociate

from its original context—these images operate independently, circulating at large in the world market and imagination with no real need for a fixed identity. At the same time, the Rastafari *choose* to associate the images with the life of Haile Selassie, the individual these images represent. In essence, the Rastafari have become archivists of information about Haile Selassie's life, and in turn, about Ethiopia.

Western discourse on Africa and African visual culture has a history of severing its subject into opposing fields of analysis, or dichotomies. From civilized vs. uncivilized to tradition vs. modernity to authentic vs. inauthentic, these patterns of thought have effectively restricted perceptions of Africa to a narrow plane of possibilities. In this study, I intend to continue what I see as an inclination in contemporary scholarship to seek to tear down these restrictive paradigms, to branch out into new and flexible modes of understanding culture that more accurately reflect the dynamic nature of knowledge. Another important goal is to reveal that knowledge about Ethiopia and Africa as a whole is housed in archives that transcend the academic domain. Ethiopia represents many different things to diverse people living in and out of Africa, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the popular sphere. In fact, visual representations of Ethiopia are far more prevalent in the popular domain than Ethiopia is present in academic studies of African visual culture. It is my hope, therefore, that this study will not only fill a gap in the history of photographic practice and Africa, but that it will also serve as a contribution to Ethiopian and African visual studies in general.

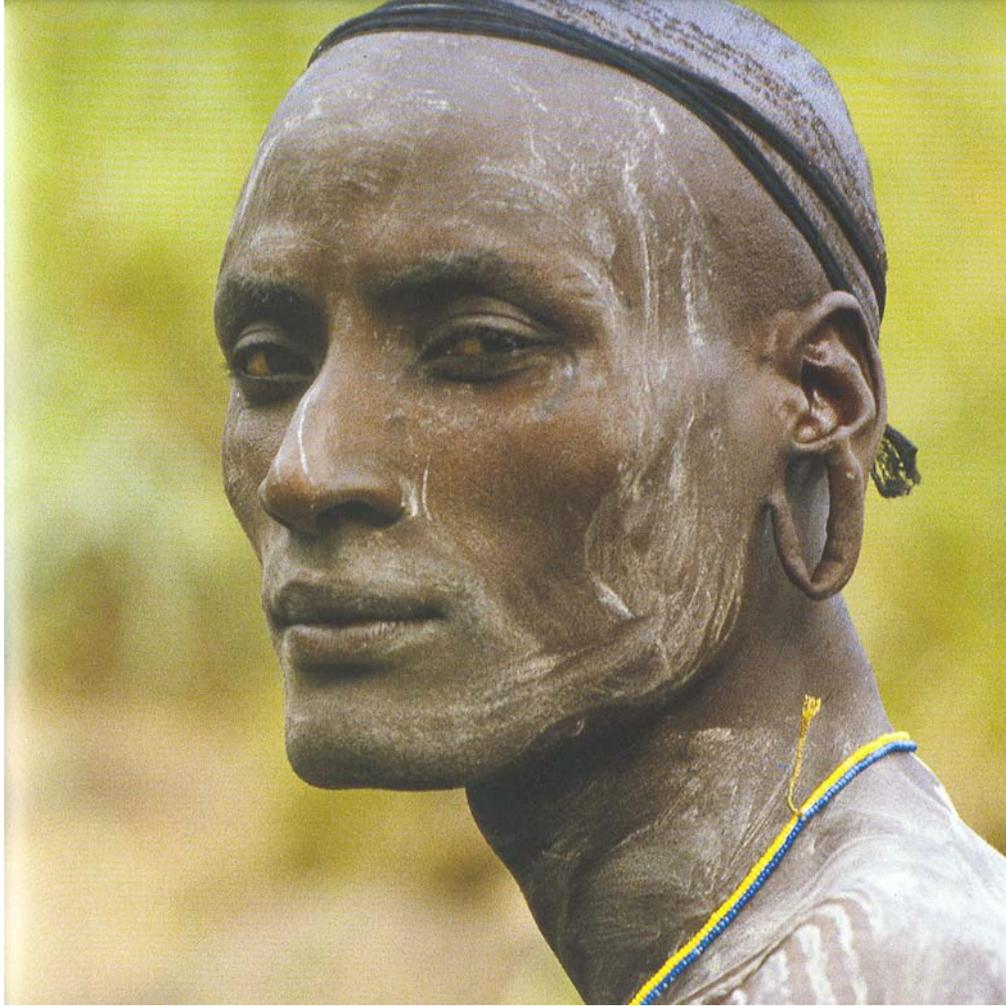


Figure 1.1 Photograph by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher. 1980-2004. “Surma, Ethiopia. Barchini, with his chiseled features and long elegant body, was one of the handsomest and most seductive men we met in Surmaland. After painting his body with beautiful chalk designs on the banks of the Dama River, he would turn around and gaze at us intensely, seeking our approval. We were so disarmed by his powerful expression that we would sometimes forget to press our camera shutters.” (Beckwith and Fisher, 2004: 87)



Figure 1.2 Formal coronation portrait of Haile Selassie. Probably taken by Haïgaz Boyadjian in 1930. Private collection. (Pankhurst and Gérard, *Ethiopia Photographed*, 74)

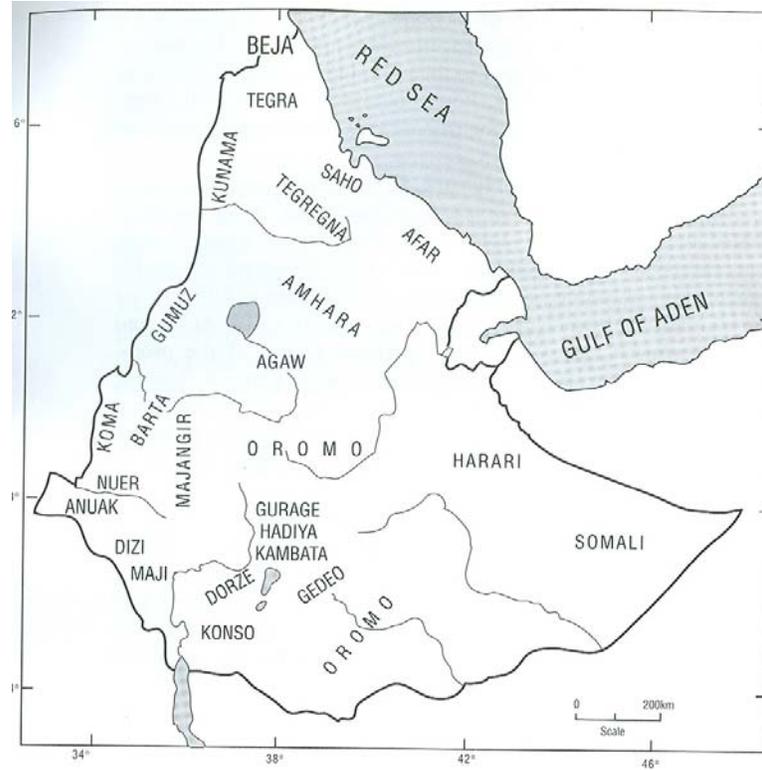


Figure 1.3 Linguistic map of Ethiopia. (Zewde, 2001: 6)

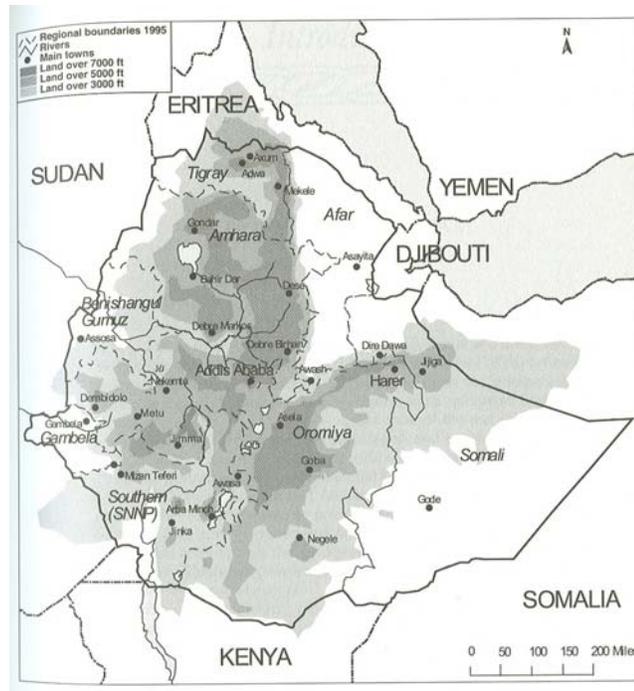


Figure 1.4 Map of Ethiopia showing regional boundaries of the nine Ethiopian States. (James, et al., 2002: xii)



Figure 1.5 *Spirit of Sisterhood*, by Aida Muluneh, 2000. Cibachrome Print 40 x 30 in.
Collection of the artist. (Harney, 2003: 82 and back cover.)



Figure 1.6 From right to left: Lij Iyasu, his father Ras Mickael and Ras Hapte Ghiorgis. Attributed to Bedros Boyadjian. Private Collection. (Pankhurst and Gérard, 1998: 127)

CHAPTER 2
MAPPING ETHIOPIA'S HISTORY: LEGENDS OF THE NILE AND THE
ÆTHIOPIAN OCEAN

Primitives in the Age of Discovery appeared to be identical throughout the globe because, wherever they were encountered, they were portrayed and represented by the same people... (Steiner, 1995: 203)

The description of the archive deploys its possibilities (and the mastery of its possibilities) on the basis of the very discourses that have just ceased to be ours; its threshold of existence is established by the discontinuity that separates us from what we can no longer say, and from that which falls outside our discursive practices... (Foucault, 1972: 130-131)

Some of the earliest reproducible representations of Ethiopia and Ethiopian people are found in historic maps and books. These are also the earliest views of what is now Ethiopia known to have circulated widely in the West. These early representations can never tell the “whole story”—they present a decidedly uneven version of history, told from a single perspective, designed for a specific European audience. Read contextually, however, these maps and illustrations become valuable documents, repositories of useful information that define both *what* we know and *how* we know about history. In this chapter, I will discuss how the image—and idea—of Africa—was literally constructed over several centuries.

Until incredibly recently, Western texts referred to Ethiopia as Abyssinia (Portuguese and English), or Abessinen/Abessinien (German), or Abyssinie (French). For the purposes of this chapter, Abyssinia, when it appears without quotation marks, refers to historic Ethiopia. Not only is this how the word was used in European texts up until the mid 20th century, it will also simplify the arguments presented in this chapter—

for, though Abyssinia has always been a part of *Æthiopia*, *Æthiopia* is not the same thing as Abyssinia.

Early Visions of Africa

In the 5th century BCE, Herodotus included a lengthy speculative report on the elusive source of the Nile in Book II of his *Histories*.¹ Like many of his contemporaries, Herodotus was fascinated by the annual floods that brought life-giving silt downstream, fertilizing the Egyptian Nile delta and enabling agriculture and civilization to flourish.² The source of the Blue Nile, in highlands Ethiopia, was “discovered” by the Portuguese Jesuit missionary Jeronimo Lobo in 1616, though it was little known until James Bruce discovered the source again with much more pomp and show in 1780.³ The source of the White Nile was not firmly identified until 1862, when John Speke finally reached the shores of Lake Victoria after several smaller discoveries by Richard Burton, David Livingston, Samuel Baker and Henry Morton Stanley.⁴ These contributions to accurate renderings of Africa’s topography were enormous. Maps printed during the 19th century

¹ Herodotus, *The Histories*, translated by Robin Waterfield, with an introduction and notes by Carolyn Dewald (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

² Today the floods, which are caused by heavy seasonal rains in the Ethiopian highlands, are controlled by the Aswan High Dam—a virtuoso engineering feat that rises 107 meters above sea level, spans five kilometers at its crest, and produces 10 billion kilowatt hours a year.

³ See Jerónimo Lobo, *The Itinerário of Jerónimo Lobo*, translated by Donald M. Lockhart (London: Hakluyt Society, 1984; and James Bruce. *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (New York: Horizon Pres, 1964; originally published 1790).

⁴ See E.H. Lane-Pool, “The Discovery of Africa: A History of the Exploration of Africa as Reflected in the Maps in the Collection of the Rhodes Livingston Museum,” in *The Occasional Papers of the Rhodes-Livingston Museum Nos. 1-16* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974): 217. Burton and Speke found Lake Tanganyika in 1858; David Livingstone saw Lake Nyasa in 1859 and Lakes Mweru and Banweulu in 1867 and 1868; Baker made it all the way to Lake Albert and Nyanza in 1864; and in 1877, Stanley finally connected the Lualaba with the Congo, after which, writes Lane-Pool, “there was not much left to be discovered in Africa.”

even mark Stanley's progress, tracing his journeys through territories that were labeled "unknown" for centuries.

Historical representations, such as maps, capture distinctive views of how Africa was perceived at various points in history. Because maps depict what is known and what is unknown simultaneously, subtle changes and minor alterations can be read as signs of how the idea of Africa evolved over time. The history of the mapping of Africa cannot be discussed without first introducing Ptolemy, a Greco-Roman scholar from Alexandria, who is recognized as one of the first theorists to draw maps using stereographic projections, or systems for representing the three-dimensional surface of the earth on a two-dimensional plane.⁵ Ptolemy's *oikoumenē*, or known world (figures 2.1 and 2.2), consists of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and ends not far below the equator. When Ptolemy wrote his *Geography* in the 2nd century CE, unknown lands below the equator were thought to be infertile, "uninhabitable," and generally unfit for civilization. Medieval maps occasionally depict would-be inhabitants, the so-called *Antipodeans*, as contorted human-like creatures, folded at the waist, holding their feet up beside their grotesque

⁵ By the 6th century BCE, Greek philosophers had deduced that the earth was a revolving sphere. This allowed them to calculate the earth's circumference, which in turn enabled them to establish fixed meridians of longitude. (If the earth takes 24 hours to rotate 360°, then one hour equals 360° divided by 24, or 15°.) When an event, such as an eclipse, is observed simultaneously at two different locations, the difference in local time between the two places can be used to calculate their separation in degrees. Eratosthenes (276 BCE-194 BCE) used this method to determine the temporal distance between Alexandria and Syene (modern day Aswan) and estimated the diameter of the earth to be 25,000 miles, a figure within two hundred miles of actual polar circumference (24,860 miles). Despite the accuracy of Eratosthenes' calculation, his findings were challenged by subsequent theorists, and by the time Ptolemy wrote his *Geography* and drew his first maps of the *oikoumenē*, or known world, in the 2nd century CE, the estimated circumference of the earth had been reduced to approximately 18,000 miles. Published a century before Ptolemy's, Strabo's *Geography* also used this smaller calculation. In the great libraries at the University of Alexandria in Egypt, Ptolemy had access to books by Herodotus, Eratosthenes, Strabo, and many other Classical philosophers, historians, astronomers, and mathematicians. Many of these texts no longer exist, though Ptolemy's *Geography* is probably a synthesis of several earlier scholars' achievements. See R.V. Tooley and Charles Bricker, *Landmarks of Mapmaking: An Illustrated Survey of Maps and Mapmakers* (Amsterdam and Brussels: Elsevier, 1968); and J. Lennart Berggren, and Alexander Jones, *Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

faces—symbolically representing the belief that these unfortunate monsters would have to walk upside down because they faced the sun from the wrong direction.

Africa, which Ptolemy called *Libyē* (figures 2.3 and 2.4), was thought to extend eastward just below the Horn, enclosing the Indian Ocean like a lake (figure 2.1). Cities that were familiar to Ptolemy, such as Alexandria, and *Soēnē* (Syene, modern Aswan), are mapped along with geographical features known only through conjecture, such as the two lakes south of Egypt depicted as the source of the Nile. The Nile River had mythical importance to early cartographers. The annual floods that made the Egyptian soil rich and fertile were predictable, but both the source of the Nile and the cause of the life-giving floods were an absolute mystery. Ptolemy's proposal stems from a report by a Greek trader named Diogenes, who allegedly visited the two lakes around 50 CE.⁶ First called *Paludes Nilli*, later known as the Lakes of the Crocodiles and the Cataracts, they were finally named Lakes Zairi and Zaflan and they appear on most maps of Africa through the 18th century.⁷

Ptolemy's *Geography* eventually fell into disuse and his original manuscripts, along with all copies made shortly after his time, were lost. The Romans were disinterested in maps based on astronomical observation, and they discarded Ptolemy's stereographic projections in favor of schematic road maps, which were essentially straight lines with compass rosettes in the margins to indicate direction; the idea of spherical earth was rejected completely. Medieval "T-O maps" (figure 2.5) and large *mappae mundi* include most of the same place names used in Ptolemy's *Geography*, but

⁶ Lane-Pool, "The Discovery of Africa," 216.

⁷ Ibid, 216-217.

depict Jerusalem at the center of the now-flattened known world. These maps accentuate the magnitude of Christian influence on European perceptions of the world during the centuries leading up to the great age of European exploration and “discovery.” In the 14th and 15th centuries, theological maps gave way to more functional nautical charts and guides, and the world became round once again. Thus, when sea-faring explorers and intrepid profit-seekers created a stronger market for accurate, readable maps, Ptolemy’s scientific projections surged back into fashion.

Arab cartographers had retained knowledge of Greek science during the Middle Ages through their links with Byzantium and were responsible for reintroducing Ptolemy to the rest of the world. Figure 2.6 shows an early 16th century copy of a map drawn by the Arab cartographer al-Idrisi for King Roger of Sicily in 1154.⁸ Al-Idrisi’s design combines the Medieval “T-O” layout of the world with his interpretation of Ptolemy’s stereographic projection. The Indian Ocean is not enclosed, but the Horn is still stretched too far to the east. Lakes Zairi and Zaflan are included, along with a third, and all three feed streams leading north towards Egypt from the *Montes Lunae*, or Mountains of the Moon—a hypothetical mountain range not accepted by Ptolemy, but adopted by most of his followers. The oldest complete extant copy of Ptolemy’s *Geography* was compiled by monks at the Vatopeki monastery in Mt. Athos, Greece at the beginning of the 14th century.⁹ The first printed edition appeared in Europe in the late 15th century, with no maps; but a second edition featuring 26 maps from copper plates was printed in 1477.¹⁰

⁸ For information on al-Adrisi, see Lane-Pool, “The Discovery of Africa,” 217; and Tooley and Bricker, *Landmarks of Mapmaking*, 23-25.

⁹ Tooley and Bricker, *Landmarks of Mapmaking*, 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

As European explorers ventured farther and farther into the southern hemisphere, Africa steadily took shape in Western minds. The lower limits of the continent were established and the empty spaces along the coastline were packed with the names of places that had been recently “discovered.” Yet, Europeans rarely reached the interior; in fact at first they scarcely tried. Early Western explorers were primarily concerned with tapping the spice and luxury-goods markets in the East and “discovering” Africa was a peripheral objective compared to trying to find a way to get around it. Arab and African traders also eliminated the need to travel inland by bringing valuable slaves, ivory and gold to the coastal ports.¹¹

Maps of Africa from this time period, such as the Sebastian Münster’s rendition for his 1540 reprint of Ptolemy’s *Geography* (figure 2.7), use space-consuming mountain ranges, wild animals, and fantastic beasts to fill in unknown territories.¹² Like al-Idrisi, Münster includes both lakes Zairi and Zaflan and the Mountains of the Moon, though his map is best remembered today primarily because of the *Monoculi* he drew perched on the coast of what is now Cameroon. This remnant of the “dog-headed and four-headed men,” gryphons and countless other imaginary things that “crept and crawled across Medieval manuscript maps” is much more than mere nostalgic ornamentation, Münster’s creature preserves a very real popular misconception that monsters like *Monoculi* actually

¹¹ Ibid, 159.

¹² Sebastian Munster was a professor of Hebrew. In addition to making maps, he also published bibles and a book on grammar as well as several Hebrew translations. See Lane-Pool, “The Discovery of Africa,” 219.

inhabited regions of inland Africa.¹³ Edition after edition of Münster's Africa appeared until 1688, and it was popular long after more accurate maps had become available.¹⁴

Münster's map combined popular myths and Ptolemy's descriptions of North Africa and the Nile, with up-to-date information provided by Portuguese explorers about the, west, south, and southeastern coastline. Sixteenth, 17th, and even 18th century cartographers consciously built upon Ptolemy's work, thoroughly embedding his ideas within their own. Imaginary land creatures like the *Monoculi* were not that common in later maps; however, brightly colored whimsical Africas embellished with lions and elephants, giant birds and fanciful trees persisted. As time went on, cartographers drew increasingly elaborate maps, atlases were published with entire chapters dedicated to segments of the African coast, and popular designs were constantly re-produced for a burgeoning merchant class with a rising interest in foreign and exotic things. Even though new discoveries continually shifted European visions of Africa, the Nile region was often drawn according to Ptolemy's 2nd century suggestion.

Æthiopia, Abyssinia and the Quest for Prester John

The Greeks knew the African continent as "*Libyē*;" on Münster's map, the largest place name is the Greek word "Æthiopia." For Ptolemy (and Münster), "Africa" pertained only to what is now the Mediterranean coastline of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Later cartographers used "Libya" to designate all of northern Africa west of Egypt and labeled the adjacent inland areas "Inner Libya" or "Libya Interior." The

¹³ The *Monoculi* is absent from a nearly identical map, created by Heinrich Bunting in 1592. A print of Bunting's map is currently housed in the Map and Imaging Library at the University of Florida.

¹⁴ Tooley and Bricker, *Landmarks of Mapmaking*, 159. The most notable improvements to African cartography were made by Martin Waldseemüller. Despite their accuracy, however, Waldseemüller's maps were far less popular than those made by Münster, which were released in edition after edition until 1688. See Tooley and Bricker, *Landmarks of Mapmaking*, 159.

coastal region of “Libya” was also referred to as “Barbarie” (Barbariæ, Barbary, Berberey), although the term for the interior usually remained the same. On 19th century maps, the western part of “Barbarie” is often labeled “Tripoli,” which is now where Libya, the modern country, is located today. Libya became an independent nation in 1951 after nearly five decades of first Italian, then French and British colonial rule.¹⁵ Before that, Libya had been part of the Ottoman, Roman, and Phoenician empires; yet, most post-colonial studies of African countries typically focus on the European, “modernizing” colonial period. This is, of course, due to the fact that by the beginning of the 20th century, Europe had colonized almost the entire African continent.

The only two modern African countries that remained politically autonomous during the age of colonial rule are Liberia, which declared independence in 1847, and Ethiopia. Italy actually attempted to take Ethiopia by force—twice. After being defeated by Emperor Menelik II and his armies at the battle of Adwa in 1896, a much embittered Italy attacked Ethiopia again, shortly before the outbreak of World War II. Although Italian forces did occupy Ethiopia from 1936 until 1941, the country is usually thought of as having never been officially colonized. A map published in the June 1931 issue of *National Geographic Magazine* (figure 2.8) independent Ethiopia is shown bordered by British and Italian Somaliland (Somalia), French Somaliland (Djibouti) and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. “Italian” is printed in parentheses beneath “Eritrea.”

This *National Geographic* map is a solemn reminder that while Ethiopia was independent in 1931; most of the African continent was not. During the 20th century, Ethiopia became a symbol of resistance, freedom, and hope for colonized people in

¹⁵ Libya was conquered by Italy in 1910, but was redistributed between France and Britain by the Allied powers in 1942.

Africa, as well as for oppressed black communities in the Caribbean and North America. Several African countries adopted the green, yellow, and red colors of the Ethiopian flag when they achieved independence from Europe in the 1960s and 70s.¹⁶ Home to “Lucy,” the skeletal remains of humanity’s oldest known ancestor; mentioned in Homer, Herodotus, and Ptolemy; and discussed numerous times in the bible; Ethiopia was and is commonly thought of as an ancient civilization, a piece of Africa untainted by colonialism.

On the *National Geographic* map, “Abyssinia” appears in parentheses below “Ethiopia.” As stated above, these two words are not necessarily interchangeable.¹⁷ This is clearly evident in Herman Moll’s *Africa According to y Newest and most Exact Observations*, a map printed in London in 1714 (figure 2.9 and 2.10).¹⁸ West Africa is shown broken up into “Barbaria,” “Zaara, or the Desart,” “Negro Land,” and “Guinea,” while “Ethiopia,” written in large bold type across the breadth of central Africa, refers to everything else below Egypt. Moll’s map is based closely on Ptolemy, who used “Æthiopia” the same way.¹⁹ Moll locates “Abissina” (Abyssinia) more or less where Ethiopia is today, and correctly makes Lake Tana (spelled “Tzana”) the source of the Blue Nile. Even though Ptolemy’s fabled lakes Zaira and Zaflan had been dispelled by a

¹⁶ The following countries adopted red, yellow and green national flags upon declaring independence: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, and Togo.

¹⁷ See Martin Bernal “European Images of Africa—A Tale of Two Names: Ethiopia and N---,” in *Images of Africa: Stereotypes & Realities*, ed. Daniel M. Mengara (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2001): 23-45.

¹⁸ Moll’s map is atypically plain for this time period.

¹⁹ Münster’s map followed Ptolemy closely who also uses *Æthiopia* for this region of Africa.

cartographer named Guillaume Delisle in 1700, Moll includes them anyway. R.V.

Tooley and Charles Bricker point out:

[Moll] kept Zaire and Zaflan, making them into what he called ‘bogs’ or ‘morasses,’ with no direct outlets to the Nile. As if out of respect [for] the ideas of the ancient Alexandrian, he added a river, the Zeebe, and made it flow north almost to the Nile in an apparent attempt to reconcile modern geography with Ptolemy.²⁰

Moll’s “Africa,” as well as several imitations produced by his competitors, were published in British history books and geography journals until the end of the 18th century.²¹

In order to understand how influential Ptolemy’s ideas were, Moll’s map can be compared to a much more colorful document from 1595, the latter attributed to Gerard Mercator the Younger (figure 2.11). Mercator’s design is one of “those old maps that fascinate collectors,” a “sumptuous, fanciful, decorative...rarity;” inaccurate but beautiful, it “captures the imagination.”²² His elongated version of Africa is engulfed by gently undulating waves, and the oceans are labeled in an ostentatious script, full of balanced loops and winding, rounded flips. Larger geographic regions are capitalized (“Libya Interior,” “Agisymba,” “Abissini”) while the smaller units and cities are identified in lowercase print. Wide, gently gradated boundary lines follow invented threads of mountains and the imagined paths of major rivers, forming distinct geographic units suffuse in muted pink, yellow and green. The most elaborate ornamentation,

²⁰ Tooley and Bricker, *Landmarks of Mapmaking*, 170.

²¹ Versions of Moll’s map were published in Michael Adams, *The New Royal Geographical Magazine* (London: Alex Hogg; Symonds, Parsons, and Co., 1794?): 297; *A New, Royal, and Authentic System of Universal Geography* (London: J. Cooke, 1790?); and in Daniel Fenning, *A New and Easy Guide to the Use of Globes* (London: S. Crowder, 1799). All of these sources were accessed in May 2005 from the George Smathers Libraries at the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. <<http://galnet.galegroup.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/servlet/ECCO>>

²² Tooley and Bricker, *Landmarks of Mapmaking*, 9.

however, is reserved for the title cartouche (figure 2.12). Here, twin satyrs, one facing forward, the other facing back, recline on top of an illusionistic metalwork medallion, its lower portion draped in vines laden with ripe fruit. The bisymmetrical composition is enhanced by dramatic chiaroscuro detailing raked over the vibrant pink and blue openwork design. The cartouche also communicates important information about how to read the map correctly: the central white roundel bears the title of the map and the name of its maker, while the narrow horizontal plate across the bottom contains the scale. A trompe l'oeil frame surrounds the entire map, underscoring Mercator's obvious aesthetic sensitivity.

It is important to note that before the 20th century, individual cartographers had different ideas about what Africa should look like. Place names are utilized sporadically and known boundaries frequently shift—while this inconsistency is partly due to honest attempts at accuracy, idiosyncrasies were most often the result of a lack of information combined with simple differences of opinion. Moll's map is extremely plain, while Mercator's is deliberately artistic. Both maps of Africa incorporate Ptolemy's Lakes Zairi and Zaflan, but whereas Moll makes "Abissina" a small province of "Ethiopia," Mercator extends "Abissini" across the whole central interior, omitting "Æthiopia" completely.

Moll intentionally synthesized canonical Ptolemaic cartography with the "*Newest and Most Exact Observations*" from up to date explorers' accounts when he made his map of Africa in the early 18th century, just as Münster had done in 1540, and Mercator does in 1595. Mercator's map uses the Greek term "Agisymba," Ptolemy's word for the

southernmost limit of the *oikoumenē* (figure 2.13).²³ Despite Ptolemy’s massive impact on later cartographers, Mercator’s inclusion of “Agyismba” is an anomaly.²⁴ All historic mapmakers made conscious decisions when selecting place names, setting regional boundaries, and modifying natural geophysical features such as lakes, mountains, and rivers. These representational choices were not merely attempts to reconcile hear-say with science; inclusions and omissions were often strategic, designed to communicate specific ideas to a defined audience.

The Greek “Æthiopia” comes from *Aithiops*, which means “burnt-face.” In the past, the term functioned much like “Sub-Saharan Africa” does today: it designated a broad geographical region with vague boundaries, and generally referred to the part of Africa where the people are dark-skinned, or “black.”²⁵ “Abyssinia” is a Portuguese word, probably derived from the Arabic term “Habash,” which in turn probably derives from “Habashat,” the name for a group of people who live in modern Tigray, Ethiopia.²⁶ Also widely used was the Arabic term “Habshi,” a corruption of “Habash,” which had negative

²³ Berrgren and Jones state that for Ptolemy, Agisymba was the southernmost limit of the *oikoumenē*. However, it is important to note that despite the fact that “Agisymba” resembles “Abyssinia” or a variation of “Abyssinia,” “Agisymba” is a separate concept. Berrgren and Jones claim that the word is found in no other independent ancient source, which underscores Mercator’s reliance on Ptolemaic geography. Mercator seems to have placed Agisymba in West Africa because of the misunderstanding—shared by many cartographers at the time—that the Niger and the Nile were connected. Berrgren and Jones support the claim that Agisymba did indeed at one time refer to what is modern Niger or Chad. See Berrgren and Jones, *Ptolemy’s Geography*, 168. It is also worth noting that Tooley and Bricker’s *Landmarks of Mapmaking* assumes (probably erroneously) that Agisymba is interchangeable with Abyssinia.

²⁴ Out of the approximately 90 historical maps of Africa I looked at in the University of Florida’s collection, Mercator’s is the only one where Agyismba is used. These maps are also accessible on the world wide web at <<http://palmm.fcla.edu/map/>>

²⁵ See Bernal, “European Images of Africa—A Tale of Two Names: Ethiopia and N---.”

²⁶ Richard Pankhurst. “The Ethiopian Diaspora to India,” in *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean*, ed. Jayasuriya, Shihan de Silvia and Richard Pankhurst (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2003): 136.

connotations, was often applied to slaves, and did not always refer to Abyssinians.²⁷

Today Ethiopians prefer not to be called “Abyssinians,” and as I mentioned in the introduction, historic Ethiopians called themselves Ethiopians, even while the rest of the world called them Abyssinians. What these historic maps reveal, however is that this is not a simple case of complex inter-lingual translation—for in the past, Abyssinia was always a part of Æthiopia, but not all Æthiopians were Abyssinians.

Mercator may have used “Abissina” instead of “Ethiopia” or “Æthiopia” because of the widely held popular belief in a mythical figure named Prester John. In Europe, Prester John was a legendary Christian Emperor who ruled a powerful kingdom somewhere in the East. He was rumored to live in India or Asia, but was quickly grafted onto Africa when early explorers like Marco Polo encountered Christian “Abyssinian” Emperors.²⁸ Christianity has existed in what is now Ethiopia since the 4th century. During the Middle Ages, when Islamic *jihads*, or holy wars, tore through the heart of the Christian realm, the idea of a Christian stronghold in the East was a comforting fantasy—medieval Europeans believed that Prester John’s armies could help them fend off the onslaught of Islam and liberate the Holy Land from heretic “infidels.”²⁹ In Mercator’s Africa, there are no fantastic beasts or wild animals and his oceans are sea-monster free, but he does include a small image of Prester John, enthroned and bearing a Christian

²⁷ Ibid. See also Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians* (Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998): 77.

²⁸ “Prester” comes from *presbyter*, the Latin word for ‘priest.’ According to Tooley and Bricker, Prester John supposedly “originated in stories about a Tartar chief who converted to Christianity.” Tooley and Bricker, *Landmarks of Mapmaking*, 161-163.

²⁹ Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, p. 76-78. See also Wendy James, “Kings, Commoners, and the Ethnographic Imagination in Sudan and Ethiopia,” in *Localizing Strategies: Regional Traditions in Ethnographic Writing*, ed. Richard Fardon (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1990): 96-136.

cross in one hand, mapped next to the Nile in the center of “Abissina” (figure 2.14). Münster also included the well-known kingdom on his 1540 woodcut map. Labeled “Hamarich,” the home of Prester John is similarly placed—on the Nile just below the ancient city of Meroe.³⁰

The most widely circulated map of Africa in the late 16th century was published in 1570 as a page in Abraham Ortelius’ *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, the “first great atlas of the world” (figures 2.15).³¹ The 1573 edition of the atlas featured a new map: *A representation of the empire of Prester John, or, of the Abyssinians*, (figure 2.16). Here, lakes Zairi and Zaflan are prominently featured, along with four large blue elephants, and in the upper left corner, a small red shield bears the crest of Prester John, “a Lion Rampant, supporting a crucifix.”³² The plaque below the crest lists several “grand titles” for the biblical David, and gives information about Prester John’s lineage, traceable back to Solomon.³³ Like Mercator, Ortelius assumes far too great an area for Abyssinia, wishfully projecting Christianity, or at least Christian control, over all the unknown regions surrounding the mysterious southern source of the Nile.

In 1683, a German cartographer named Hiob Ludolf issued a much more accurate map of Abyssinia (figures 2.17).³⁴ Hiob never visited Africa himself, but based his map

³⁰ Hamarich is probably a variation of Amharic, the language of the Amhara people of highlands Ethiopia.

³¹ Lane-Pool, “The Discovery of Africa,” 220.

³² *Ibid*, 221.

³³ Tooley and Bricker, *Landmarks of Mapmaking*, 160-163. 161.

³⁴ Hiob Ludolf never visited Africa, yet he is considered the father of Ethiopian studies. For information about Ludolf, see Tooley and Bricker, *Landmarks of Mapmaking*, 163-166; and Siegbert Uhlig, *Hiob Ludolfs “Theologia Aethiopica”* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983). Hiob Ludolf’s map of Abyssinia may actually have been drawn after his death by one of his sons.

on information provided by Abba Gregorius, an Amharic monk residing in Rome, and several Portuguese missionaries who had been to Abyssinia. Hiob's map provides accurate, timely details about Ethiopia in the 17th century, such as the inclusion of the newly established capital Gondar. Indicated by a cluster of stately marquees placed just off the north bank of Lake Tana (figure 2.18), the capital had been moved to Gondar from Danqaz in 1636 by the Abyssinian ruler Fasilidas.³⁵ One of Hiob's Portuguese missionary informants was Jerónimo Lobo, a Jesuit priest who spent nine years in Abyssinia (in this case, definitely historic Ethiopia) in the 1620s and 30s.

Lobo discusses Fasilidas at length in his *Itenário*, an account of his journeys in Abyssinia and discovery of the Blue Nile. When Samuel Johnson translated Lobo's *Itenário* in 1735, he remarked, in plain admiration of Lobo's "no-nonsense" approach:

[Lobo] appears by his modest and unassuming narration to have described things as he saw them, to have copied nature from the life, and to have consulted his senses, not his imagination. He meets no basilisks that destroy with their eyes; his crocodiles devour their prey without tears; and his cataracts fall from the rock without deafening the neighboring inhabitants.³⁶

Of Abyssinia, Lobo himself states:

This is the empire commonly called the empire of Prester John of the Indies, erroneously so, however, since the truth is that the ancient and true Prester John and his domain have been lost to human memory. And with the persistence of rumours of Prester John in the eastern parts and the signs of his being a Christian prince, the Portuguese who very much wanted to discover the said Empire and were unable to gain knowledge of it, finding the Ethiopian [sic] princes with so many signs of Christianity, and also comparing them with [what they had heard of] the ancient Prester John...they came to believe that this was the ancient Prester John of the Indies; and this same report, brought and communicated by the Portuguese, was then published throughout the world.³⁷

³⁵ Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 109.

³⁶ Quoted in Tooley and Bricker, *Landmarks of Mapmaking*, 163.

³⁷ Jeronimo Lobo. *The Itenerario of Jeronimo Lobo*, 155.

Hiob would have had access to this information; yet, he still calls his map “Abyssinia, the Land of Prester John.” Lobo’s account of Abyssinia was exceptional, and many representations of the Horn of Africa and the Nile region more broadly continued to romantically superimpose Abyssinia and Christian rule over vast portions of the unknown interior.

Prester John” maps were designed for a wealthy and predominantly Christian European audience: it didn’t matter that the Abyssinian rulers had real names, nor did it matter that they had never had a King with the title “Prester John” in their history; the fact that the Abyssinians were Christian was sufficient to confirm what European audiences and mapmakers wanted to believe. Just as Münster, Moll, and Mercator included some Ptolemaic conventions in their maps of Africa and omitted others, Hiob consciously selected parts of Lobo’s story to include and deliberately chose to leave other important details out.

The “Habit” of an Ethiopian

Maps have a very unambiguous rapport with reality. They self-consciously “speak” about their subjects, offering a miniaturized, conceptual diagram of an explicitly defined terrain—maps are made to communicate information and they are intended to be read. Text is, of course, indispensable; cities, mountains, rivers, lakes, oceans and seas, the title and creator’s name, as well as cues for decoding the map, like the scale, are all literally spelled out on the surface. Mapped alongside these textual representations, however, are numerous figurative representations that also bear significant meaning. Münster’s *Monoculi*, for example, or Mercator’s miniscule image of Prester John, suggest something beyond candid elocution of a notable African place; they also inadvertently convey cultural particulars about Mercator, Münster, and their markets. Some figurative

representations were highly conventionalized, used on multiple maps of Africa from the 16th through the 19th century, such as the small images of elephants and other wild animals that appeared over unknown lands so frequently, they became part of a pictorial language for conveying the concept of “Africa” to European audiences.

Over time, cartographers refined their skills with better instruments and more comprehensive astronomical knowledge. Combined with the escalating influx of first-hand accounts provided by traders, explorers, and missionaries, these improvements made 17th and 18th century maps far more accurate. Simultaneous developments in printmaking technology, specifically the invention of a sophisticated type of copperplate intaglio engraving, allowed commercial mapmakers to print more maps and include more detailed imagery, bringing Africa into sharper focus than ever before.³⁸ Maps became progressively picturesque as views of distant cities and ports, economic interests, zoological discoveries, and inevitably, African people, began to occupy a larger percentage of the margin. Consequently, images of “natives,” like elephants and lions, assumed a fundamental role in defining Europe’s mental picture of Africa.

One of the more organized of these information laden maps is Willem Blaeu’s *Africa Newly Described* (figure 2.19). A veritable archive unto itself, Blaeu’s map features a wide border containing vignettes of Cairo, Alexandria and other well known cities across the top, and an inventory of African people “in national dress” down both sides. Part of a larger atlas of the world, Blaeu’s map of Africa appeared in 28 editions

³⁸ Christopher R. Steiner, “Travel Engravings and the Construction of the Primitive,” *Prehistories of the Future: the Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, ed. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995): 206.

from 1630 to 1662.³⁹ This wide-border style was very popular in the early 17th century, and since cartographers borrowed freely from each other, several maps were issued with identical or only slightly modified imagery. The border figures on Blau's map are identical to the figures on John Speed's map of Africa from 1626 (figure 2.20), only Blau's are shown reversed, and in pairs. Each figure or pair of figures is labeled, for example, "Abyssinian," "Egyptian," or "Mozambiquan." Twelve nationalities are covered in all, and they are the same on both maps.

For artistically minded cartographers, the title cartouche, long a reserve of ornamental excess, also provided the perfect compositional opportunity to incorporate additional, relevant information. For example, A map of the West African coast from 1635, again by Willem Blau (figure 2.21), portrays two African figures lounging on top of a stone marker, along with several monkeys and a parrot. Like the figures and cities on Blau's wide-border map, these details convey information about Africa. "Oceanus Æthiopicus" is written just above the figures' heads in the same style of decadent script used by Mercator. The map credits (publisher, cartographer's signature, etc) are placed on a separate, smaller cartouche to the left, though the central cartouche retains the title and the scale. On the lower right, Blau has also included a pair of Africanized putti bearing a large elephant's tusk (figure 2.22). Ivory was a common theme on maps of the African coastline, reflecting the economic interests of European consumers at the time. Here, Blau's map harks back to a century before, when sea monsters and mer-men populated the seas—just below the surface of the water the lower bodies of the putti are transformed into red-tipped green fish tails.

³⁹ Tooley and Bricker, *Landmarks of Mapmaking*, 166.

Another regional map of Africa, *Æthiopia Inferior vel Exterior* (“Lower or Outer” *Æthiopia*) is stylistically indistinguishable from Blaeu’s *Guinea* and repeats the same basic formation for the main cartouche: two African figures, surrounded by several monkeys, flank a central panel identifying the geographic area being presented (figure 2.23 and 2.24). Here, however, the two figures stand rather than recline, and the decorative stone slab has been replaced with a flayed cow skin. Replete with head and tail still attached, the pale pink inside of the hide suggests the slaughter was a fairly recent transaction, subtly (or perhaps not so subtly) underscoring their assumed barbarity.⁴⁰ It is impossible to glean from these figures a specific “nationality” or pinpoint a more exact regional affiliation; they obviously have cattle, and they wear loincloths and capes and carry weapons, but they aren’t specifically identified as “Abbyssinian” or “Mozambiquean” like the border figures on Blau and Speed’s slightly earlier maps. Indeed, these two figures flanking a skin weren’t intended to reference anything other than *all* of “Lower *Æthiopia*.”

The same exact iconography is used by Dutch cartographer Pieter Goos on a map of the “West Indies” (figure 2.25 and 2.26) included in his *Sea-Atlas of the Watter World*, a book of nautical charts first printed in 1666. Johann Baptist Homann, a distinguished German cartographer, also uses the flayed skin cartouche for a map of the “New World” he created in the early 18th century. The subject matter is totally different—the “New World” vs. southern “*Æthiopia*”—but the image and the intention are the same; to the

⁴⁰ While the majority of cartouches on historic maps continued to be styled after illusionistic stone markers or stelae, occasionally a cloth was used. For example, on his 18th century map of the Holy Land, Matthaeus Seutter uses a cloth cartouche supported by smiling (white) putti. This type of cloth motif appears to be the “civilized” counterpart to the flayed skin cartouche, which is only found on maps of lands once considered “primitive” by Europeans.

right audience, the figures with the skin signify “primitiveness” in any context and can be easily lifted from one part of the world and grafted onto another.

In his study of engravings of “primitive” people in travel narrative books from the 16th through the 19th century, Christopher Steiner points out that:

Illustrators were able to use conventionalized images without sacrificing a sense of realism because few of their readers had ever seen the peoples and places described in the text. Since neither artist nor reader had much knowledge of what the subject ought to look like, it is easy to understand how a system of imaginary signs could come into being to represent any culture deemed primitive. All that was necessary was that the image producer and image consumer agree on the meaning of these newly constructed signs.⁴¹

Steiner argues that this type of borrowing is part of “the logic of representation engendered by mechanical reproduction;” whereby a recognizable image, or sign, *because it is recognizable*, becomes a way to make the text seem more comprehensive, more real, and more authentic.⁴² It was true that many cartographers and publishers never saw the places or the people depicted in their maps and they relied on previously encoded signs, or tropes, to authenticate their accounts; thus, images like the flayed skin cartouche enabled mapmakers to speak authoritatively to their audience about unfamiliar subjects.

Mechanical reproduction accelerated the dissemination of recognizable imagery throughout Europe as new texts used old tropes to identify their subjects, recycling the same pictures to a widening audience through a range of printed materials. This was necessary in what Susan Stewart describes as the “entrepreneurial mode” of knowledge

⁴¹ Steiner, “Travel Engravings and the Construction of the Primitive,” 210.

⁴² Ibid, 202-225. See also Christopher Steiner, “Authenticity, Repetition, and the Aesthetics of Seriality: The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Postcolonial World*, ed. Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999): 90-96.

production during the 18th century, when writers broke free of “the patronage system, the court, the world of the coffeehouse, and the practice of subscriptions,” and begin actively seeking publishers for their writings.⁴³ This “commodification of writing” she argues, “demanded an authenticating apparatus;” in the context of travel narratives, maps and other documents describing cultures exotic to that of the producer, the picture of the “native” or “primitive other” becomes the authenticating apparatus, reciprocally proclaiming that both the text/map and the image are true.⁴⁴

In the examples discussed above, the image of two “natives” holding up a flayed skin has the effect of casting both the “West Indies” and “Lower Æthiopia” as “primitive lands.” The figures are at once generic and specific: their ability to signify broadly makes them interchangeable, yet *contextually* the figures become “West Indians” and “Æthiopians,” comparable to the “Abbisinian,” the “Egyptian” or any of the other figures in Blau and Speed’s catalogue of “nationalities.” The way a figure is represented—their mode of dress and adornment, the objects they carry, the way they either sit or stand—become identifying characteristics of distinct categories of people when the same tropes are constantly repeated; thus, clothing—or the lack of clothing—can be made to serve as the medium through which “nationality” is translated, the dressed, adorned, or naked body becoming interchangeable with the figure’s national(or “ethnic”, or “racial”) identification.

⁴³ Susan Stewart, “Antipodal Expectations: Notes on the Formosan ‘Ethnography’ of George Psalmanazar,” in *Romantic Motives: Essays on Anthropological Sensibility*, ed. George W. Stocking (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989): 48-53.

⁴⁴ In “Travel Engravings and the Construction of The Primitive,” Christopher Steiner points out how this process does not apply only to “primitive” cultures; it was also used to represent cities in Europe in travel journals and other texts.

Two book illustrations, both printed in the late 18th century, demonstrate this point clearly: in the first illustration, taken from John Fransham's *The Entertaining Traveler; or, The Whole World in Miniature* (London, 1767), three pairs of figures, each a male and a female, wearing their "national costume" are presented as representatives from their respective cultures. They appear in a row with labels above their heads that read (from left to right) "The Habit of a Negroe," "The Habit of a Moor," and "The Habit of a Mexican," (figure 2.27). Nine modes of dress are presented in all, in three illustrations, and these are the only images in the whole book.⁴⁵ The second example is from *The History of All Nations*, by David Paterson (Edinburgh, 1777), (figure 2.28). The iconography is identical to Fransham's illustration of "the habit" of a "Negroe": the man is wearing a loincloth and carries a spear; the woman wears a cloth draped about her waist, and carries an infant on her back. The only difference is that in the second illustration, the words "the habit of..." are left off. There are several illustrations of other nationalities in Fransham's book, yet, his "A Negroe" is the only image that doesn't include these extra contextualizing words.

This image of an African woman wearing a short waist wrapper, carrying a baby on her back, appeared earlier as the "Mozambiquan" in the catalogue of cultures on Willem Blaeu's *Africa Newly Described* and John Speed's *Africae*, discussed above (figures 2.19 and 2.20). On both 17th century maps, "Abyssinians" are shown wearing jodhpur-style pants and belted tunics, wrapped turbans and shoes. A similarly dressed individual appears on the title page for Samuel Johnson 18th century novel *The History of Rasselas*,

⁴⁵ The other two images contain representations of "The Habit of a Chinese," "The Habit of a Mogul," and "The Habit of a Persian;" and "The Habit of a Turk," the Habit of a Tartar," and "The Habit of a Polander."

Prince of Abyssinia.⁴⁶ Images of Prester John, the most famous of all Abyssinians, always portray him in kingly dress, usually carrying a crucifix, and enthroned. An image of “The Emperor of Abyssinia” from Allain Manesson Mallet’s *Description de L’Univers* (1685) shows the Emperor, still equated with Prester John, in embroidered and tassled finery, wearing a military helmet and sandals (figure 2.29).⁴⁷ In stark contrast to other kinds of Æthiopians—the two figures holding the flayed skin, or the “Mozambiquan” woman, for instance—Abyssinians are depicted “favorably” by European standards, most readily indicated by the fact that they are typically represented fully clothed.

Pictures of Africa and African people printed on historical maps, and in old books, have the ability to communicate and store information; they can be read as products of a particular culture, as statements of contextually specific ideas. They are also biased, implicated in the history of colonialism, signs of an uneven distribution of knowledge and power. After Lake Victoria, was “discovered” by John Speke in 1862, and the sources of the Congo and Lualaba were “discovered” a few years later by Henry Morton Stanley, “there was not much left to be explored in Africa.”⁴⁸ The Nile Region, which held the undivided attention of two-thousand years of cartographers, could finally be mapped “correctly.”

Not ten years after Stanley’s final breakthrough, a group of European superpowers assembled in Berlin to haggle over Africa’s future. They cut Africa into fifty different states, divided the newly established territories between them, and agreed to respect each

⁴⁶ Johnson, Samuel. *The history of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (London, 1799?), George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. May 2005
<<http://galenet.galegroup.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/servlet/ECCO>>

⁴⁷ This image appears in Tooley and Bricker, *Landmarks of Mapmaking*, 164.

⁴⁸ Lane-Pool, “The Discovery of Africa,” 217.

other's borders. At the Berlin Conference in 1894, the age of Discovery ended and the era of European colonialism in Africa officially began. The map of Africa today is a snapshot of this notorious event, a lasting picture of an inexorable moment in both Africa's and Europe's past. Yet, Africa today is also a picture of resistance, of freedom fought for and won, of new national, regional and ever-changing individual identities.

All of the maps and images discussed in this chapter are intended to illuminate the complex history of European representations of what is now Ethiopia. I have shown that what is Ethiopia today once had two different identities: Abyssinia, the fertile country that feeds the Nile, the ancient Empire of Christian Kings; and *Æthiopia*, an obscure land populated by barbaric pagans. In the next chapter I will turn to more recent representations of Ethiopia, and I will explore how this division, in some instances, still exists; my discussion will also move from maps as historical documents of exploration and discovery, to photographs as representations of relationships of power. Around the same time that Speke was discovering the source of the White Nile in 1862, Europeans began documenting people with photography, and a whole new way to think about and look at African culture developed.



Figure 2.1 Map of the World according to Ptolemy's second projection, 1482. This map is from the 1482 Latin edition printed by Lienart at Ulm, the first edition of the Geography to include woodcut print maps. (Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, The Houghton Library, Harvard University. Plate 6 in Berggren and Jones.)

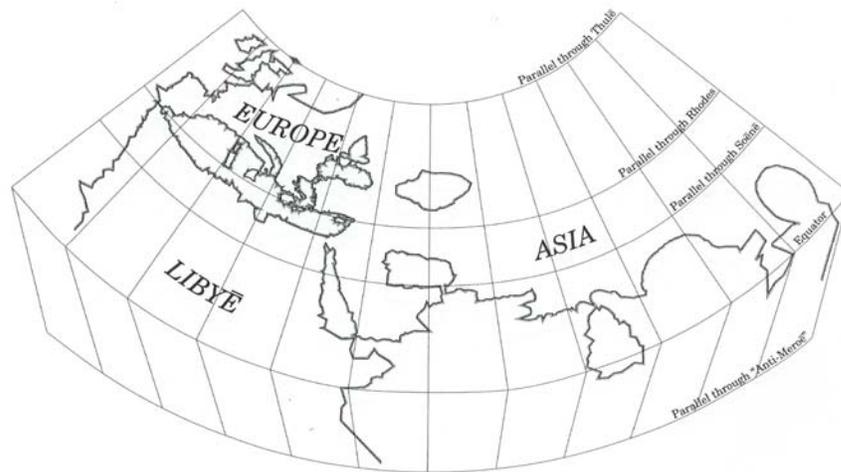


Figure 2.2 Reconstruction of Ptolemy's *oikoumenē*, (Map 1. in Berggren and Jones)

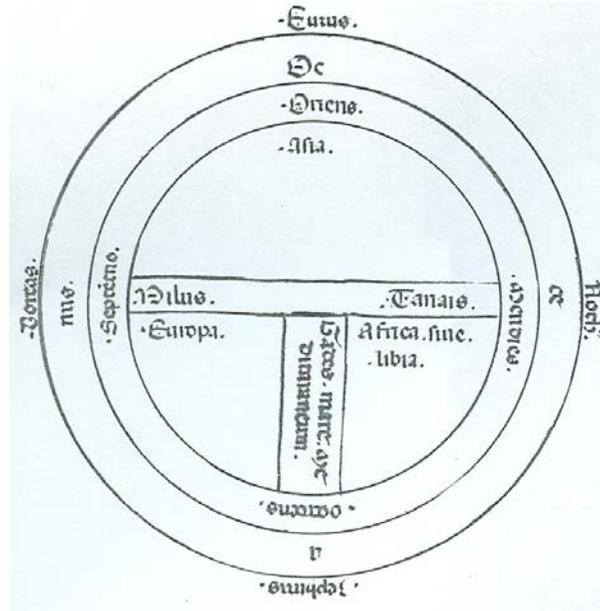


Figure 2.5. “T-O” map. From a 14th century copy of the writings of Lucan (Marcus Annaeus Lucanus), a 1st-century Roman poet. (Tooley and Bricker, 24). The bottom stroke of the “T” represents the Mediterranean; the top bar depicts the Nile River on the right, and the waters north of the Aegean on the left. The double outer ring represents the river Ocean.



Figure 2.6 Copy of a map by al-Idrisi. Al-Idrisi created the original map for King Roger of Sicily in 1154. The copy shown here was probably made around 1500 CE. (Tooley and Bricker, 24).



Figure 2.7 Sebastian Münster's Map of Africa. Woodcut print with insert type. Created by Münster in 1540 for his version of Ptolemy's *Geography*. The map depicted here is from the third edition, published in 1542. (Tooley and Bricker, 153).

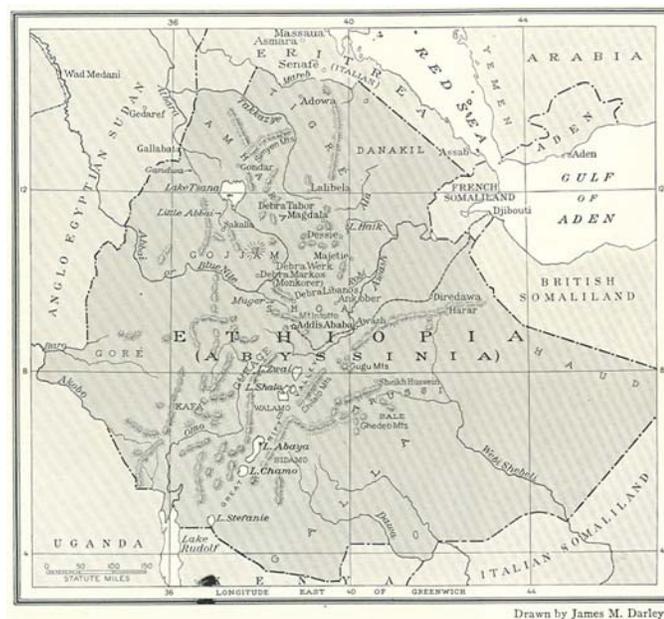


Figure 2.8. Map of Ethiopia printed in 1931. (*National Geographic Magazine*, June 1931, 702). The original caption reads, “ARID, SEMIDESERT COUNTRY SURROUNDS ETHIOPIA. The ancient Empire embraces more than 350,000 square miles of the productive north-eastern plateau of Africa, and, while it lies wholly within the Tropics, its elevation tempers the climate.”



Figure 2.9 *Africa According to the Newest and most Exact Observations* created by Herman Moll, London, 1714. 26.5 x 18.7 cm (University of Florida, George A. Smathers Library)



Figure 2.10. Detail of figure 2.9 showing “Abissina” (upper right), Ethiopia (center), and Lakes Zaire and Zaflana and the Zeebe River (bottom).

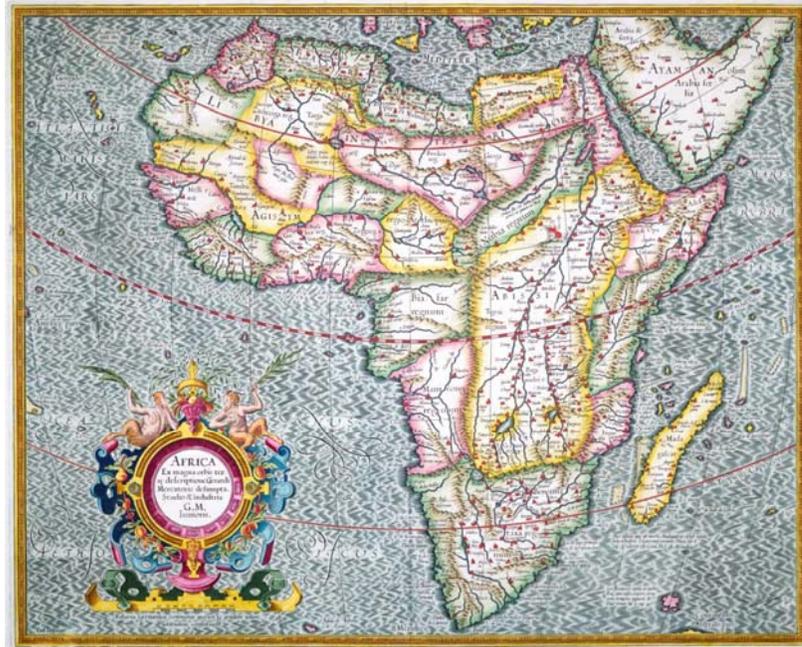


Figure 2.11 *Africa Ex Magna Orbis Terre* created by Gerard Mercator (the younger), 1595. 38 x 47 cm (University of Florida, George A. Smathers Library)



Figure 2.12 Detail of figure 2.11. Title cartouche from Mercator's map, surface treatment of water, trompe l'oeil frame, and the "Oceanus Aethiopicus."



Figure 2.13 Detail of figure 2.11 showing “Agisymba.”

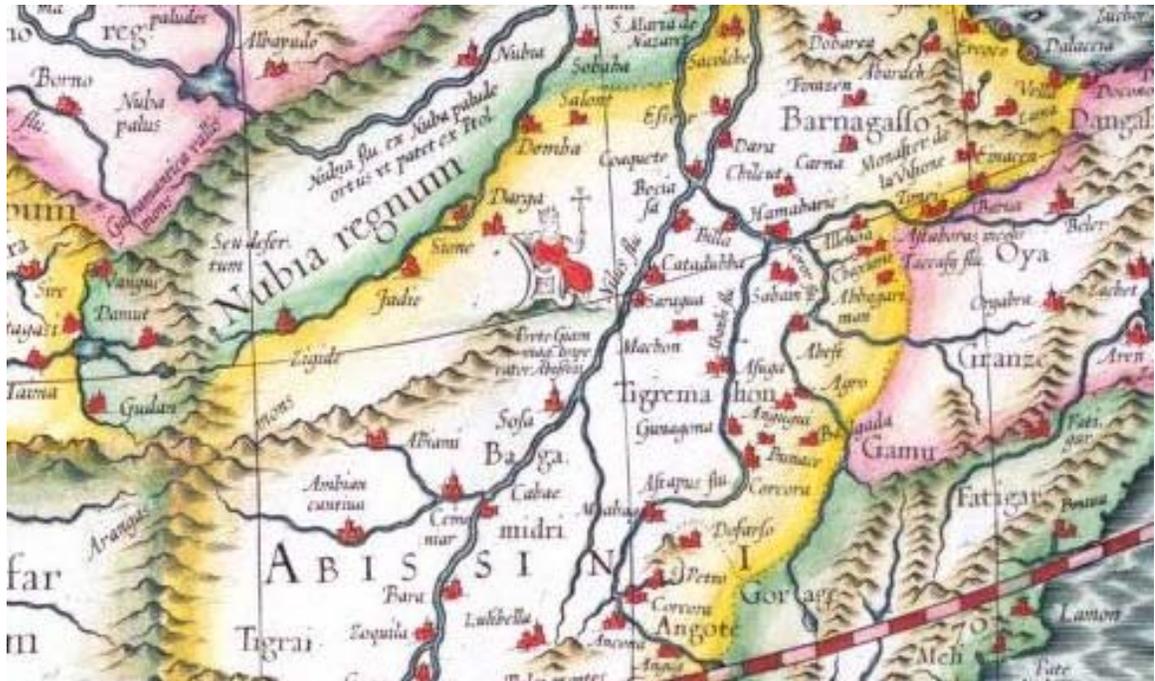


Figure 2.14 Detail of figure 2.11 showing “Abissini” (bottom) and illustration of Prester John (center).



Figure 2.15 *Africae Tabula Nova*, created by Abraham Ortelius, Antwerp, 1570. 37.5 x 50.3 cm (University of Florida, George A. Smathers Library). Included in Ortelius' world atlas, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*.



Figure 2.16 *Presbiteri Johannis Abissinorium Imperii Descriptio* (A representation of the empire of Prester John, or, of the Abyssinians), created by Abraham Ortelius, Antwerp, 1573. 38 x 44 cm (University of Florida, George A. Smathers Library).

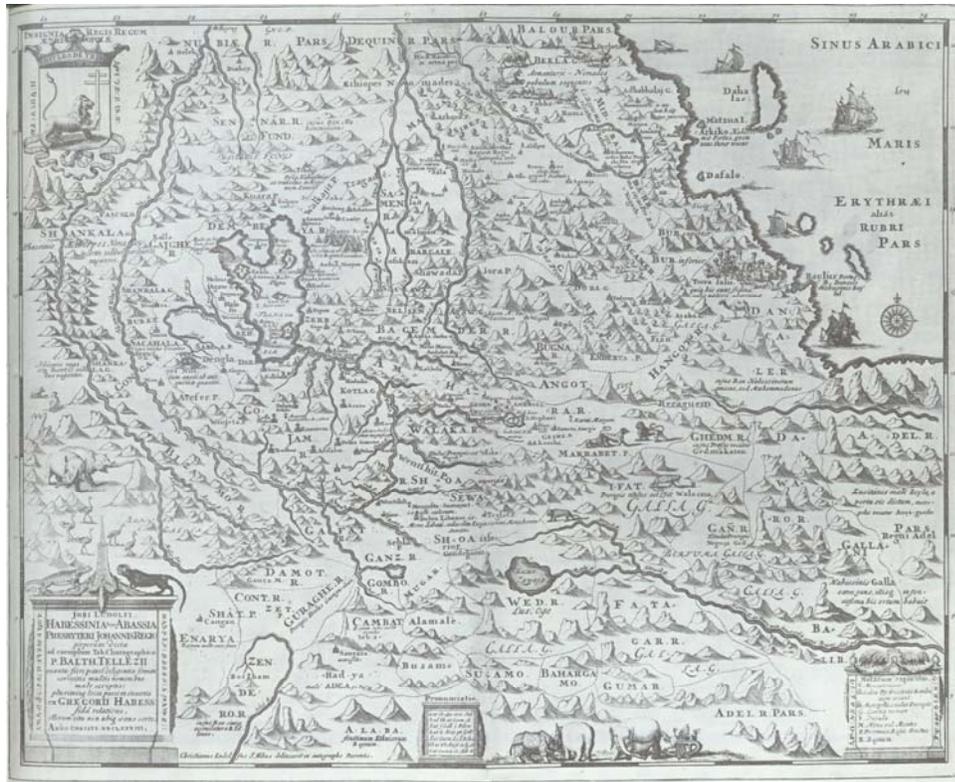


Figure 2.17 *Habessinia or Abassia, Presbyteri Johannis Regio.* (“Habessinia” or “Abassia,” the Land of Prester John.) Created by Hiob Ludolf (or possibly his son), 1683. (Tooley and Bricker, 165.)



Figure 2.18 Detail of figure 2.17 showing tents at “Guender” (Gondar).

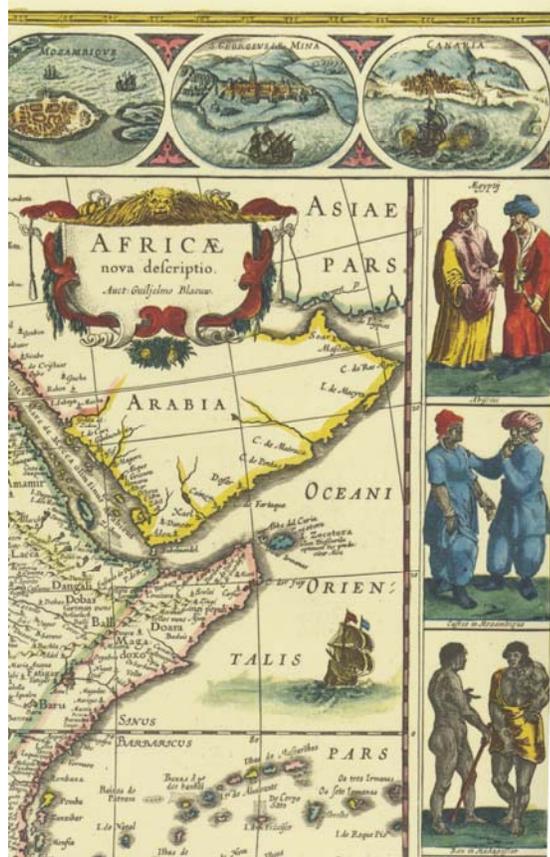


Figure 2.19 Detail of *Africae Nova Descriptio* (Africa Newly Described), created by Willem Blaeu, 1630. (Reproduced in full in Tooley and Bricker, 175-176.) Figures depicted are (top to bottom): “Ægypty,” “Abiβini,” and “Cafres in Mazambique,” [sic].



Figure 2.20 Detail of *Africae*, map of Africa created by John Speed, London, 1626. (Tooley and Bricker, 166). People depicted (left to right): “Abissinian,” and an “Egyptian.”



Figure 2.21 *Guinea*, created by Willem Blau, Amsterdam, 1635. 39 x 53 cm (University of Florida, George A. Smathers Library).

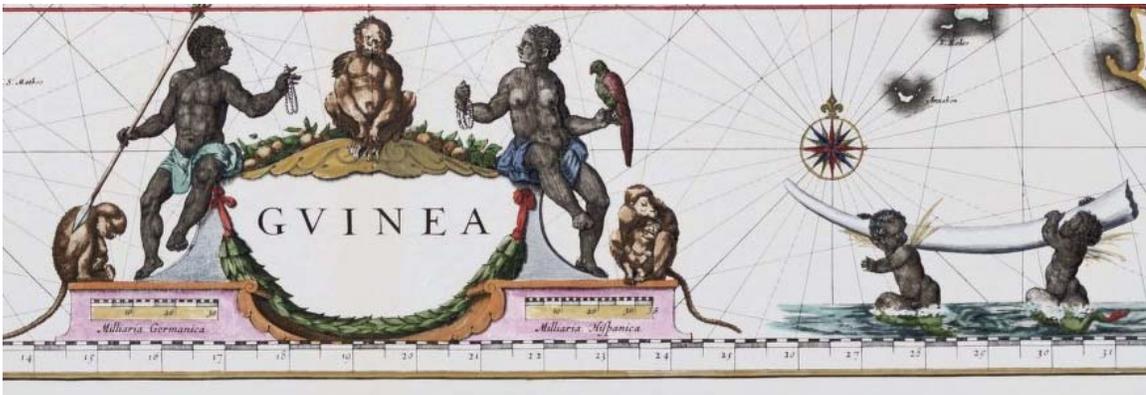


Figure 2.22 Detail of figure 2.21.



Figure 2.23 *Æthiopia Inferior vel Exterior* (“Lower or Outer” *Æthiopia*), made by Jan Jansson after an earlier map by Jan Blau (1642). 39 x 51 cm (University of Florida, George A. Smathers Library). The only difference between Blau’s map and Jansson’s is that the latter lacks a sailing ship above the cartouche. (Blau’s version appears in Tooley and Bricker, 167.)



Figure 2.24 Detail of figure 2.23 showing flayed cow skin cartouche.



Figure 2.25 *Paskaerte Van West Indien de Vaste Kusten en de Eylanden*, created by Pieter Goos, nd., probably late 1660s. (University of Florida, George A. Smathers Library).



Figure 2.26 Detail of figure 2.25 showing flayed skin cartouche.

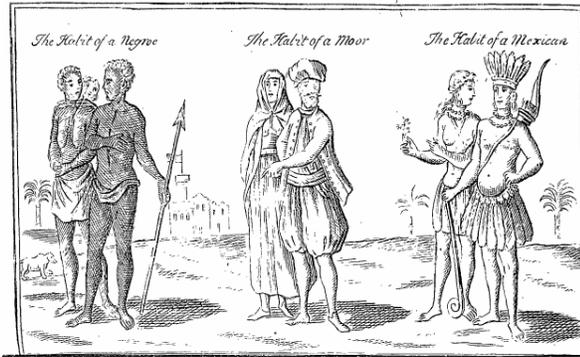


Figure 2.27 Illustration from *The Entertaining Traveler; or, the Whole World in Miniature*, by John Fransham and printed by Henry Holmes, London, 1767. (The British Library, accessible at <<http://galenet.galegroup.com>>)



Figure 2.28 Illustration from *History of All Nations*, printed by David Paterson, Edinburgh, 1777. (The British Library, accessible at <<http://galenet.galegroup.com>>)



Figure 2.29 Image of the Emperor of Abyssinia from Allain Manesson Mallet's *Description de L'Univers*, 1685. (Tooley and Bricker, 164).

CHAPTER 3
PHOTOGRAPHING ETHIOPIA: THE SAFARI AND THE PILGRIMAGE

While the gaze of the subject of the photograph may be difficult to find in the heavy crisscrossing traffic of the more privileged gazes of producers and consumers, contemporary stories of contestable power are told there nonetheless.

(Lutz and Collins, 1993: 216)

Photography is modernity run riot. (Sekula, 1986: 4)

Recent readings of photography and Africa often focus on how the West has systematically used Africa to construct a narrative about itself. This kind of cultural domination is not restricted to photography; indeed, the historic maps discussed in the last chapter reveal how Africa was “colonized” by the European imagination long before Europeans actually assumed political control. When viewed critically, photographs, like maps, often reveal much more about the producer/observer than they do about the produced/observed. The question then inevitably becomes, what, or who is really the subject? Photography, and photographs of human bodies in particular, necessitate that the subject be split into an interlocking triad—the photographer, the photographed, and the viewer, or spectator. All three are always present, yet they seldom exercise agency equally.

In this chapter, I will address representations of Ethiopian people in photographs by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, most of which were taken between 1984 and 1989. During the mid 1980s, the Western news media was flooded with devastating images of starving Ethiopian women and children as Ethiopia went through one its worst famines in recorded history. While this kind of imagery can certainly be damaging—presenting

Ethiopia as a pitiful, wretched place where life is nothing but a struggle for survival—the same is also true of the opposite; in other words, representations of Ethiopia as a glorious Eden where humanity and nature are one and the same also promote stereotypical, and thus harmful perceptions of African people

Gazing at Ethiopia

The most comprehensive photographic study of modern Ethiopia is Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher's *African Ark: Peoples of the Horn*, a lavishly-illustrated, large-format "coffee-table book" published in 1990.¹ Ethiopia is the primary focus of the book, though Somalia, Djibouti, and what is now Eritrea are also covered. Beckwith and Fisher have been working separately and together in Africa for over 30 years and between them they have published seven books, produced two films, contributed to several *National Geographic* feature articles and delivered countless lectures on African culture at universities and museums across the United States.² Carol Beckwith is also a painter and Angela Fisher designs jewelry, which she sells at a boutique near her London home. Their award-winning photographs have been exhibited as art in cities all over the world, yet like most professional photographers, their work crosses disciplinary bounds; they self consciously document African culture, and their "fieldwork" resembles at times the

¹ Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, *African Ark: Peoples of the Horn*. (London: Collins Harvill, 199).

² The books are: Tepilit Ole Saitoti and Carol Beckwith, *Maasai* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980); Angela Fisher, *Africa Adorned* (New York: Abrams, 1984); Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, *African Ark*; Carol Beckwith, *Nomads of Niger* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993); Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, *African Ceremonies*, 2 vols. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999); Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, *Passages* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000); Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, *Faces of Africa* (Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2004). *National Geographic* articles featuring their photographs include: Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, "Masai Passage to Manhood," *National Geographic* 196 no. 3 (September 1999): 52-65; Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, "African Marriage Rituals," *National Geographic* 196 no. 5 (November 1999): 80-97; and Karen E. Lange, with photography by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, "Himba: Consulting the Past, Divining the Future," *National Geographic* 205 no. 1 (January 2004): 32-47. The two films are *Way of the Wodaabe*, and *The Painter and the Fighter*.

efforts of university-trained anthropologists and ethnographers. Frequently celebrated—and condemned—for the unprecedented access granted to them as outsiders, Fisher and Beckwith have managed to photograph events many Westerners are seldom permitted to see.

Beckwith claims that she approaches photography “with the eye of a painter in terms of light, color, and composition;” her photographs are intended to be visually striking, “multilayered experiences in the way a painting is.”³ This premeditated aesthetic is plainly visible, for instance, in the image of an Orthodox priest, gingerly descending a worn staircase within the rock-hewn Lalibela complex in northern highlands Ethiopia (figure 3.1).⁴ In the photograph, enormous vertical masses of rutted and furrowed rock, weathered a dusky muddle of antique auburn, russet, and gray by centuries of wind and rain, rise up on either side of the image, just barely reaching ground level where the un-seen top of the “so-called Tomb of Adam” peeks out from the vast trench in which it sits. Hewn, not built, the eleven rock-cut churches at Lalibela were literally carved out of the solid red volcanic tuff of the surrounding terrain during the Zagwé dynasty in the 12th or 13th century CE.⁵

³ Carol Beckwith, “An Interview with Carol Beckwith,” *African Arts* 18 no.4 (August 1985): 38.

⁴ Two other photographs from Lalibela, (page 32 and pages 46-47 of *African Ark*), and a third image from Ura Kidane Mehret on Lake Tana (page 56 in *African Ark*) also appear in the August 1985 issue of *African Arts* as illustrations for an interview with Carol Beckwith, conducted by the editors of the magazine in December 1984. (The interview was published in 1985: Carol Beckwith. “An Interview with Carol Beckwith,” 38-45.) Angela Fisher is not mentioned in the interview, or in the photo captions; therefore, it is highly likely that this image was taken by Carol Beckwith. Although some of Beckwith and Fisher’s later compilations do include imagery that they previously published individually, when Beckwith and Fisher work together, they share credit for all of the photographs. I do not make any attempt in the following discussion to distinguish one’s work from the other.

⁵ Richard Pankhurst. *The Ethiopians*, (Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998): 45-60.

The composition is both stunning and suggestive: the mammoth precipice dwarfs the Ethiopian priest, his tiny barefoot figure suspended in a shaft of ethereal light, purposely conjuring visions of Old Testament patriarchs and sandy pilgrimages to remote and holy places. The stark white of his turban, softened by the halo-like aura that seems to surround his entire body, is a focal cue, leading the eye upwards past the darkened portal and the shadowed cross-shaped window to the barely illuminated ledge of the central edifice and the two unlit archways of the far wall. As somber and silent as the stone ramparts that almost completely engulf him, the priest in the picture bears his aesthetic burden with dignity and grace.

Two general, though unstated, themes dominate this particular collection of photographs: religion and/or ritual, and “ethnic” dress and adornment, both of which fall under the collective rubric of “traditional” culture.⁶ In the first category are images of pious Orthodox priests and bearded Falasha *Cahens*—religious leaders of the Beta Israel, or indigenous Ethiopian Jews—depicted soberly praying or reading from yellowed and fraying old books.⁷ There are also several pictures of “enraptured” Oromo pilgrims “only lightly brushed with Islam” and chanting “gypsies” who practice a “strange ecstatic religion” portrayed in the midst of fervent revelry at the tomb of Sheikh Hussein.⁸ The second category includes pictures of Orthodox celebrants dressed in filigree crowns and embroidered capes; elaborate Hamar coiffures; Suri women wearing large clay lip-plates;

⁶ These two themes are not the only subjects addressed in the book. There are also several shots of domestic architecture and images of both men and women at work, but these images often function as a framing device for each group or culture, and set the stage, so to speak, for a narrative far more concerned with African bodies and “traditional” rituals.

⁷ Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ark*, 49-75.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 174-203.

and several images of men and women with intricate scarifications, tattoos, and copious displays of beautiful jewelry. Of course, some images span both categories, such as the photographs of Suri men painting their bodies in preparation for “ritual dueling,” called *Donga*—which is actually more of a sport than a “ritual.”⁹ Played by the Mursi as well as the Suri, *Donga* is a type of stick-fighting where men pair up and try to knock down their opponent with a six foot wooden staff.

The Suri photographs are some of the most attention-grabbing images in the whole book. Unlike the distant, rather ambiguous vantage point from which the viewer sees the tiny Ethiopian priest descending the Lalibela staircase, the Suri men are shown in relentless close-up.¹⁰ The sequence begins with an image of one man painting another man’s face, shown opposite a life-size portrait of the latter individual.¹¹ The next two

⁹ Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, *African Ark*, 263-297.

¹⁰ Catherine Lutz and Jean Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993): 193. In their discussion of photographs in National Geographic Magazine, Lutz and Collins locate seven different gazes. “Vantage point” is a characteristic of the photographer’s gaze.

¹¹ The first photograph reappears in Beckwith and Fisher’s most recent work, *Faces of Africa*, yet in their new context, the two Suri men are given names. The man doing the painting is Ole Rege, and the man being painted is Kolaholi. Out of the twelve quixotically titled chapters in the book, Ole Rege and Kolaholi appear in “Patterns of Beauty.” (Recall, that Barchini appeared in the chapter titled “Art of Seduction;” see chapter one: Scope and Content.) On the next two pages, a close-up portrait of another Suri man, Muradit, appears with the following caption: “Surma, Ethiopia. Muradit’s painted face patterns enhance his mischievous mood.” A black page with white text (the format of choice for most picture-books about Africa) relays a story Beckwith and Fisher usually tell during their lectures: “When the day came to leave Surmaland, we asked Muradit what we could give the Surma as a thank you for their wonderful hospitality. After a moment of reflection, he announced, ‘We would like to see your breasts!’ We were quite taken aback, but realized that this was a fair request as Surma women went bare-breasted, men often nude, and we were completely covered up, *hiding unimaginable and mysterious secrets!* We invited Muradit into our hut, took a deep breath, and, to the count of three, lifted our T-shirts for five long seconds. His eyes widened with amazement and his mouth dropped open. He raced outside to tell the 300 villagers pulsating with curiosity what he had seen. Muradit stood on a tree stump and delivered an 11-minute speech. Our guide, Zewde, translated his words. One of us had round voluptuous breasts and was clearly a married woman with many children and absolutely taboo. The other had small upright pointy nubile breasts and was clearly available to everyone! At this point, Zewge hurriedly packed up our mule train and spirited us over the mountains to safety,” (202). Beckwith and Fisher used this story as part of their stand-up routine during the lecture tour that accompanied the release of *African Ceremonies* in 1999—I would like to thank Al Roberts for pointing this out to me. I am not using Ole Rege and Kolaholi’s names in this section of my discussion, because it is significant that they are anonymous in *African Ark*.

pages are double views of the same two men, standing on a rock outcropping, helping each other paint abstract designs in the white chalk mixture smeared over their bodies (figure 3.2). On the right, one man, the same one who paints' the other's face in the first photograph of the sequence, leans forward, his countenance fixed in an expression of intense concentration, as he gently holds up his associate's penis while using his other hand to paint intricate designs on the man's lower abdomen. The following two photographs—cropped just above the belly button at the top and just above the knee at the bottom and covering the whole 10x14 inch page—are “portraits” of the painted genitalia of, presumably, the same two men (figure 3.3).¹² The final two pages reveal an even *closer* look, so close, in fact, that tiny creases and pores are clearly discernable on their carefully decorated bellies (figure 3.4).

These photographs of Suri men are presented to the viewer as objects that are meant to be looked at. In academic discourse, this act of looking is referred to as “the gaze” and can be defined as the (social and political) position from which a subject is viewed and perceived by a spectator. The position of the viewer, or spectator, and the act of viewing a subject as a spectator, is a culturally bound process, an activity that shifts according to who is doing the looking, what they are looking at, and how they interpret what they are seeing. Thus, the viewer or spectator—the observer—also becomes an active subject through the very act of looking at the photograph, through the act of viewing, or gazing at the observed. In the photographs of the Suri men, Angela Fisher and/or Carol Beckwith are the first spectators, and although they are not physically present in the pictures, their subjectivity as observers—their “gaze”—is embedded in the

¹² In *Faces of Africa*, there is instead a close-up of a Suri man's buttocks. The caption reads: “Surma, Ethiopia: Details of body painting,” (202-205).

image, encoded in the representational choices they have made. The subjects that photographers chose to shoot, the vantage point they shoot from, the equipment they use, the way a shot is framed, or the way the final image is cut; even the way the film is processed is part of a conscious representational process.¹³

There are also other kinds of gazes embedded within photographs of human subjects, namely, the line of sight of the subjects themselves. In their analysis of photographs in *National Geographic Magazine*, Jane Collins and Catherine Lutz write: “There is perhaps no more significant gaze in the photograph than that of its subject. It is how and where the other looks that most determines the differences in the message a photograph can give about intercultural relations.”¹⁴ In the case of the Suri men, the man who paints his associate’s body in figure 3.2 is gazing directly at the other man’s penis. His “gaze” is then emphasized by the two “portraits” of painted Suri genitalia on the following pages. When these photographs are viewed together, or read, on the pages of *African Ark*, the emphasis on genitalia affects the viewer’s reception of the Suri man’s gaze, accentuating the penis rather than the act of painting, or the *Donga* game the paintings are created for; which, it should be noted, are likely far more important to the Suri men than the dramatization of their penises enacted by Fisher and Beckwith’s representational choices. This “intersection of gazes” is always exacerbated when the lived context of the observed is different from the lived context of the observer.¹⁵ In

¹³ Carol Beckwith states that she feels “Kodachrome film made and processed in France is much more suitable to Africa. The color balance seems to emphasize earth tones and reds, and is better suited for African skin colors.” Carol Beckwith, “An Interview with Carol Beckwith,” 44.

¹⁴ Catherine Lutz and Jean Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 197.

¹⁵ See Jean Collins and Catherine Lutz, “The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes,” chapter seven in *Reading National Geographic*.

other words, when—for example—a Western reader gazes at a non-Western subject, the probability for there to be a disjuncture in meaning is heightened significantly.

Touring Ethiopian Bodies

The relationship between observer and observed that is implicit in all acts of looking, photographic or otherwise, often creates situations that give rise to an uneven balance of power. In photography, this unevenness stems partly from a photograph's ability to place the viewer in possession of the viewed subject; from photography's ability to create a hand-held version of a real individual that can be easily consumed. Susan Sontag has written extensively about photography's power to commoditize the body, arguing that taking pictures is a "predatory act," that "to photograph people is to violate them."¹⁶ Photographs, she says, "turn people into objects that can be symbolically possessed;" they "convert the world into a department store or museum-without walls in which every subject is depreciated into an article of consumption, promoted to an item for aesthetic appreciation."¹⁷ The painted bodies—and body parts—of the Suri men are a case in point. Because Fisher and/or Beckwith have chosen to present the men's bodies as art, their bodies become beautiful objects that eagerly insist on being looked at: the photographs *ask* to be consumed.

Gazing at African bodies in picture books and magazines is a very passive form of domination compared to the actual act of taking the picture. Photographers directly engage with their subjects, thus, they are in a position to abuse their authority. In the words of Susan Sontag, they are far more "predatory" than those individuals who merely

¹⁶ Susan Sontag. *On Photography* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990): 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 110.

gaze at an image that somebody else has already taken. One arena where this “predatory” relationship is more than apparent is in cultural tourism and the practice of taking photographs of people as souvenirs.¹⁸

Sontag writes that taking pictures “gives shape to the experience” of being a tourist: people traveling in unfamiliar territory arrive at their destination, often unsure of what else to do, they “stop, take a picture, and move on.”¹⁹ According to David Turton, this is exactly what happens with the Mursi of southwestern Ethiopia, who are “one of the last few groups in Africa amongst whom it is still the norm for women to wear large pottery or wooden ‘plates’ in their lower lips.”²⁰ The Mursi are listed in European, American, and Ethiopian travel brochures as a “must-see attraction,” and tourists travel great distances just to take their pictures. Turton writes:

The encounter between Mursi and tourists is clearly a tense and uneasy one for both sides. The Mursi seem determined not to let the tourists forget that they have come for no other purpose than to ‘take’ photographs, while the tourists seem intent on getting the photographs they need...and making their getaway as quickly as possible.²¹

Mursi women “expect to be paid 2 Ethiopian Birr” (less than 50 cents), although they usually have to “settle for 2 Birr for each series of photographs” taken by a single tourist.²² Of course, it is really the lip-plates that people come to see. To tourists, the lip-

¹⁸ Ibid, 64.

¹⁹ Ibid, 10.

²⁰ Turton, David, “Lip Plates and ‘The People Who Take Photographs:’ Uneasy Encounters between Mursi and Tourists in Southern Ethiopia,” *Anthropology Today* 20 no. 3 (June 2004).

²¹ Turton, David. “Lip Plates and ‘The People Who Take Photographs,” 5.

²² Ibid, 3.

plate signifies the “authenticity” of the Mursi people, while their photographs confirm the very act of looking—the experience of touring “authentic” Mursi bodies.

In *African Ark*, there are several photographs of Suri women wearing large clay lip-plates (figure 3.5). Like the Mursi, the Suri live in the Omo River valley area of southwestern Ethiopia, a region described in Fisher and Beckwith’s book as a remote wilderness, “forgotten by history.”²³ The Omo River valley is also touted as remote, wild, and untouched by travel agencies that offer extreme rafting expeditions, cultural tours and photo safaris to this “forgotten” region of Ethiopia. The main attraction is invariably the exotic wildlife and the numerous “tribes” who live there, whose authenticity is often the main attraction. Extreme Party, an adventure travel agency located in the Ukraine, claims that on their Omo River rafting expedition, “we shall feel as though we are in a wild untouched kingdom; this is the real, virgin Africa as it was thousands of years ago before the White Man appeared.”²⁴

Safari Experts, a Utah based travel agency specializing in photographic tours of Africa, Argentina, Australia, and New Zealand, also offer rafting expeditions down the Omo. Their website resembles an amateur version of the latter half of *African Ark*, with numerous photographs of the Suri and Mursi, as well as the Karo, and the Hamar juxtaposed with diary-like text detailing the most recent excursion. Echoing Turton’s lament of the Mursi women’s predicament, the entry reads:

[The Mursi] have, perhaps rightly, learned the value of their looks to earn money from tourists. The price is not high, and it will surely rise as more visitors find their way to these remote places, just two bir.... Some have learned to count the clicks

²³ Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, *African Ark*, 249.

²⁴ Extreme Tours, Osmos Co, Dnepropetrovsk, Lenin's street 15, Ukraine , 49005. <<http://www.go2raft.com>> Last accessed May 23, 2005.

from SLR [manual, “single-lens-reflex”] cameras...so the price builds. *I find my digital camera gives me an advantage here, as it is soundless.*²⁵

The itinerary for the Omo trip is actually more like a list of “tribal” body adornment practices and “ceremonies;” Safari Experts claim to provide a completely authentic experience, “immersing” their customers in the unique cultures of the Omo River peoples. They do, however, include a disclaimer: “there is of course no guarantee we will succeed in finding...any sought after ceremony; but our local contacts give us the best chance to locate and gain access to them.”²⁶ In addition to their “photographic safaris” of the Omo River valley, Safari Experts also lead guided “pilgrimage” tours to the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, the imperial ruins of Gondar, and the ancient obelisks of Aksum.

Beckwith and Fisher’s *African Ark* gives readers a chance to go on a “photographic safari” or “religious pilgrimage” in Ethiopia without ever leaving home. In fact, the book was made as an extended travel brochure advertising the visual splendor of Ethiopia’s rich cultural diversity. Comrade Fisseha Geda, the former head of the Ethiopian Tourism Commission, had seen Fisher and Beckwith’s other photographic books about Africa and invited them to conduct a similar survey of Ethiopia.²⁷ Beckwith and Fisher began the project under his guidance, and later worked closely with Yohannes Berhanu, Head of Ethiopian Tourism Promotion. The Commission provided Fisher and Beckwith with two guides, Worku Sharew and Zewge Mariam Haile, who both worked with the photographers throughout their four and a half years of research in Ethiopia. In the

²⁵ Safari Experts, L.C., P.O. Box 680098, Park City, UT 84068-0098. <<http://www.safariexperts.com>> Last accessed May 23, 2005. emphasis mine.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Beckwith and Fisher, “Acknowledgements,” *African Ark*, no page no.

acknowledgments section of *African Ark*, Fisher and Beckwith write: “With their knowledge, devotion, and endless patience the difficult task of covering the entire country became not only possible but one of the most unforgettable experiences in our lives.”²⁸

Tourism is a major source of revenue for many African countries, as well as for many of Africa’s “traditional” peoples. The Mursi may not like having their photographs taken, but they depend on the money that tourism generates in order to buy goods and food at the highlands markets, and to pay their taxes.²⁹ They are aware of the exchange value of their “looks,” and are willing, begrudgingly, to perform their Mursi-ness for spectators who insist on looking at their bodies. It should also be noted that the “tribal” peoples of Ethiopia are not the only Ethiopians performing their “authenticity” for tourists. Orthodox priests in the predominantly Christian highlands are entirely willing to don their full regalia and display their church’s hallowed treasures for tourists who wish to take their picture. Like the Mursi, the priests expect payment, which they accept in the form of a small donation to the church.

One of the photographs in *African Ark* shows a priest from the church of Ura Kidane Mehret in Bahr Dar, a popular tourist destination on the shores of Lake Tana (figure 3.6). The priest stands at the entrance to the *maqdas*, the “holy of holies” where the sacred *tabot* (a symbolic representation of the Ark of the Covenant) is kept, holding a processional cross and an illuminated manuscript. Like the priest descending the worn staircase at Lalibela (figure 3.1), the body of the Bahr Dar priest is framed by an

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Turton, “Lip Plates and ‘The People Who Take Photographs,’” 3.

elaborate architectural space. Wearing a dimly golden cape and hat with a faded sunflower-speckled red robe, the priest's small figure would be completely lost in the brightly painted murals that surround him were it not for the gleaming silver cross that reflects the glare from the camera's flash and directs the viewers' attention to his face. Standing against the slightly open, large double doors leading to the dark, unlit interior room, the priest meets the photographer's (and the viewer's) gaze with self-awareness. He knows that his photograph is being "taken" by a tourist. Beckwith and/or Fisher's photograph may be compositionally sophisticated and have more snap and more "punch" than unremarkable tourist versions captured with consumer-grade equipment by non-professionals; yet, other than its obvious technical superiority, the photograph could have been taken by anyone visiting the church in Bahr Dar.³⁰

Gazing Back

Few of the people depicted in Fisher and Beckwith's photographs in *African Ark* meet the gaze of their photographers. Human subjects, the primary focus of the book, are usually depicted in the midst of some "ritual" or activity, or they are shown gazing at someone or something just outside the frame of the picture, such as the Suri woman in figure 3.5. Most images that would qualify as portraits portray their subjects in this manner. One exception is the striking image of a Konso man, seated inside a circle of rocks on a steep outlook, presumably on the eastern slopes of the Omo River in southwest

³⁰ In a volume of *African Arts* dedicated wholly to photography (August 1985), editors Herbert Cole and Doran Ross suggest to that in order to improve their own amateur photography in the field, Africanists who study African visual culture should: "Look through the pages of several *African Arts*, *National Geographic*, *Life*, and other publications to see which photographs have the most sensitivity or punch, tell the best story, bring Africa most alive." Herbert Cole and Doran Ross, "The Art and Technology of Field Photography," *African Arts* 18 no.4 (August 1985): 48.

Ethiopia (figure 3.7).³¹ The man looks straight into the camera, not quite smiling, but almost, with his arms folded casually across his lap. The leaning tree trunk to his right supports a tangled scribble of limbs, which occupy the top third of the photograph and assume the position of the sky. The tree and the branches help frame the man's figure in the foreground, drawing him out from the deep nebulous blur of seemingly endless terrain beyond the cliff. A skinny, pointed elbow and a sliver of shirt corner and sleeve are the only visible signs of the young child who hides just out of sight on the other side of the leafless tree.

The image of the Konso man is formally outstanding, yet the tree, rocks and vast landscape do not appear purely for aesthetic effect; they are included to convey information about the Konso people. In fact, in *Faces of Africa*, a compilation of their photographs published by the National Geographic Society in 2004, the image reappears, only this time it is flip-flopped, depicted in complete reverse (figure 3.8, left). In *African Ark*, the caption reads: "For the Konso, wood and stone are the two most highly valued building materials."³² The fact that the picture's function is to convey information is reinforced by its placement in the text, sandwiched in between several photographs of Konso settlements and buildings. The *same* image of Konso architecture appears next to the photograph in *Faces of Africa*, and the caption conveys the same vague information:

³¹ For information about the Konso, see Elizabeth Watson and Lakew Regassa, "Konso," in *Peripheral People: The Excluded Minorities of Ethiopia*, ed. Dena Freeman and Alula Pankhurst (London: Hurst and Company, 2003). The photograph appears on page 212 of *African Ark*, sandwiched in between several images of Konso settlements and houses.

³² Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ark*, 212.

“Using gnarled roots and braches, the Konso build their houses on stony mountain terrains, leaving the better land to be terraced and cultivated.” (figure 3.8, right).³³

Another image where the subject returns the photographer’s gaze is a picture of two young Hamar women, beautifully adorned for the “jumping of the bull” “ceremony,” an event in which young Hamar men run across the backs of their herds of cattle in order to symbolically mark their entrance into adulthood (figure 3.9). This image is included in both *African Ark* and *Faces of Africa*, though unlike the previous example, the figures in the picture face the same direction in both pictures. The woman on the right watches an unseen activity transpiring outside the picture’s frame, seemingly unaware of the photographer’s presence; while the woman to her right, on the left side of the picture, is gazing directly at the photographer. She smiles, wholly aware that her picture is being taken. The caption, which is again similar in both books, emphasizes the elaborate and plentiful jewelry both women wear, thus indicating that their adornments are what makes them worth photographing.

In photography, the returned gaze is a rhetorical device, marking the image as a representation that always already incorporates a relationship to the subject from the observer’s perspective; the look back draws the viewer into a dialogic relationship with the person in the picture, both visually and empathetically. In some cases, the returned gaze may make the visual encounter more comfortable for the observer: it can “short circuit the voyeurism identified as an important component of most photography,” providing assurance that the person in the image is aware of being photographed—like a

³³ Beckwith and Fisher, *Faces of Africa*, 176.

sign of consent.³⁴ Smiles, especially, make the subject in the photo appear accessible by defining a comfortable viewing space.³⁵

A returned gaze can also be self-consciously seductive, inviting and confirming open voyeuristic engagement. In *The Colonial Harem*, Malek Alloula demonstrates how colonial audiences gazed at images of Algerian women on postcards to satisfy their own Orientalist obsession with the harem.³⁶ Alloula finds two dominant themes in the postcards: Algerian or “Moorish” women are 1) idle, and 2) sexually available. Many of the images depict women’s “rituals”—the things they do to combat boredom while imprisoned inside their harem, like drink coffee and smoke cigarettes. Figure 3.10 is a postcard reproduced in Alloula’s book depicting two Algerian women and a girl “having coffee.” The central figure is topless, and stares directly into the camera, paying very attention to the small cup of coffee in her hand or to the young girl who serves it to her. The woman’s gaze is clearly directed towards a viewer that is expected to respond by staring directly back. The excuse that authenticates the subject matter and gives viewers permission to consume the image, so to speak, is the “ritual,” the fact that the women are drinking coffee. This deliberately tame subject matter is intended to mask—however poorly—the openly erotic message the image conveys.

Colonial postcards have a great deal of historical baggage. They are rooted in a system of exploitation that is now commonly recognized as a significant facet of the

³⁴ Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 197.

³⁵ It is important to not that the empathetic response to smiles in photographs is a culturally conditioned response. See Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 96.

³⁶ Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, translated by Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

meanings they hold for contemporary audiences.³⁷ Bare-breasted women, however, are still a major part of the Western popular image of “traditional” Africa.³⁸ A photograph of a young Konso woman in *African Ark* epitomizes the standard chest-up portrait that is commonly encountered everywhere African people are represented in Western popular culture (figure 3.11). From the pages of *National Geographic*, to calendars, note-cards, and the internet, television, travel guides and tourist’s photographs, as well as a plethora of coffee table books, this type of image of African women is ubiquitous. The young Konso woman in figure 3.11 looks directly at the viewer, gently supporting a sleeping child on her back. Judging from young woman’s apparent age, the child is probably not her own, but rather a sibling or relative she has been charged with looking after. Nevertheless, the caption reads: “In addition to working in the fields, a Konso woman’s everyday activities include carrying fire-wood, grinding corn and caring for her children.”³⁹ The young woman depicted here doesn’t have the same inviting expression on her face as the woman on Alloula’s postcard, yet her gaze establishes the possibility for Western audiences to interpret the image in the same way.

³⁷ For an analysis of colonial postcards, see Christraud Geary and Virginia-Lee Webb, eds., *Delivering Views: Distant Cultures in Early Postcards* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998). Four essays dealing with representations of Africa and Africans in postal stamps, a very related topic, are included in the Summer 2004 issue of *African Arts*. These include: Merrick Posnansky, “Propaganda for the Millions: Images from Africa,” *African Arts* 37 no. 2 (Summer 2004): 53-57, 94; Agbenyega Adedze, “Re-Presenting Africa: Commemorative Postage Stamps of the Colonial Exhibition of Paris (1931),” *African Arts* 37 no. 2 (Summer 2004): 58-61, 94-95 and “Commemorating the Chief: The Politics of Postage Stamps in West Africa,” *African Arts* 37 no. 2 (Summer 2004): 68-73, 96; and Jessica Levin, “Sculpted Posts: Architectural Decoration on Gabonese Stamps,” *African Arts* 37 no. 2 (Summer 2004): 62-67, 95-96.

³⁸ Bare-breasted non-white women are an iconic symbol in the Western world, particularly in *National Geographic*. Lutz and Collins discuss how “the nude black woman” was incorporated into the magazine to boost sales. White women were never portrayed nude; in fact, in one issue, a group of bare-breasted Polynesian women were airbrushed darker so they would not be mistaken for white women. See Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 115-116; and Howard S. Abramson, *National Geographic: Behind America’s Lens on the World* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1987): 143.

³⁹ Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ark*, 217.

Awareness of the photograph's ability to function as erotica can make the looking experience unpleasant for some viewers. For example, a photograph very similar to the one in figure 3.12 was included in a recent exhibition of Fisher and Beckwith's photographs at the Ralls Collection, a private gallery specializing in contemporary art located in Georgetown.⁴⁰ The show, titled "Cultures on the Edge," was co-sponsored by the National Geographic Society and also included photographs by Wade Davis, Chris Rainer and Phil Borges.⁴¹ One visitor to the show had the following to say:

I started feeling uneasy looking at a picture by Beckwith and Fisher. It shows a shy nomad girl with her shirt off, her breasts are just beginning to bud and she wears a gorgeous beaded necklace. Her eyes meet the camera with a look so docile and vulnerable that I couldn't help but wince. I began wondering whether she really wanted the duo to take her picture or whether she just couldn't say no. There's a quality of coercion in this picture that makes me uncomfortable. Or maybe I'm reading too much in. That's the trouble with seeing a photograph in this context.⁴²

Like the photographs of the Suri men's penises, the photograph of the Konso woman's body acquires a new set of meanings when it enters a Western system of representation.

⁴⁰The Ralls Collection Gallery confirmed that the Konso woman's photograph was not included in the show, although they did not know which photograph the review refers to. Personal communication, May 2005. The Ralls Collection specializes in "contemporary photography, works on paper, and sculpture."

⁴¹ Wade Davis, Chris Rainer, Phil Borges, and Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher work together on an "online magazine," also called "Cultures on the Edge." (<<http://www.culturesontheedge.com/index1.html>>) See also Wade Davis, "Vanishing Cultures," *National Geographic* 196, no. 2 (August 1999): 62-89. These photographers—Davis, Rainer, Borges—work in the same mode as Beckwith and Fisher. Phil Borges has also worked extensively in Ethiopia and his black and white, art-like photographs present their own set of problematic issues, which are beyond the scope of the present study.

⁴² Quoted in Jessica Dawson, "At Ralls, Photographs With an Unsettling Glare," *The Washington Post* September 11, 2003: C-5. After being shown at the Ralls, "Cultures on the Edge" traveled to the United Nations, where it was shown in the Visitor's Lobby from the 10th of May to the 10th of August, 2004 as part of a larger exhibition titled "In Celebration of Indigenous Peoples." The UN show marked the third session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which met at the UN Headquarters from May 10-21, 2004 to discuss the theme "Indigenous Women." See United Nations Press Release Note #5866. "Art Exhibit: In Celebration of Indigenous Peoples." <<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/note5866.doc.htm>> Last accessed May 2005.

Authenticity as Spectacle and the Politics of Display

No matter what the context of a returned gaze is, it always seems to ground the image by assuring the viewer that the subject is aware of being photographed; the reciprocal look provides a platform for dialogue, a direction for how to empathize with a photographed subject—even when looking at the image is difficult. Figure 3.12 depicts an Amharic woman being sprayed with holy water by an Orthodox priest near the source of the Blue Nile in highlands Ethiopia. The photograph is not published in *African Ark*, but does appear in *Faces of Africa*. In situ, the image appears opposite a standing portrait of Priest Aba Wolde, whose green sleeved left arm holds the hose in the former picture. The caption for both images is the same: “Right and Left: Priest Aba Wolde treats a young woman possessed by the *Zar* spirit.”⁴³

Out of the five figures in the possession image, Aba Wolde is the only individual given a name. The “young woman” whose nude and drenched body is prominently framed front and center—obviously the most visible body in the scene—is patently anonymous. Not only is the woman not named, she is also blinded, prevented from returning her observer’s gaze by an iron cross held in front of her eyes. The man who stands just behind her, however, looks out towards the observers’ space, and *his* gaze immediately makes the viewer realize that the woman whose body is palpably on display *is not aware* that she is being photographed. Unlike the more formal, and certainly

⁴³ Beckwith and Fisher, *Faces of Africa*, 168. The photograph appears in the chapter titled “Inner Journeys.” Several images of Orthodox priests from *African Ark* appear at the beginning of this chapter. All of the images of “civilized” religions appear at the beginning (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, 140-151), while all other kinds of “inner journeys” follow: Himba possessions, 152-157; Ewe “voodoo healing hospitals,” 158-161; Ashanti possession, 162-165; more Ewe “voodoo,” 166-167; the Amhara woman being sprayed by an Orthodox priest, also a possession, 168-169; and to end the chapter, one more image of a Ewe man practicing “voodoo,” 70-171. Although she is being sprayed by an Orthodox priest in “what seemed like a normal Christian church service,” the Amhara woman appears late in the chapter, sandwiched in between images “voodoo” rituals.

posed, frontal portrait of Aba Wolde shown on the left; the image of the young Amhara woman shown on the right appears to have been captured with her unaware, incapacitated by her own spiritual suffering.

Aesthetic and technical decisions are not the only representational choices photographers regularly make. The power to represent other people, particularly using verisimilar media such as photography and film, comes with certain ethical and moral responsibilities that cannot be totally subverted through artistic or even objective, documentary consideration. Even when human subjects in photographs are not given names, their bodies are lasting impressions of their presence as individuals; they are visible signs of human subjectivity. The image of the Amhara woman is very difficult to look at. Her obvious agony and apparent vulnerability invite viewing subjects to empathize with her, to emotionally respond to her and view her as an individual; yet, For Beckwith and Fisher, the fact that the woman is “possessed” is what makes the event “authentic” and worth photographing. Like the postcard showing Algerian women “drinking coffee” discussed above, it is the “ritual”—in this case, an exorcism—that claims to justify the viewer’s engagement with the scene. The Amhara woman is cast as an anonymous actor, un-knowingly staging her own “authenticity,” while her individual subjectivity is relegated to the periphery.

The concept of “authenticity” has been thoroughly unpacked by several Africanist scholars in discussions of what is commonly referred to as “tourist art.”⁴⁴ These studies

⁴⁴ See Ruth Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, eds., *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Postcolonial World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Sydney Kasfir, “Samburu Souvenirs: Representations of a Land in Amber,” in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Postcolonial Worlds*, ed. Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher Steiner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999): 67-83; Christopher B. Steiner, “Authenticity, Repetition, and the Aesthetics of Seriality: The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Postcolonial World*, ed. Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher Steiner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 87-103;

examine how an object's "authenticity" is constantly being redefined by the way people respond to and interact with the objects—especially in the marketplace. As far as the African art market goes, "authenticity" is usually deployed as a standard for measuring an object's value.⁴⁵ This is, of course, nothing new. Walter Benjamin, in his study of the affects of mechanical reproduction on artistic practice, argued that the "aura" of art—its quality of uniqueness—declines when objects are mass produced; this dissemination, he later wrote, shifts the definition of "authenticity" away from the object itself, and into the realm of the political, into the arenas where meaning is constantly being negotiated.⁴⁶ It is important to note, however, that "judgments concerning authenticity are not limited to works of art; people, cultures and practices may also be deemed authentic or inauthentic."⁴⁷

In photographs of real people, the concept of "authenticity" changes: a human subject's unique "aura"—their subjectivity—is always present regardless of how many times the picture is reproduced. In Beckwith and Fisher's work, the subjectivity or "aura" of the individual is always subjugated to the "authenticity" of the role they fulfill in the photograph. In other words, Beckwith and Fisher's subjects are cast as actors, not people.⁴⁸

Christopher B. Steiner, *African Art in Transit*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; and chapters three and four in Victoria L. Rovine, *Bogolan: Shaping Culture through Cloth in Contemporary Mali* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

⁴⁵ Rovine, *Bogolan*, 31.

⁴⁶ Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3. Ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002): 101-133.

⁴⁷ Rovine, *Bogolan*, 30.

⁴⁸ For Benjamin, the role of the human subject as actor in film does not retain the same "beckoning aura" he finds in portrait photography. He attributes this to the actor's knowledge of his audience: "While [the

“Authentic” people, cultures and practices are the focus of Beckwith and Fisher’s two volume masterwork, *African Ceremonies*. Most of the images portray anonymous human subjects; like the “young women possessed by a Zar spirit,” their “authenticity” is defined and limited by their participation in the “rituals” and “ceremonies” being depicted. Published in 1999, the book contains 744 pages, 850 photographs, costs \$150, weighs 15.5 pounds and “documents” 43 “ceremonies” in 26 African countries. In the introduction, Fisher and Beckwith write:

As we have come to admire the beauty, strength, and vitality of Africa’s people and traditions, we have also realized how vulnerable many of these cultures have become...Some groups we visited a decade ago have now disappeared, and Western ways are eroding the belief systems of many cultures. Concerned that these traditions are in imminent danger of being lost, we embarked on this project to *document* these vanishing ways of life and create a visual record for future generations.⁴⁹

Though they clearly state that the book is intended to be documentary, Fisher and Beckwith maintain that they “approached the project not as anthropologists but as artists, following [their] creative spirits.”⁵⁰

The book has received mixed reviews. Some of the photographs make audiences uncomfortable, or, make them question the relationship between the photographers and their subjects. For instance, in his review of *African Ceremonies* for the *New York Times*, Anthony Appiah asks, “What did it take...to persuade Masai [sic] and Taneka men...to allow a foreign woman to photograph the moment of their circumcision, their transition

actor] stands before the apparatus, he knows that in the end he is confronting the masses. It is they who will control him.” See Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility,” 112. In Beckwith and Fisher’s photographs, it is Beckwith and Fisher who are “confronting the masses” that they know will “control”—and of course, consume—their images.

⁴⁹ Beckwith and Fisher. *African Ceremonies* v. 1, 12.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

to manhood?”⁵¹ Another set of problematic images are the photographs of a young Maasai girl undergoing a painful excision surgery without any anesthesia. Like the torment apparent on the face of the drenched Amhara woman in *Faces of Africa*, and on the faces of the Maasai and Taneka initiates, the Maasai girl’s agony is forcefully tangible. The caption for a dark, fuzzy close-up of her face reads: “As the cutting processes the girl screams in pain and appeals to her relatives to let her go, but they continue to hold her down, believing that the procedure is being performed in her own best interests...” (figure 3.13).⁵²

A slightly smaller photograph appears above the close-up shot, and here, the viewer sees the girl being cut, but also looks at several of her relatives who gaze at her writhing body bearing wide, joyful smiles (figure 3.14). Western viewers cannot approach this image without bringing their own subjectivity to bear on their interpretation; in a culture where excision is not practiced, it is no wonder that these photographs can be read as cruel. This example illuminates the slippery process of intercultural representation—no matter how much the image generates an empathetic response, it cannot be assumed that the *photograph* means the same thing to Maasai and Western audiences.

These disturbing photographs also raise another issue: is this still art, and is it appropriate to put this kind of imagery on display? The intersection of photography, art, and life is indeed precarious and has occupied much of the discourse surrounding

⁵¹ K. Anthony Appiah. “The Rite Stuff,” *New York Times Book Review* (December 5, 1999): 13. Interestingly, another line from Appiah’s article is used to advertise the book on Beckwith and Fisher’s website. It reads: “These are sumptuous photographs...a visual feast...and they reflect the photographer’s gift for gaining the trust of their subjects and the reciprocal generosity of African men and women.” The line appears at the beginning of Appiah’s review, before he launches into a critique of *Ceremonies*. On Beckwith and Fisher’s website, the quote is attributed to “The New York Times Book Review.” See <<http://www.africanceremonies.com/index.html>> Last accessed June 2005.

⁵² Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ceremonies* v. 1, 89.

photographs of real people.⁵³ In September, 2004, twin exhibitions titled “Inconvenient Evidence: Iraqi Prison Photographs from Abu Ghraib” were shown simultaneously at the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh and the Manhattan International Center for Photography in New York.⁵⁴ The now infamous Abu Ghraib photos were taken by United States soldiers stationed in Iraq and portray the soldiers abusing, humiliating, and torturing several Iraqi detainees being held at the Abu Ghraib prison. Putting these difficult images on public display intensifies the tacit and inescapable anxiety of looking at human suffering.

In her scathing condemnation of the Abu Ghraib phenomenon (not the exhibit) Susan Sontag writes that rather than deal with the “complex crimes” the pictures depict, “the Bush administration and its defenders...sought to limit...the dissemination of the photographs” and refused to address the word “torture.”⁵⁵ “The administration’s initial response was to say that the president was shocked and disgusted by the photographs—as if the fault or horror lay in the images, not in what they depict.”⁵⁶ In effect, Sontag argues, this “displaces reality” onto the images themselves—and allows the subjectivity of both the American soldiers and the Iraqi prisoners to be overlooked.

⁵³ For the relationship of the body to photography, see Alan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3-64; Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema,” in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984): 361-373; and John Pultz, *The Body and The Lens: Photography 1839-to the Present* (New York: Abrams, 1995).

⁵⁴ There was a significant difference between the two shows—at the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, the Abu Ghraib pictures were exhibited along with photos depicting atrocities committed by the other side. Apparently this was done to lessen the blow of the harsh show in Pittsburgh, which is near the hometowns of several of the U.S. soldiers depicted in the incriminating imagery. See Paul Lieberman, “Putting Brutality on Display,” *Los Angeles Times* (September 17, 2004): E1.

⁵⁵ Susan Sontag, “Regarding the Torture of Others,” *New York Times Magazine* (May 23, 2004): 25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

This abused subjectivity is precisely what the curators at the Warhol Museum and the International Center for Photography bring to the foreground by re-presenting the images to the American public. Yet, the curators (and Sontag) were not just questioning the subjectivity of the photographers and their subjects, they are also questioning the subjectivity of the American public that consumed—i.e. looked at on T.V., the web, or in an e-mail from a friend or loved one—the Abu Ghraib pictures by looking at them and showing them to others. The two exhibitions also highlight the implicit power imbalance of most photographic encounters. In the exhibition brochure, Seymour M. Hersh points out that not only are the Iraqi prisoners being tortured, the photographic act was “part of the dehumanizing interrogation process” because the prisoners knew they were being photographed.⁵⁷

The Abu Ghraib prison photographs represent suffering inflicted as torture, while Beckwith and Fisher’s harsh representations of Maasai circumcision and excision ceremonies portray suffering in the name of “tradition.” Neither set of pictures is easy to view, yet it would be unfair and incredibly dangerous to say that the conditions of representation were the same: the Maasai girl who is being operated on is not being “tortured” by her smiling relatives and their intentions are neither malicious nor cruel. Similarly, the priest who administers treatment to the “young woman possessed by a Zar spirit,” as well as her three male attendants, wish to help the possessed woman, not do her harm. It is important to note, therefore, that unlike the Abu Ghraib pictures, in Beckwith

⁵⁷ Hersh is quoted in Lieberman, “Putting Brutality on Display,” E1. The exhibition brochure essay was written by Brian Wallis, director of exhibitions at the International Center of Photography and Seymour M. Hersh of the *The New Yorker*.

and Fisher's photographs, the tension that arises from viewing the images is a product of the *photographic* and *viewing* encounter, *not* of the photographed event.

Beckwith and Fisher's Ethiopia in Context

Beckwith and Fisher's work is difficult to categorize; part art, part documentary, part journalism, part tourist souvenir, and, according to one reviewer, part "egregious kitsch," their photographs do not settle easily into any one discursive framework.⁵⁸

When Beckwith first decided to switch from painting to photography, she "went to New York, with the thought of finding a gallery for [her photographs]," however, she took a friend's advice and decided to do a book instead.⁵⁹ Beckwith and Fisher's books are similar to exhibitions: the photographs are shown grouped together, in sequence, accompanied by brief explanatory text. Like an exhibition, their books put the photographs on display; and like curators, Beckwith and Fisher are cultural brokers; they are translators, mediators and brazen purveyors of "authentic" and "traditional" African culture.

The text for *African Ark* was written by Graham Hancock, whose own work, like Beckwith and Fisher's, focuses on the "vanishing cultures" of the world. In the preface to the book, Beckwith, Fisher, and Hancock together write:

The Horn of Africa has drawn us to it for nearly two decades, exerting a special magnetism that has brought us back to it again and again. Maybe this attraction stems from the fact that much of the Horn is wild in a way that few parts of Africa can claim to be, and thus still free in spirit....Cut off from the wider world...the ancient cultures of the region have *retained their diversity unadulterated by Western influences*....Vast and remote, the Horn of Africa is an Ark that shelters an

⁵⁸ Ken Johnson, "Images of Tribal Africa, In a Hollywood Style," *New York Times*, Late Edition, East Coast (August 25, 2000): E.2. Johnson is referring to the exhibition of their photographs titled "Passages" which traveled the country following the release of *African Ceremonies* in 1999. Johnson's review discusses the show as it was exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

⁵⁹ Beckwith, "An Interview with Carol Beckwith," 38.

astonishing variety of human societies: *from the ancient and highly sophisticated to the remote, simple and untouched*....In trying to capture the spirit of this extraordinary region we hope that we have made some contribution towards preserving it.⁶⁰

Throughout the book, Graham's insipid, heavily-romanticized narration draws a sharp contrast between the "ancient and highly sophisticated" Christian and Jewish cultures of the highlands, and the "remote, simple and untouched" cultures of the south and the "gaunt and leopard colored" interior.

This essentialist dichotomy is routed through centuries of European representations of Abyssinians as civilized, respectable near-equals and *Aethiopians* as savage and naively child-like barbarians. I investigated this division at length in the first chapter, where I discussed how certain perceptions of Africa generated by the West became embedded in historical documents such as maps and printed illustrations in antique texts. This over-simplification of the peoples of the Horn and Ethiopia is problematized further in *African Ark* by Beckwith, Fisher, and Graham's representation of the Horn as a "wild place," still "free in spirit" where ancient cultures survive "unadulterated by the Western world." This type of language is characteristic of the woeful preservationist rhetoric that permeates far too many representations of Africa in Western popular culture.

Beckwith and Fisher's books read like a eulogy for a dying land; and the photographers, who have cast themselves as saviors, resolutely insist that by capturing these people and practices on film, they are "making a record" which will preserve these endangered practices and cultures "for future generations of African children, as well as

⁶⁰ Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ark*, 9, emphasis mine.

for the education, knowledge, and understanding of the outside world. .”⁶¹ In an interview conducted by David Braun for *National Geographic News* in 2004, Beckwith states: “We believe about 15 percent of the ceremonies we have photographed no longer exist.”⁶² Another glaring example comes from Angela Fisher’s introduction to her first book, *Africa Adorned*. She writes:

During seven years of traveling in Africa to research this book, I was constantly aware that many traditions—including some outstanding styles of jewelry and dress—were rapidly becoming rarer or had already disappeared...On successive visits to the isolated Dinka people in the Nile swamps of southern Sudan, I noticed that in a matter of months these proud nomads, traditionally naked except for a covering of ash and body beads, had, like many others on the continent, begun to wear synthetic headscarves, motif T-shirts, and even platform-heel shoes.⁶³

By “implying that the adaptation of Western-style garb constitutes a failure, a breach in the vigilance of ‘traditional’ people,” Victoria Rovine points out, Fisher denies her subjects any agency to blend local and non-local styles as they see fit.⁶⁴ Rovine discusses several examples of how Western clothing is often negotiated into and subverted by African systems of fashion; rather than constituting a “breach in vigilance,” these instances reflect the dynamic complexity and adaptability of African fashions and traditions.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Angela Fisher, quoted in David Braun, “*Faces of Africa* photographers on Their 30-year Endeavor,” *National Geographic News* (October 20, 2004): http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/10/1020_041020_africa_faces.html

Last accessed March 2005.

⁶² Carol Beckwith, quoted in *Ibid.*

⁶³ Angela Fisher, *Africa Adorned* (New York: Abrams, 1984): 9-10.

⁶⁴ Rovine, *Bogolan*, 97.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Perri Klemm reaches a similar conclusion in her study of Oromo women’s dress in the Eastern Hararghe region of Ethiopia. See Peri M. Klemm, *Shaping the Future, Wearing the Past: Dress and the Decorated Female Body among the Afran Qallo Oromo in Eastern Hararghe, Ethiopia* (PhD Dissertation, Emory University, 2002).

Beckwith and Fisher were in Ethiopia taking photographs for *African Ark* during the mid and late 1980's, during the twilight of Mengistu's generally oppressive dictatorial regime. Most images of Ethiopia in the West at this time depicted conflict, war, and famine; far from being the resilient, proud nation that had beaten colonialism, Ethiopia emerged as a starving, war-torn catastrophe. It is impossible to view *African Ark* without considering that the nostalgic, idealistic and highly sentimental "vanishing" version of Ethiopia it presents was not only endorsed by the Derg government; members of the Ethiopian Tourism Commission were intimately involved with the production of the book. In other words, the two were asked to use their lavish photographs to reverse Ethiopia's tarnished image.

Beckwith and Fisher's photographs are some of the most famous professional images of Africa circulating in popular Western culture today, and Ethiopia is well represented in their oeuvre. The first epigraph at the beginning of this chapter is an apt summary of what I have shown: while producers (the photographers) and consumers (the viewer) may exert a stronger agency by influencing the photograph's form or by interpreting its meaning, the presence of the subject's body—their undeniably existential subjectivity—allows "contemporary stories of contestable power [to be] told there ...nonetheless."⁶⁶

Beckwith and Fisher's images of Ethiopia reflect only one aspect of a diverse nation with a long, proud, and complex history. Their Ethiopia is a "vanishing" one, full of beautiful, spiritual, and even "wild" people practicing ancient rituals handed down to them by their ancestors. This vision of Ethiopia is really no different from the way the

⁶⁶ Ibid, 216.

rest of Africa has come to be represented in Western popular culture: according to *National Geographic*, the Discovery Channel, PBS, Granada, many international tourist agencies and a slew of popular “coffee-table books” beginning with the phrase, “Last of the...;” the whole African continent—or at least, anything still “authentically African” in Africa—is about to disappear.

In the next chapter I will address how differently modern Ethiopia was viewed in the Western world in the years before the Derg overthrew the Imperial government. In 1936, while the rest of Africa was still in the midst of colonial rule, Haile Selassie was named *Time Magazine*’s “Man of the Year;” he was a respected member of the United Nations, as well as a powerful champion for the modernization of his own country and a voice calling for freedom of all African peoples worldwide. Beckwith and Fisher’s photographs of Ethiopia may represent the most recent popular Western vision of Ethiopia, yet, during the greater part of the 20th century, the whole world knew Ethiopia primarily through the image of Emperor Haile Selassie.

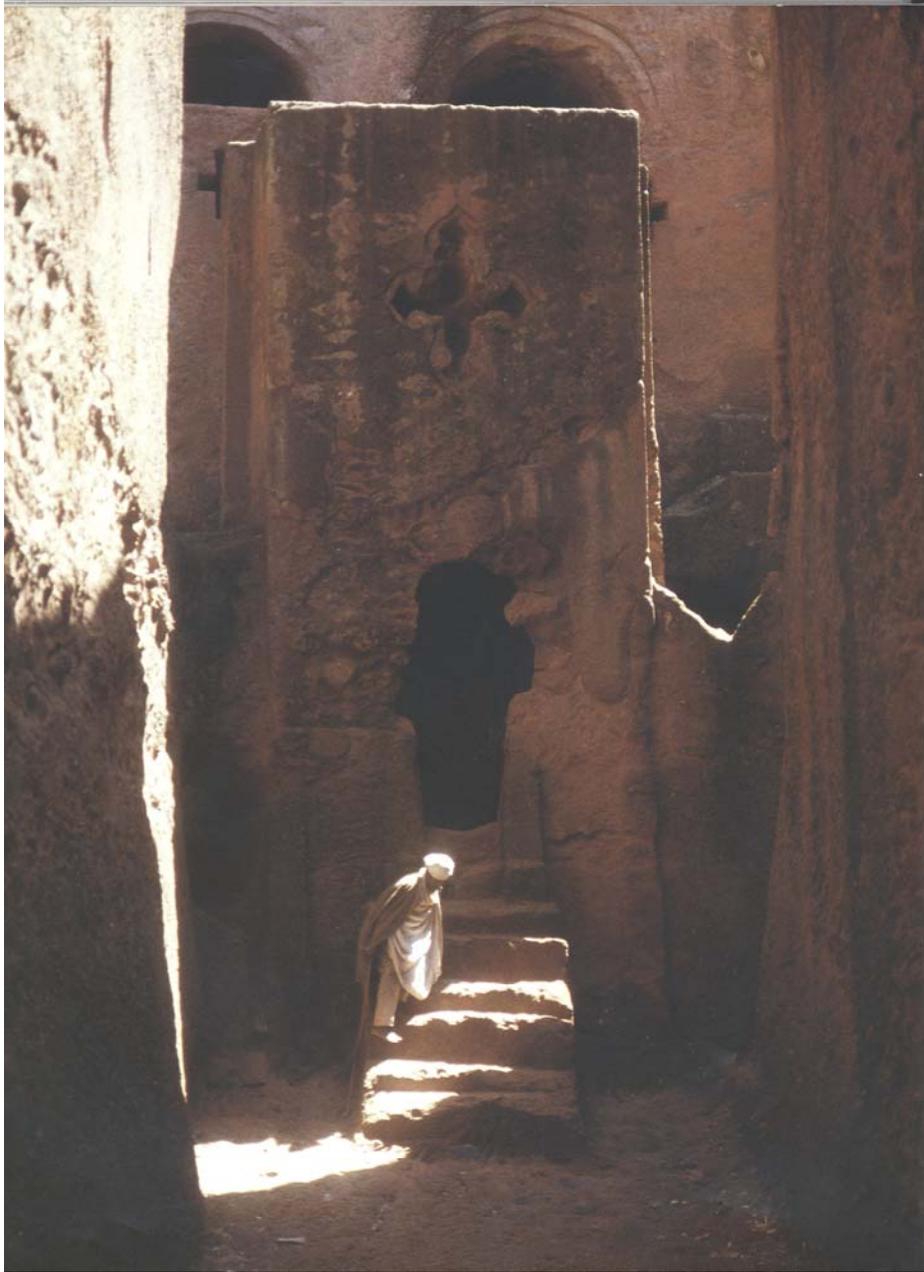


Figure 3.1 Ethiopian Orthodox Priest, at a rock-hewn church in Lalibela. Photography by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher (Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ark*, 126)



Figure 3.2 Suri men painting their bodies in preparation for *Donga*. Photograph by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher (Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ark*, 281)

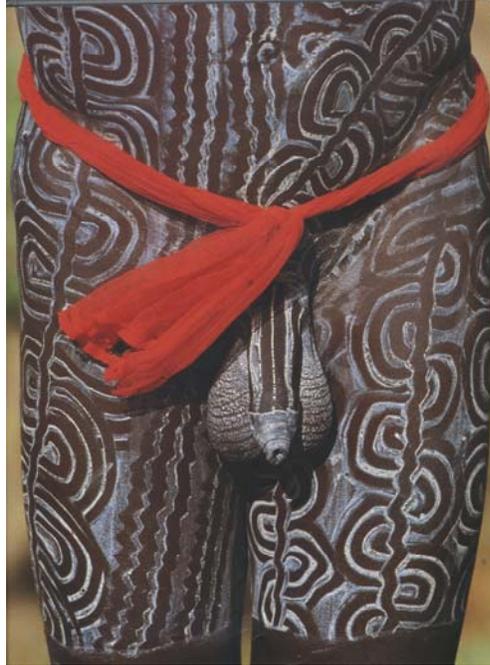


Figure 3.3 Suri body painting. Photograph by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher.
(Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ark*, 283)



Figure 3.4 Suri body painting. Photograph by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher.
(Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ark*, 284)

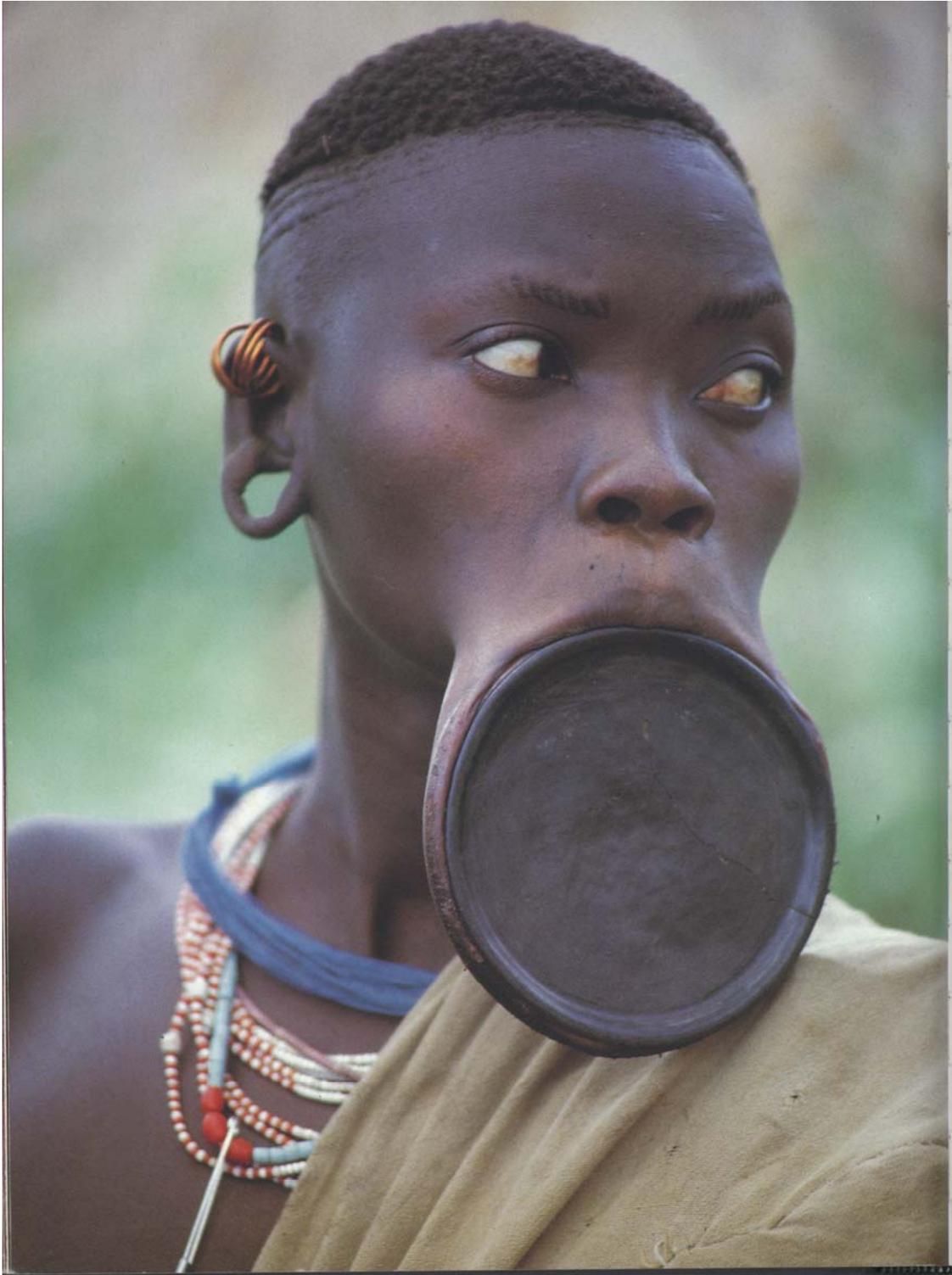


Figure 3.5 Suri woman wearing a lip-plate. Photograph by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher (Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ark*, 248)

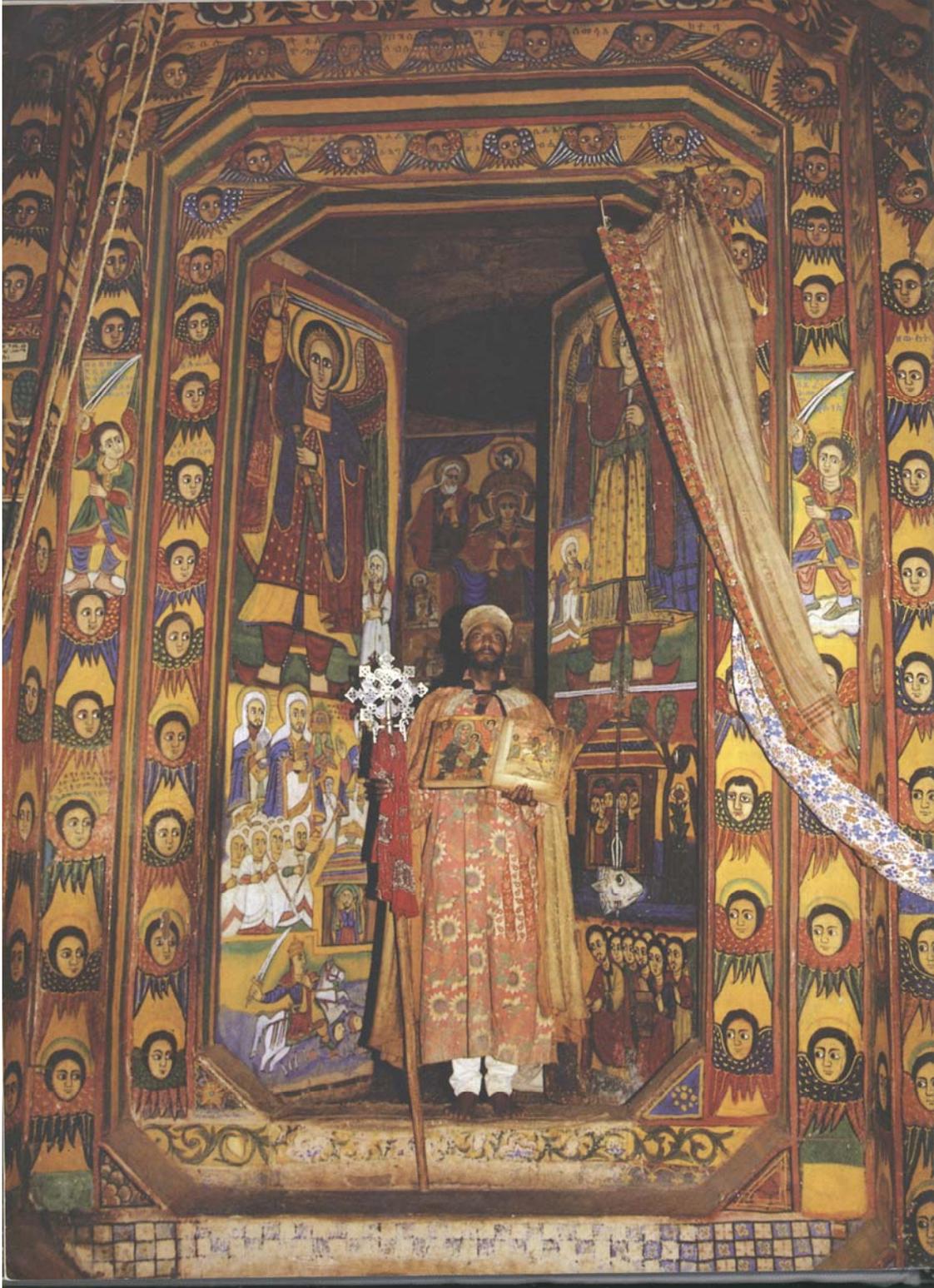


Figure 3.6 Priest standing at the entrance of the *maqdas* (“holy of holies”) of the church of Ura Kidane Mehret on Lake Tana. Photograph by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher (Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ark*, 56)

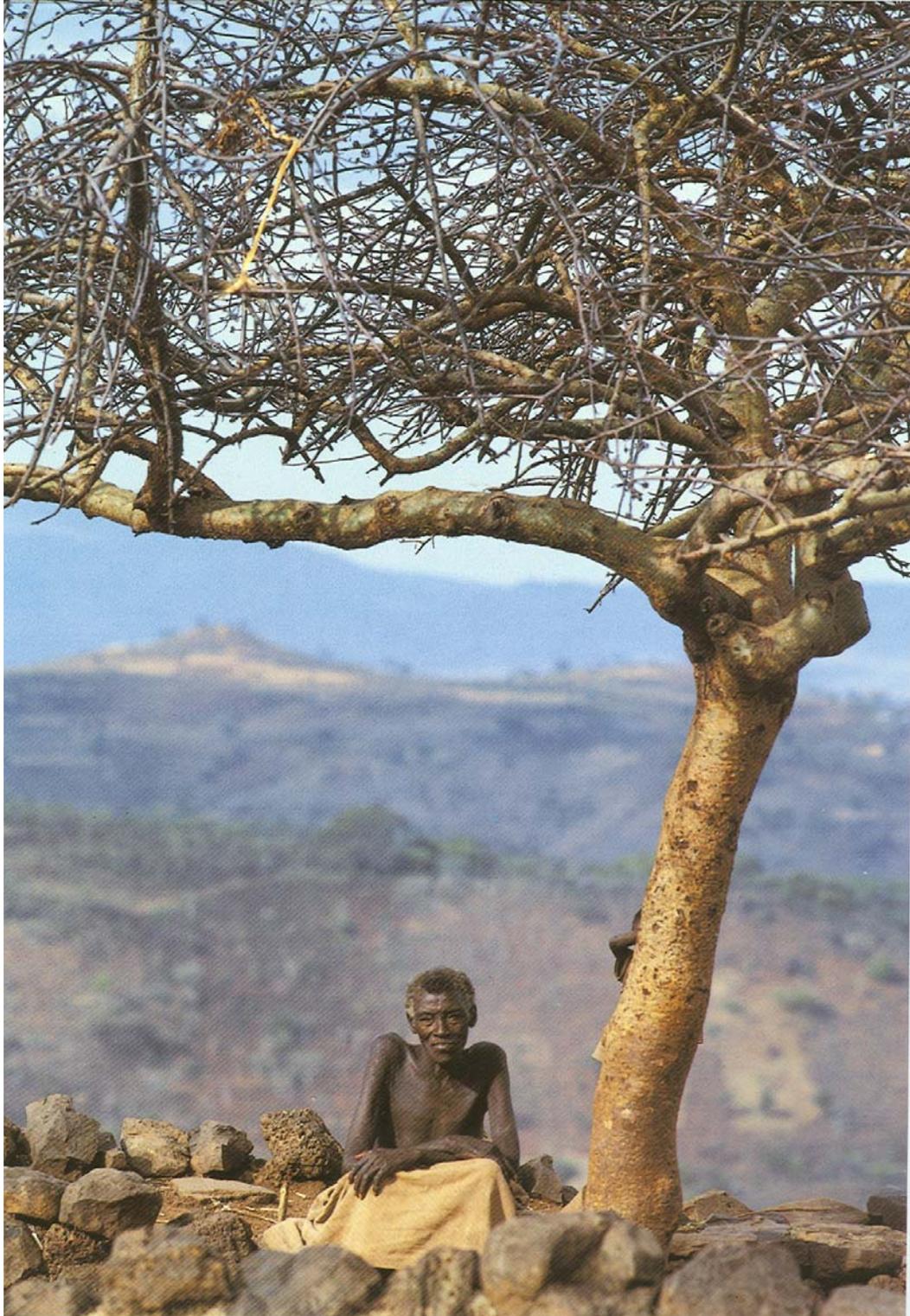


Figure 3.7 Konso man. The caption reads: “For the Konso, wood and stone are the two most highly valued building materials.” Photograph by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher (Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ark*, 212)

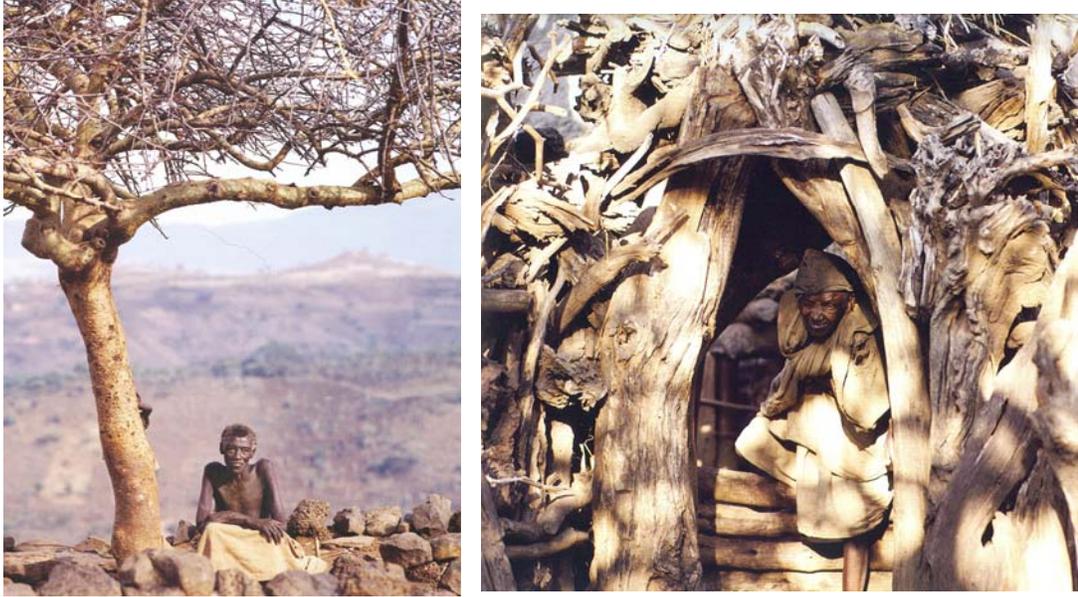


Figure 3.8 (left and right) Konso man and Konso architecture. “Konso, Ethiopia: Right and Left: Using gnarled roots and branches, the Konso build their houses on stony mountain terrains, leaving the better land to be terraced and cultivated.” Photography by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher. (Beckwith and Fisher, *Faces of Africa*, 176-177)



Figure 3.9 Hamar women. Photography by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher. In *African Ark*: “On the day after the “jumping of the bull ceremony,” women gather together, beautifully attired in their beaded skins and iron jewellery [sic]. Their hair is rubbed with fat into small balls and covered with ochre. This hairstyle is frequently set off with aluminum plaques in the shape of ducks’ bills which project dramatically from the forehead. Courtship dances follow and continue for the following two days and nights.” (Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ark*, 244) In *Faces of Africa*: “Beautifully attired in their beaded skins and iron jewelry, Hamar girls gather together to celebrate the Jumping of the Bull male initiation. Their hair is styled into small round pellets covered with ochre and perfumed fat, and accentuated with a large aluminum plaque resembling the beak of a hornbill. Their iron neck torques and armlets are permanently fixed onto their bodies by the local blacksmith to proclaim their marital status.” (Beckwith and Fisher, *Faces of Africa*, 240 and back cover.)



Figure 3.10 Early 20th century postcard of Algerian women. The caption reads: "Algiers. Arab women having coffee." (Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, 73)

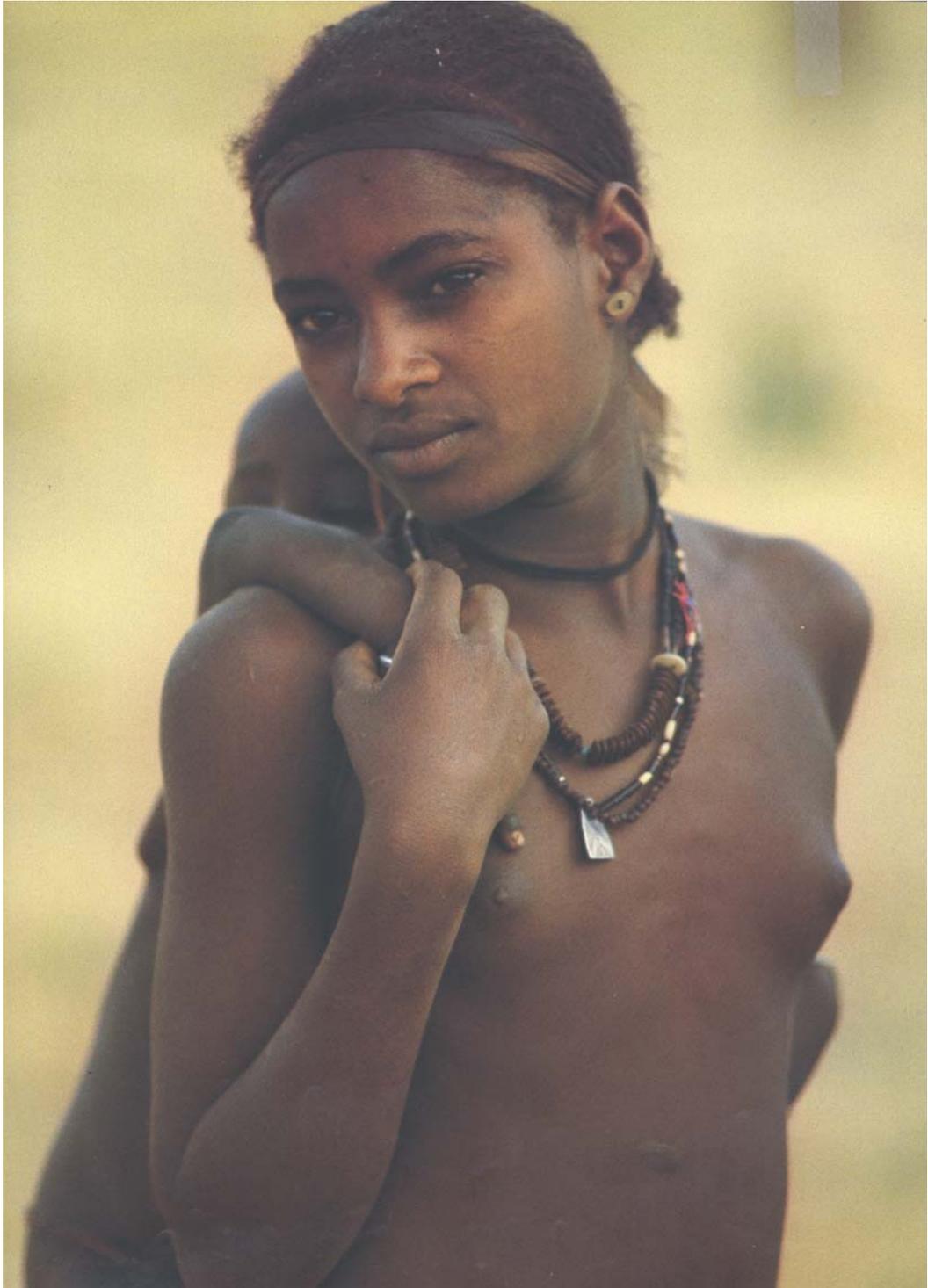


Figure 3.11 Young Konso woman. The caption reads: “In addition to working in the fields, a Konso woman’s everyday activities include carrying fire-wood, grinding corn and caring for her children.” Photograph by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher. (Beckwith and Fisher, *African Ark*, 217)

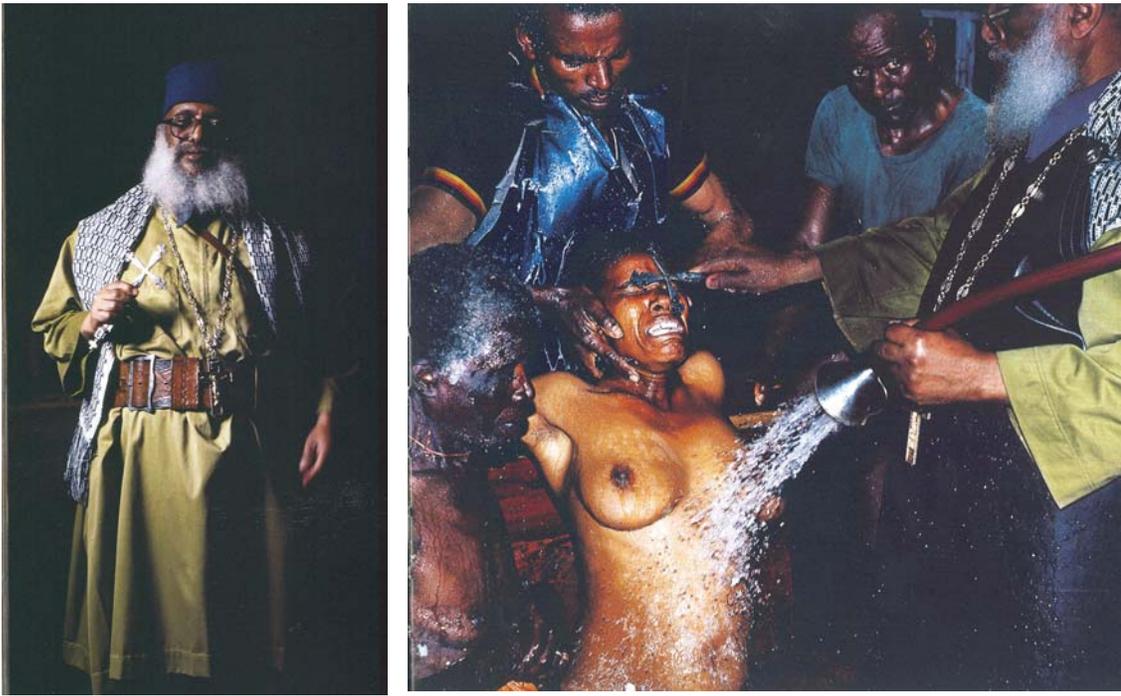


Figure 3.12 (right and left) Amhara woman and Orthodox priest. The caption reads:
“Amhara, Ethiopia: Right and left: Priest Aba Wolde treats a young woman possessed by the Zar spirit.” Photograph by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher. (Fisher and Beckwith, 2004: 168-169)

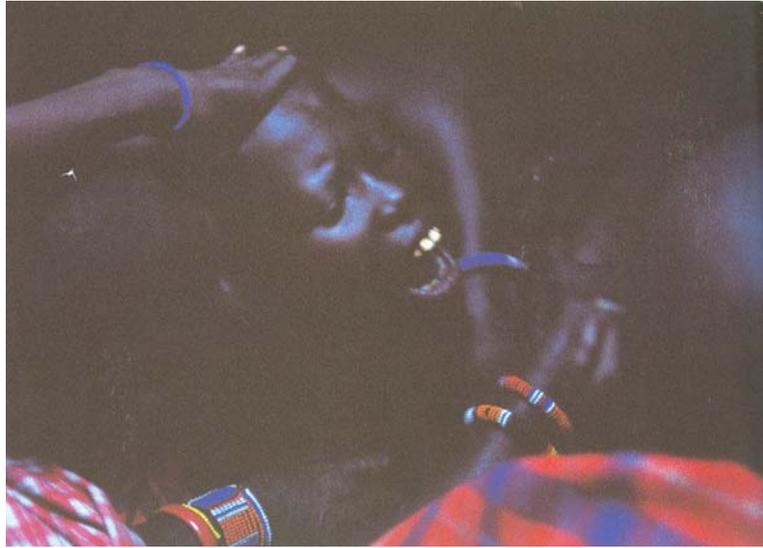


Figure 3.13 Maasai girl undergoing painful excision. (Fisher and Beckwith, *African Ceremonies*, 90)

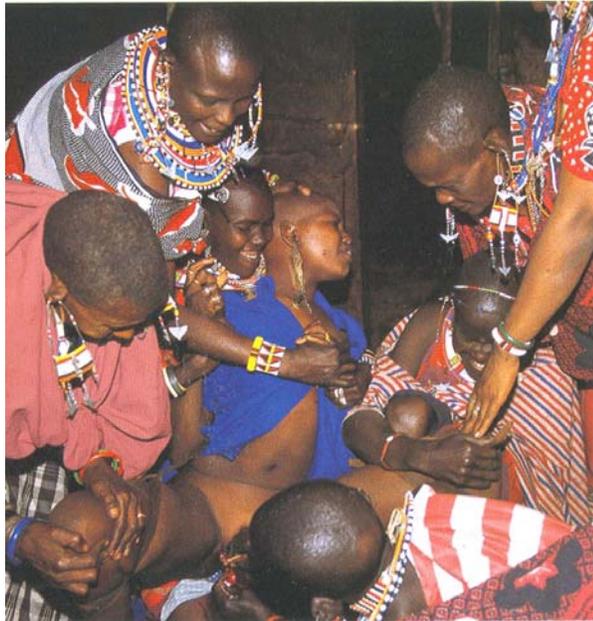


Figure 3.14 Maasai girl undergoing excision. (Fisher and Beckwith, *African Ceremonies*, 90)

CHAPTER 4
VISIONS OF POWER: THE IMAGE OF EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE I

Culture is contested, temporal and emergent. Representation and explanation—both by insiders and outsiders—is implicated in this emergence (Clifford, 1986: 19)

Until the color of a man's skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes...We Africans will fight...(Haile Selassie to the United Nations, October 6, 1963)¹

In chapter three, I discussed Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher's photographs of Ethiopia, most of which were produced at the invitation of the Ethiopian Tourism Commission in the mid 1980s. At a time when the Western news media was flooded with devastating imagery of one of the worst famines in Ethiopian history, Beckwith and Fisher created a nostalgic, idealistic, and highly *marketable* vision of Ethiopia unspoiled by the plight of the poor and hungry, and untainted by the modern Western world.

Images of famine had been a large part of Ethiopia's Western reputation since 1973, when British journalist Jonathon Dimbleby produced his devastating documentary *The Hidden Famine* about the millions of starving people in Ethiopia's Wallo province. On September 11th, 1974, Haile Selassie's opponents screened Dimbleby's film on Ethiopian national T.V., spliced with scenes of imperial banquets and other palace luxuries. Haile Selassie was deposed the following day. Prior to his overthrow, however, Haile Selassie's image was *the* primary symbol of Ethiopia circulating in the modern Western world.

¹ The speech is reproduced in its entirety in Lance Seunarine, *The Lion Roars: Selected Speeches and Letters of Haile Selassie* (New York: Trican, 1998). It is also worth noting that Bob Marley and the Wailers set this famous speech to music in their 1976 hit song "War."

In this final chapter, my discussion is structured around the image of Emperor Haile Selassie. Haile Selassie intentionally used his likeness as a tool of diplomacy, a means of generating and communicating power. In addition to his frequent appearance in the Western popular media, Selassie had numerous formal portraits made throughout his lifetime, which were reproduced in large quantities and distributed internationally. Because images of Selassie were and are so prolific, they provide a useful platform for addressing the diverse personalities his photograph acquires in specific viewing contexts.

The Image of Selassie in the Western Media

Tafari Makonnen was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie I on November 2, 1930 in the largest coronation ceremony in Ethiopia's history.² The event was big news in Ethiopia, as well as in the West, where photographs of the new Emperor and his wife Empress Menen were featured in popular periodicals such as *Le Miroir du Monde* and *L'Illustration* in France, *The Illustrated London News* in Britain, and *National Geographic* and *Time Magazine* in the United States (figures 4.1-4.5). Hundreds of journalists and diplomats from Europe and the United States attended the hugely publicized event. Ethiopia had never been more popular.

For African Americans and other black people living in the diaspora, Selassie's coronation was a powerful metaphor for black solidarity and pride. Here was a black African man wearing a golden crown and seated on a throne, with hundreds of white Europeans—including several members of various European royal families—paying their respects to his sovereignty (figure 4.6). For many white Europeans and Americans,

² Most sources usually indicate that prior to his coronation in 1930, Tafari bore the title of Ras, or Prince. In fact, Tafari had been promoted from Ras to Negus, or King in 1928. Although Tafari was more prominent politically, at home and abroad, the actual ruler of Ethiopia from 1916 until her death in 1930 was Empress Zawditu, a daughter of Menelik II.

however, the coronation symbolized an entirely different concept; rather than marking a momentous event in the modern history of black empowerment, the event served to affirm the creeping belief that Ethiopians were not “real” Africans. During the coronation, writes Fikru Negash Gebrekidan, “the hundreds of white dignitaries in Addis Ababa could seek consolation in the Caucasoid image of Ethiopia to convince themselves that their host, although swarthy in complexion, was not a black African.”³

There was a great deal of tension in the Western world during the early 20th century over how to classify Ethiopians. They were “Negros” and “brothers” to many black people living in Diaspora; yet many white people, particularly proponents of what has come to be known as Social Darwinism, resolutely insisted that at least some Ethiopians were “Caucasian.”⁴ The debate was strongest in areas where the ideological separation of blacks and whites was matched in social practices and institutional structures, such as it was during the segregation-era in the United States.

For example, in 1919, Ethiopia sent a “goodwill mission” to Belgium, England, France, and the US “to congratulate [them] on their success in the war.”⁵ “The African-American press gave good coverage to the delegation,” writes Joseph Harris: “It was of course a rare opportunity for African Americans to identify with official representatives

³ Fikru Gebrekidan, *Bond Without Blood: A History of Ethiopian and New World Black Relations, 1896-1991*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005).

⁴ See Harold Marcus, “The Black Men Who Turned White: European Attitudes towards Ethiopians, 1850-1900,” *Archiv Orientalní* 39 (1971); and Joseph E. Harris, *African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia, 1936-1941* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994). Harris quotes C.G. Seligman, an English anthropologist who later lived in Germany, who wrote that the Hamites “belong to the same great branch of mankind as the Whites.” Harris states that “such an idea allowed European scholars and writers to characterize Ethiopians as the cultural link between themselves and the non-Hamitic Africans,” (1-3).

⁵ Joseph Harris, *African American Reactions to War in Ethiopia*, 3. The delegation consisted of Dejazmach (“commander of the gate,” a political title just below Ras similar to the English “count”) Nadeo, the nephew of Empress Zawditu; Ato (“Sir,” now “Mr.”) Sinkaw; Ato Hirouy; and Kantiba Gahrou, who spoke English and acted as interpreter.

of an independent African country.”⁶ While the delegation was, for the most part, “treated like white men,” on August 8, 1919, the National Democratic Club on 5th Street in New York City refused to let them enter to dine.⁷ Despite the Democratic Club’s denial of the allegations, several members reported hearing the retinue being told, “we’ll not have black men eating here.”⁸ While the event was certainly a source of contention for all parties involved, it did have the affect of “eradicating the notion of racial difference between African-Americans and Ethiopians”—at least in the United States.⁹

African-American sentiments towards Ethiopia as a symbol of black nationhood were strengthened significantly during the Italo-Ethiopian War. In 1934, just prior to Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia, a group of Africans and African-Americans living in Washington D.C. organized the Ethiopian Research Council to “disseminate information on the history, civilization, and diplomatic relations of Ethiopia in ancient and modern times.”¹⁰ The organization had a tremendous impact on African-American awareness of Ethiopia and Ethiopian history.

The council received and answered numerous queries regarding Ethiopian politics, and society, as well as education, population and military statistics. There were also

⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁷ *Chicago Defender*, July 19, 1919.

⁸ Just prior to the incident, the leader of the delegation, Dejazmach Nadeo, was interviewed in his suite at the Waldorf-Astoria by R.D. Jonas of the International League of Black Races.⁸ Jonas asked Nadeo what “his people” thought about lynchings in the U.S. Nadeo answered that “[Ethiopians] dislike brutality, burning at the stake, lynching of any nature, and other outrages heaped upon your [Jonas’] people.” Jonas then asked him if the Ethiopians considered themselves to be black men, to which Nadeo replied, “We are, but not like American Black men. We are treated like white men.”

⁹ Harris, *African American Reactions to War in Ethiopia*, 5.

¹⁰ Ethiopian Research Council, Memorandum, Washington, nd. Quoted in Joseph Harris, *African American Reactions to War in Ethiopia*, 20.

“innumerable requests for Ethiopian flags and photographs of the emperor.”¹¹ During the war, these items were sold (a map cost 15 cents) to raise money for the Ethiopian cause at meetings of the NAACP and the UNIA, “as well as door to door and on the street.”¹² The Council produced their own maps, while the photographs were supplied—and autographed—by Emperor Haile Selassie himself (figure 4.7).

Haile Selassie’s image appeared frequently in the Western media during the war and subsequent Italian occupation (figures 4.8-4.13).¹³ Two months prior to the Italian invasion, as Mussolini’s armies were amassing along the Eritrean-Ethiopian border in preparation for their impending attack, the *New York Times* published a concocted face off between a smug Benito Mussolini and a five-year old formal portrait of Selassie, shown in full coronation regalia (figure 4.8). One of the most noteworthy images published during the Italo-Ethiopian war time period appeared on the front cover of the January 11, 1936 issue of *The Illustrated London News* (figure 4.9). The photograph shows Selassie posing with his left foot atop an unexploded Italian gas bomb. Although it was printed in London, the picture did circulate in the Western Atlantic world, where it

¹¹ Ibid, 26.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ For a detailed description of the war, see Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998). The Italo-Ethiopian war officially began in October 1935. A young Italian pilot, reportedly Mussolini’s own son-in-law, dropped one of the first bombs at Adwa “in symbolic revenge for their compatriot’s defeat there forty years earlier,” (226) Technologically, Ethiopia was ill prepared for the battle that ensued. After seven long months of being bombarded incessantly by mustard gas, the sorely depleted Ethiopian army realized defeat was near. On May 2, Selassie and his family fled the country. The Italians marched into the capital three days later and triumphantly declared: “Ethiopia is Italian.” Italian occupation lasted until 1941. See also Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1991*, 2nd edition (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2001).¹³

had a profound impact on black people and white people alike who sympathized with the Ethiopia's struggle against Italian fascism.¹⁴

The Western world's empathetic response to the Italo Ethiopian war resulted in Selassie's second appearance on the cover of *Time Magazine* in January 1936, when subscribers voted him 1935's "Man of the Year." The text in the accompanying article lends credence to Gebrekidan's claim that Haile Selassie and Ethiopia were perceived quite differently by black and white Western audiences. The text reads:

King of Kings. In 1935 there was just one man who rose out of murky obscurity and carried his country with him up & up into brilliant focus before a pop-eyed world...Haile Selassie has created a general, warm and blind sympathy for *uncivilized Ethiopia* throughout *civilized Christendom*. In the wake of the world's grandiose Depression, with millions of *white* men uncertain as to the benefits of civilization, 1935 produced a peculiar Spirit of the Year in which it was felt to be a crying shame that the Machine Age seemed about to intrude upon Africa's last free, unscathed and simple people. *They were ipso facto Noble Savages, and the noblest of them all naturally emerged as the Man of the Year.* (my emphasis)¹⁵

Later in the article, Selassie is described as a "businessman" with "a grasp of both savage and diplomatic mentality."

World War II put an abrupt end to Western interest in Ethiopia, as Europeans and Americans alike became far more absorbed in their own national predicaments. Thus, Haile Selassie is virtually absent from the Western media from 1941 until the 1950s when he once again became a focal point of world attention. The revived interest was largely due to Selassie's involvement with independence movements elsewhere in Africa, which culminated in the establishment of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

¹⁴ The image was especially powerful in Jamaica, where it was viewed by the Rastafari—a group of people who, following Selassie's 1930 coronation, hailed Selassie as the returned messiah and a living god—as "one more sign of the emperor's invincibility, a testament to his natural powers over man-made weaponry." Gebrekidan, *Bond Without Blood*, 61. The Rastafari are discussed in greater detail below.

¹⁵ "Ethiopia: Man of the Year," *Time Magazine* 27 no. 1 (January 6, 1936).

(ECA) in 1958 and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, both of which established their permanent headquarters in Addis Ababa.¹⁶

From 1950 until 1974, images of Haile Selassie appeared in eight issues of the German magazine *Bunte Illustrierte*; three times each in *Der Spiegel* (figure 4.14), *Frau im Spiegel*, and *Stern*; once in *Film und Frau*, and *Frankfurter Illustrierte*; and even once in a German issue of a Mickey Mouse comic themed “The Oldest Kingdom in the World.” During the same time frame in Italy, Selassie was featured in five issues of *Epoca* (figure 4.15), two of *L’Europeo*, and once each in *Oggi* and *Storia Illustrata*. *The Illustrated London News* published two more issues with Selassie on the cover, one in 1965 and another in 1966. In France, Haile Selassie appeared once in *Paris Match* and three times in *Point de Vue: Images du Monde*; and in Norway, he was featured on the November 19, 1954 issue of *Se*. Finally, in the United States, Haile Selassie photos were published once in *Business Week*, *Jet*, and *Hue*, and in seven issues of *Life*, three issues of *Ebony*, and one edition of *National Geographic*.¹⁷

¹⁶ Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 262-

¹⁷ Sources with an asterisk featured a photograph of Haile Selassie on the front cover. *Bunte Illustrierte* (August 22, 1959), (January 7, 1961), (January 14, 1961), (March 3, 1968*), (November 20, 1968), (February 26, 1969*), (December 15, 1970) and (March 1, 1973*); *Der Spiegel* (November 10, 1954*), (January 4, 1961) and (November 2, 1965); *Frau im Spiegel* 27 no. 45 (October 29, 1972), 27 no. 49 (November 26, 1972), and 27 no. 51 (December 10, 1972); *Stern* 18 no. 8 (February 21, 1965), 18 no. 9 (February 28, 1965), and 27 no. 39 (September 19, 1974); *Film und Frau* 26 no. 9 (October/November 1957); *Frankfurter Illustrierte* (April 25, 1959*); *Micky Maus* (May 15, 1971); *Epoca* 0534 (December 25, 1960*), 0535 (January 1, 1961), 0787 (October 24, 1965), 1051 (November 15, 1970), and 1224 (March 17, 1974); *L’Europeo* 1007 (February 21, 1965), and 1383 (June 15, 1962); *Oggi* 21 no. 17 (April 29, 1965); *Storia Illustrata* no. 182 (January 1973); *The Illustrated London News* 246 no. 6550 (February 13, 1965*), and 249 no. 6631 (September 3, 1966); *Paris Match* no. 293 (November 13, 1954); *Point de Vue: Images du Monde* (November 4, 1954), (January 31, 1969*), and (November 11, 1972); *Se* 47 (November 19, 1954*); *Business Week* (May 29, 1954); *Jet* (October 2, 1952); *Hue* (January 1954); *Life* 34 no. 18 (May 4, 1953), 36 no. 24 (June 14, 1954), 39 no. 21 (November 21, 1955), 55 no. 16 (October 18, 1963), 55 no. 23 (December 6, 1963); 58 no. 7 (February 19, 1965), and 71 no. 18 (October 29, 1971); *Ebony* 6 no. 1 (November 1950*), 9 no.8 (June 1954), and 19 no. 2 (December 1963); and *National Geographic* 127 no. 4 (April 1965). This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. I would like to thank BenGee of Ababajanboy.com (a Haile Selassie collectible vendor) in Germany for providing me with the majority of this information.

Haile Selassie died in 1975, eleven months after being deposed by the Derg military junta in September 1974. In the 1980s, when images of starving women and children flooded the international press, Ethiopia was viewed primarily as a pity case and quickly became the quintessential signifier of the “third world” (figures 4.16-4.17). When the famine ended, the border wars with Eritrea supplied a new succession of negative images that continued to shape Western perceptions of Ethiopia.¹⁸ In mainstream Western culture, Haile Selassie was essentially forgotten. Today, however, Haile Selassie’s image is once again a common sight. Since at least the late 1970’s, pictures of Selassie have been mobilized on a large social scale by an international group of people known as the Rastafari. Through their revitalization of his image—both visually and ideologically—Haile Selassie has been granted a second life in the popular world view.

Selassie as the Chapel

“Haile Selassie is the Chapel
 Power of the Trinity
 Build your mind on this direction
 Serve the living God and live
 Take your troubles to Selassie
 He is the only King of Kings
 Conquering lion of Judah
 Triumphantly we all must sing
 I search and I search this book of life
 In the Revelation look what I find
 Haile Selassie is the chapel
 All the world should know
 That man is the angel
 And our God, the King of Kings.”

(Bob Marley and the Wailers, *Selassie is the Chapel*, 1968)¹⁹

¹⁸ See Edmond J. Keller, “Drought, War, and the Politics of Famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 30 no. 4 (December 1992): 609-624.

¹⁹ My transcription. Bob Marley and the Wailers recorded “Selassie is the Chapel” on June 8th, 1968 at JBC studios in Kingston, Jamaica. Only 26 copies of the original single were pressed, 12 of which were taken to Ethiopia by Bob Marley’s close friend, Jamaican soccer star Allan Cole, as a gift for Emperor Haile Selassie I. The song was actually adapted from the country western “Crying in the Chapel” by Artie Glenn. Several versions of the song were in circulation around the time Rasta elder Mortimo Planno wrote the

Rastafarianism originated as a Black Nationalist religious movement among poor maroon communities in rural Jamaica. Encouraged by the “teachings” of Marcus Garvey, they perceived Haile Selassie’s coronation as fulfillment of biblical prophecy and by 1933 many had begun to hail Selassie as the Living God, the returned Messiah who had finally come to release the black man from the bonds of white society and lead him back to Zion—which they equated with Ethiopia.²⁰ Today the Rastafari, or Rastas as they are more commonly known, are encountered all over the world. Although it has remained a fundamentally patriarchal movement, Rastafarianism is no longer closed to white believers.²¹ Contemporary adherents “promote love and respect for all living things” and membership—if it can even be defined as such—is open to all.²² Repatriation, once a tenant of Rastafari creed, is also downplayed in modern expressions of the faith, though Ethiopia is still considered the spiritual homeland.

lyrics for the Wailers’ adaptation; Rex Allen had made the song a country western hit, there was a doo-wop version by Sonny Till and the Orioles, and in 1965, Elvis Presley topped the charts in the UK with his gospel-infused rendition of the song. Planno was more than likely most familiar with Elvis’s version, but country music was also very popular in Jamaica during the 1960s. *Selassie is the Chapel*, disc 2 of *The Complete Wailers 1967-1972 Part 1*. Ontario: Koch International and JAD Records, 1998.

²⁰ See Jabulani I. Tafari, *A Rastafari View of Marcus Mosiah Garvey: Patriarch, Prophet, Philosopher* (Jamaica: Great Company, 1996). When Tafari was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie I, he took the title “King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah.” The bible verse most frequently cited in efforts to “prove” Haile Selassie’s divinity is Revelations (5: 2-5): “And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.” Other popular verses are Revelations (17:14), (19:16), and (22:16).

²¹ Leonard Howell, considered by many to be the founder of the Rastafari movement, adamantly promoted hatred of all white people. See Jabulani I. Tafari, *A Rastafari View of Marcus Mosiah Garvey*.

²² Neil J. Savishinsky, “Rastafari in the Promised Land: The Spread of a Jamaican Socioreligious Movement among the Youth of West Africa,” *African Studies Review* 37 no.3 (December 1994): 19.

Neil Savishinsky, in his study of Rastafari in West Africa writes that until recently Rastafarianism “[drew] its largest and most committed following from among those whose indigenous culture has been suppressed;” he posits that it functioned as an “ideological corrective” for young “people of color the world over,” who felt that years of systematic oppression²³ of black culture in Western society left them disconnected from their African heritage.²⁴ In his book *Bond without Blood*, Fikru Negash Gebrekidan makes a similar claim, stating that in the “Ethiopianist” tradition, Rastafarians “find a blueprint for self-revitalization.”²⁵

A large part of this “self-revitalization” is enacted through the construction of a personal image that marks the adherent as a Rastafarian to his/herself and to others. Outwardly, via the medium of the body, this image is heralded by dreadlocked coiffures; green, yellow, and red attire or adornments; and with t-shirts and other wearable or portable items bearing emblems such as lions, maps of Africa or Ethiopia, Marcus Garvey, Bob Marley, and, of course, Haile Selassie (figure 4.18-4.19). These same symbols frequently appear in interior spaces, such the home, where they serve to visually enhance the space and function as visual reminders of faith. In addition, businesses of all types will often display Rastafari insignia in much the same way as individuals, inserting

²³ Oppression would be “downpression” in current Rasta terminology. Rastafarians change words if they don’t feel the form and meaning have a justifiable relationship. In the aforementioned example, phonetically, “oppression” sounds like “uppression.” Since “up” is good, and “oppression” is bad, it is simply changed to “downpression.” Similarly, “understanding” becomes “overstanding;” “dedicated” (*dedicated*) becomes “livicated” (*liveicated*)—which resulted in a new word, “livity”; and “library” becomes “truthbrary.” The first two examples are extremely common in English speaking countries, and have been since the 1970s. The latter example—“truthbrary” was used by Jim Marshall, a Los Angeles based Rastafari and collector (discussed below), in a personal communication (June 2005), and I do not know how widespread the term is in English speaking Rastafari communities. I would like to thank Nicholas Frech for directing my attention to this phenomenon.

²⁴ Ibid, 19-20.

²⁵ Fikru Negash Gebrekidan, *Bond without Blood*, 1.

themselves into an ideological matrix while simultaneously attracting potential customers. Of course, not all who appear to be Rastafari actually are; ever since the 1970's, when Bob Marley and the Wailers brought the faith to the world through their music, the Rastafarian image has become extraordinarily fashionable.

Consequently, images of Haile Selassie are ubiquitous in the market place. He appears on t-shirts, key chains, tote bags, bumper stickers and license plates, beach towels, necklaces, rings, and bracelets, posters, postcards, books, air fresheners, and even boxing gloves (figures 4.20-4.21). There is also a healthy trade in "used" or second-hand Selassie items, such as stamps, paper currency, coins and medals, old magazines and newspaper articles, antique photographs, and other souvenir odds and ends like cigar-bands (figure 4.22-23).²⁶

According to Jim Marshall, or Jah Jim, a Rastafari from Los Angeles, California, there are as many uses of Haile Selassie's image as there are individual Rastafari.²⁷ Once mobilized by the Rastafari—in the marketplace, on the internet or in other Rasta-oriented publications, in the music industry, as well as on peoples' bodies and in their homes and

²⁶ These cigar bands are frequently available on e-bay, and from other vendors specializing in collector's items. Cigar companies introduced decorative bands in the 19th century as a way to boost sales. Prominent political and military figures, men's sports, and hunting scenes are all commonly found on the bands, which are still produced in some capacity today. For example, Felipe Gregorio (Alexandria, Virginia) produces a Ras Tafari cigar "made of Nicaraguan and Dominican filler, Dominican binder, and Cameroon wrapper." An online advertisement for the cigars reads: "The cigars come in two sizes, 'Afrika' and 'Spliff' which sell for \$8.00 and \$3.50 respectively.... The Ras Tafari's *offer a glimpse at Ethiopian history*; the unique box bears a 16th century map of Africa on it, along with a reproduction of Haile Selassie's autograph." My emphasis. <<http://gosmokeshop.com/0299/brand2.htm>> I would like to thank Jim Marshall, Ras Adam Simeon, and BenGee for directing my attention to the Felipe Gregorio cigars. (Personal communication May-June, 2005).

²⁷ Among the Nyhabingi, the most authoritarian sect of the Rastafari, images of Haile Selassie are typically placed on the altar of worship spaces. In the worship spaces of the Twelve Tribes, the most popular organized sect of Rastafari, murals of Selassie are frequently painted to "set the mood for worship." It is important to note, however, that the images themselves are *not* worshipped. Ras Adam Simeon, personal communication, May-June 2005.

social spaces—these images assume a new status and meaning; they become idiosyncratic or “singularized” representations of expressly Rastafarian beliefs (figures 4.18-4.25).

When an object becomes “singularized,” it is possible to view it as an idiosyncratic entity that “accumulat[es] a specific biography, or set of biographies” as it “moves through different hands, contexts, and uses.”²⁸ In recognition of this fact, Igor Kopytoff advocates an approach that recognizes the “cultural and cognitive” processes that endow different kinds of objects with meaning.²⁹ Kopytoff’s methodology, which he calls “cultural biography,” is extremely useful for mapping the cumulative biography of singularized *images*, such as the formal portraits of Haile Selassie’s coronation taken by his Armenian court photographer, Haïgaz Boyadjian (figures 4.26-4.28). These images are among those most frequently adapted and modified to convey a message specific to Rastafari ideology (figures 4.29, 4.20 and 4.25). Like all photographs of human subjects, these images necessarily contain the “aura” of the photographed subject, as well as the subjectivities of the photographer and subsequent modifiers and viewers, yet through their revitalization and wide dissemination by the Rastafari, Haigaz Boyadjian’s pictures of Selassie are host to a broadened horizon of semantic possibilities.

²⁸ Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 34. Here, Appadurai is defining a key concept of Igor Kopytoff’s argument.

²⁹ Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 64-91.

The “cultural biography” of images can also be utilized to illuminate the contingent social practices that are connected to, yet extend *beyond* the actual picture.³⁰ For example, in a photograph of the 1967 Heads of State Conference in Kampala Uganda, which appears in the photography section of catalogue for the influential exhibition, *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994*, Haile Selassie is holding his hands in a position that has come to be known in the Rastafari community as the “sign of the heart” (figure 4.30). While I was conducting research for this section of my study, a nearly identical image (and several other photographs of Haile Selassie with his hands in this position) was e-mailed to me by a German Rastafari named BenGee, following a request for information about how Haile Selassie’s image is used which I had posted on several Rastafari web-based chat-groups (figure 4.31).

To many Rastafari, the “sign of the heart” is a symbol of peace, unity, and love, and a powerful signifier of their faith (figure 4.19, 4.32-4.33) BenGee also sent me a photograph of himself and Joseph Hill of the Jamaican reggae group Culture, performing this particular gesture (figure 4.33). He told me that the sign of the heart is “a good example of how Rastafarian traditions are inspired by pictures of Haile Selassie.”³¹

³⁰ For a comparable analysis of the way specific images are mobilized in widespread social situations, see Allen F. Roberts, and Mary Nooter Roberts, *The Saint in the City* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2003). Roberts and Roberts discuss how a single image of Sheikh Amadou Bamba has developed into an icon of spirituality for the Mourides, a Senegalese Sufi movement which is a mystical version of the Islamic faith. There are many important similarities between the Mourides’ use of Bamba’s image and the Rastafari use of Selassie’s picture, yet it is important to note that while the Mourides have developed their visual rhetoric based upon a single image of Bamba, the Rastafari employ numerous images of Selassie. Indeed, the abundance of Selassie images and the different life moments they depict are integral to Rastafari ideology.

³¹ Personal communication, May 2005.



Figure 4.1. Photograph of Haile Selassie's coronation, front cover of *Le Miroir du Monde*, 37 (November 15, 1930).



LES FÊTES DU COURONNEMENT DE L'EMPEREUR D'ÉTHIOPIE A ADDIS-ABÉBA
 S. M. Haïlé-Sélassié I^{er}, suivi de l'impératrice Manen, sort de la cathédrale après la cérémonie.
Pho. Universal, collectionné Paris.

Figure 4.2. Haile Selassie's coronation, front cover of *L'Illustration* 4576 (November 15th 1930).

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS

REGISTERED AS A NEWSPAPER FOR TRANSMISSION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND TO CANADA AND NEWFOUNDLAND BY MAGAZINE POST.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1930.

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"KING OF KINGS" OF ETHIOPIA: THE NEWLY-CROWNED EMPEROR, CARRYING THE ORB AND THE SCEPTRE, AND ACCOMPANIED BY HIS YOUNGEST SON, AFTER THE CORONATION CEREMONY AT ADDIS ABABA.

The coronation of the Emperor of Ethiopia, formerly known as Ras Tafari, took place at Addis Ababa, the Abyssinian capital, on November 2, amid scenes of great magnificence. The Duke of Gloucester was present as the representative of King George. The full titles of the new Emperor are stated as—"The Conquering Lion of Judah, Haile Selassie I., Elect of God, King of Kings of Ethiopia." The

above photograph of him shows him wearing the crown, and carrying the sceptre and the orb. Next to him is his youngest son. The figure on the extreme right, it may be noted, is wearing one of the lion's mane "bearskins" illustrated in colour in our issue of November 1. Further photographs of the coronation ceremonies appear on later pages in the present number.

Figure 4.3. Haile Selassie's coronation, front cover of *The Illustrated London News* (November 15, 1930).



Figure 4.4. Haile Selassie's coronation. Photograph by George W. Moore. From a feature article in *National Geographic Magazine* 59 no.6 (June 1931).

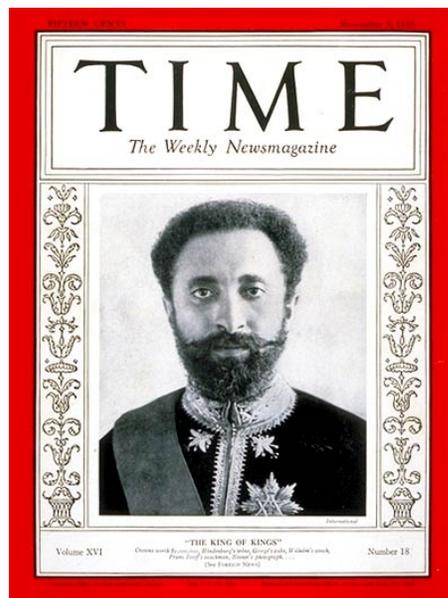


Figure 4.5 Emperor Haile Selassie I on the cover of *Time Magazine* 16 no. 18 (November 3, 1930).



Figure 4.6 Britain's Duke of Gloucester arriving in Addis Ababa for the coronation ceremony. Collection of Alain Le Sear'ch. (Pankhurst and Gérard, Ethiopia Photographed, 72)



Figure 4.7 Autographed portrait of Haile Selassie. From the collection of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center Museum, Howard University. (Harris, African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia, 86)



Figure 4.8 Benito Mussolini facing a coronation portrait of Haile Selassie, from the *New York Times* (August 4, 1935).



Figure 4.9 Haile Selassie with his foot on an unexploded Italian gas bomb. Cover of *The Illustrated London News* (January 11, 1935).



Figure 4.10 Haile Selassie and soldiers on the cover of *The Illustrated London News* (April 11, 1936).



Figure 4.11 Haile Selassie on the cover of *The Illustrated London News* (May 9, 1936).

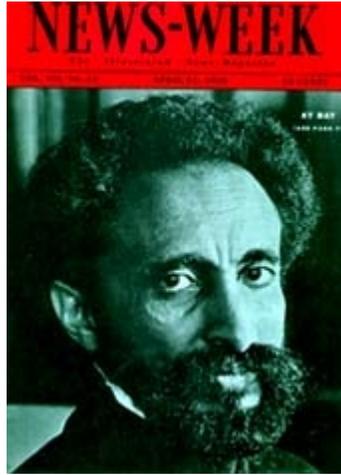


Figure 4.12 Haile Selassie on the cover of *Newsweek* (April 11, 1936)

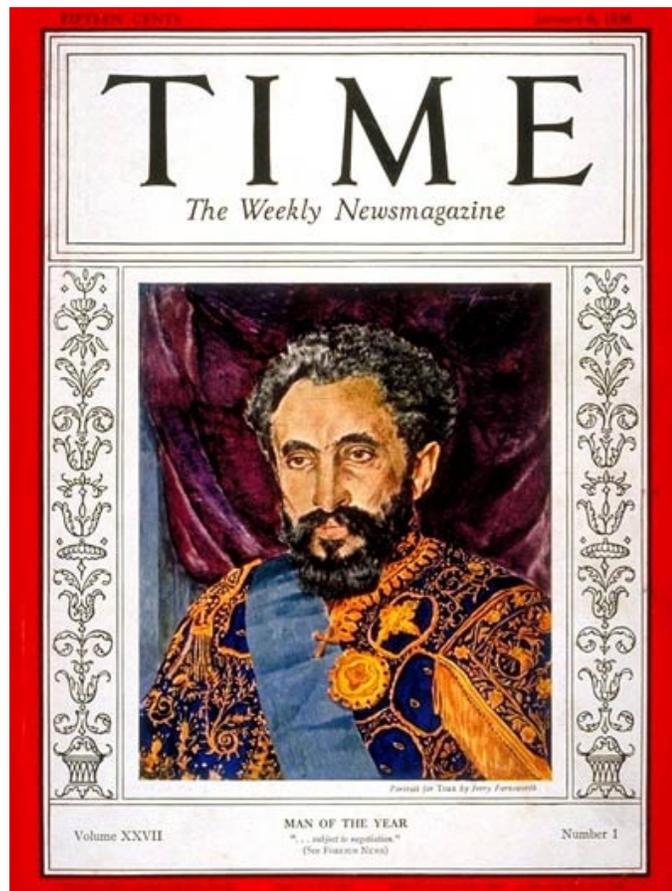


Figure 4.13 Haile Selassie on the cover of *Time Magazine* 27 no. 1 (January 6, 1936).

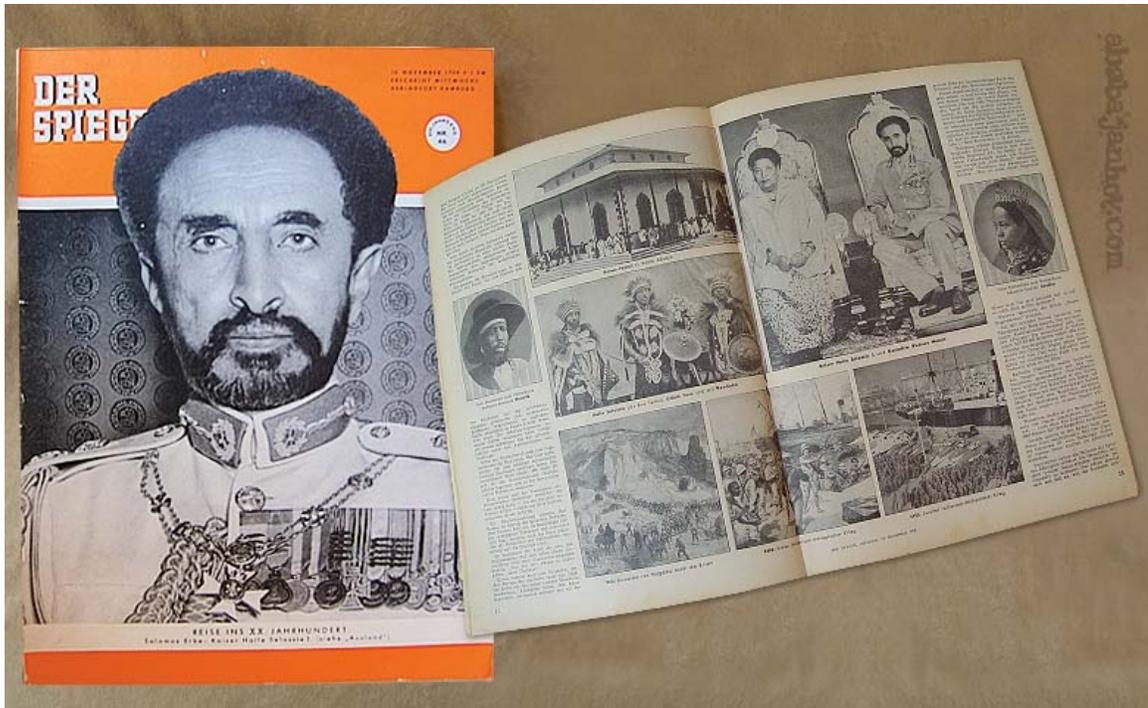


Figure 4.14 Haile Selassie on front cover of *Der Spiegel* (Germany, November 11, 1954).

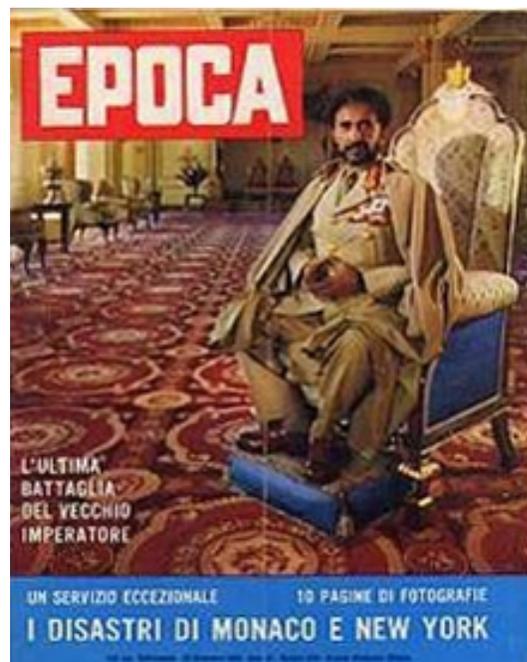


Figure 4.15 Haile Selassie on the front cover of *Epoca* (Italy, December 25, 1960).

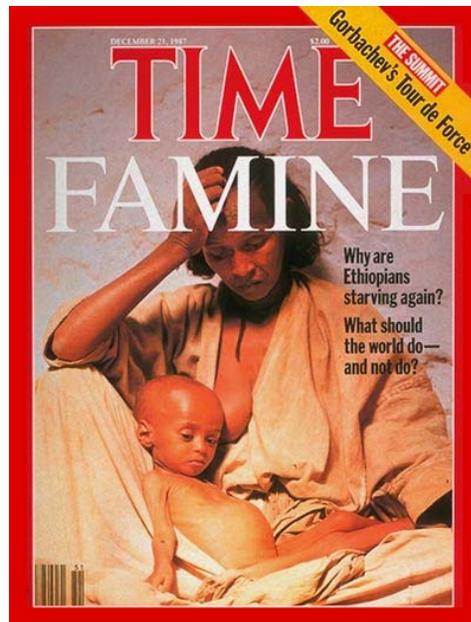


Figure 4.16 Starving Ethiopian child and mother on the cover of *Time Magazine* (December 21, 1987).



Figure 4.17 Starving Ethiopian woman. Photograph by Anthony Suau. *Rolling Stone*, (August 15, 1985, 9).

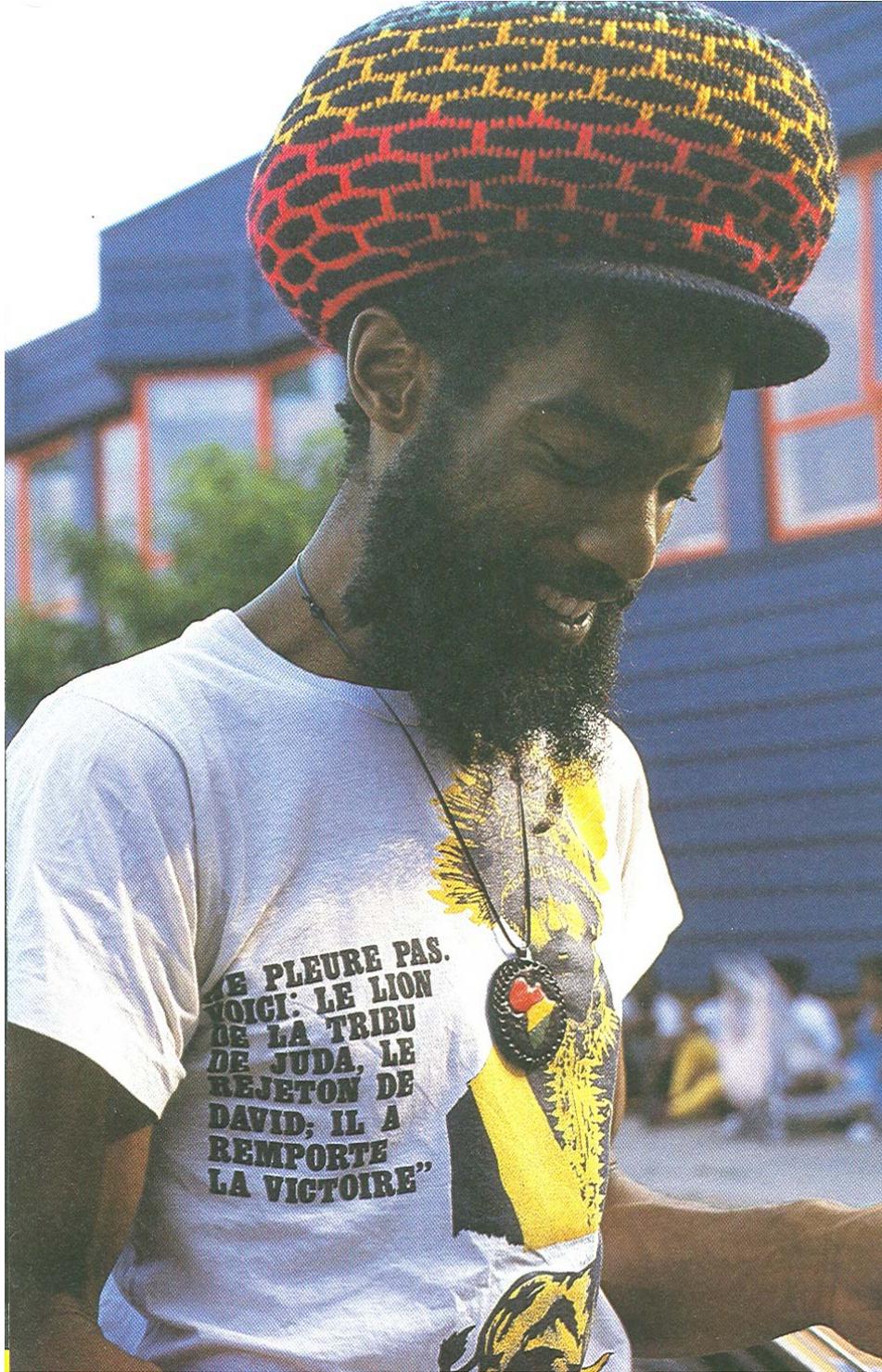


Figure 4.18 Rastafari wearing a necklace with a red, yellow and green picture of Africa and a t-shirt bearing an image of Ras Tafari (the picture that is reproduced on the shirt was taken before 1930 when Tafari became Emperor Haile Selassie.) (Faristzaddi, *Itations of Jamaica and I, the Second Itation*, np)

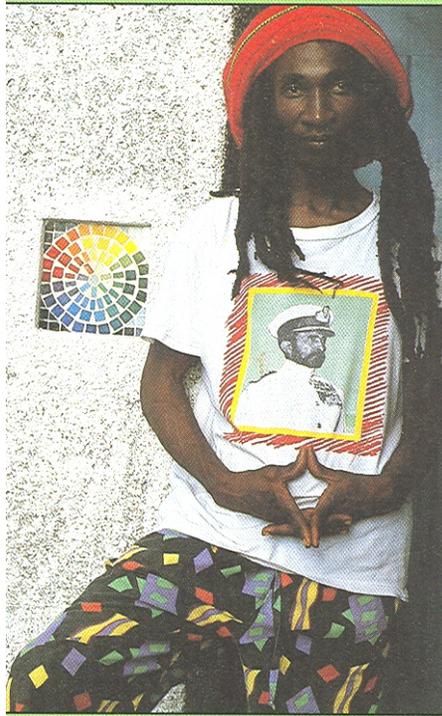


Figure 4.19 Dreadlocked Rastafari wearing a t-shirt bearing Haile Selassie's image..
(Faristzaddi, *Itations of Jamaica and I, the Second Itation*, np)



Figure 4.20 Tote bag with coronation image of Haile Selasse. Available at Zion Gates Reggae and Africentric [sic] Shop. (<<http://www.ziongates.com>>)



Figure 4.21. “Jah is my co-pilot” bumper sticker. Available at Zion Gates Reggae and Africentric [sic] Shop. (<<http://www.ziongates.com>>)



Figure 4.22 Haile Selassie I medal from his Silver Jubilee Fair in 1955. Photo courtesy of BenGee at Ababajanhoy. (<<http://www.ababajanhoy.de>>)



Figure 4.23 Haile Selassie cigar band. Photo courtesy of BenGee at Ababajanhoy. (<<http://www.ababajanhoy.de>>)

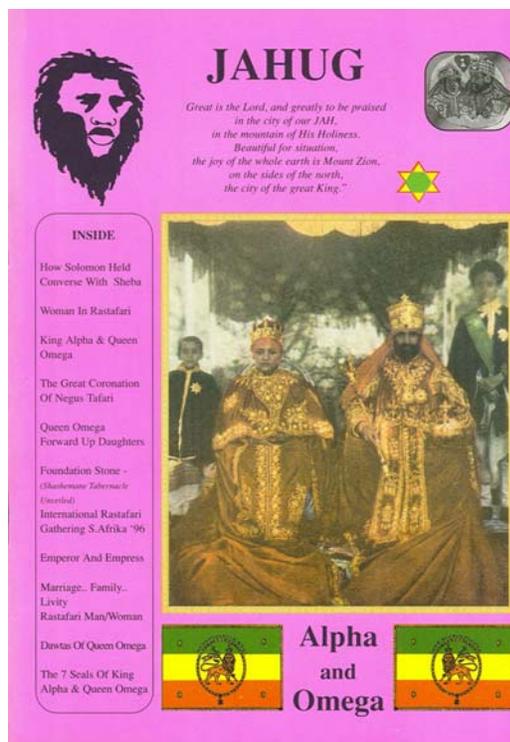


Figure 4.24. Haile Selassie and his wife, Empress Menen on the front cover of *Jahug 5 Alpha and Omega*. (London, nd.) The picture is a reproduction of George W. Moore's photographs of Haile Selassie which appeared in the June 1931 issue of *National Geographic*.

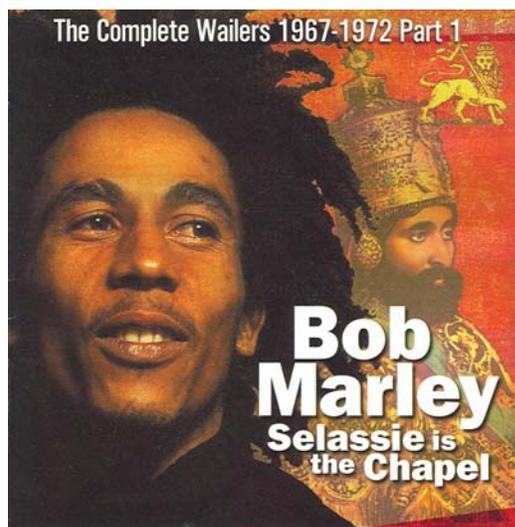


Figure 4.25 Bob Marley and Haile Selassie on the cover of the re-released version of *Selassie is the Chapel*. (Bob Marley and Wailers, JAD Records, 1998)



Figure 4.26 Formal coronation portrait of Haile Selassie. Photograph by Haïgaz Boyadjian, 1930. Collection of Dr. Behanu Abebe. New print by Denis Gérard. (Pankhurst and Gérard, “Court Photographers,” 121).



Figure 4.27. Formal portrait of Haile Selassie. Probably taken by Haïgaz Boyadjian. Private collection. (Pankhurst and Gérard, *Ethiopia Photographed*, 74)



Figure 4.28 Formal coronation portrait of Haile Selassie and his wife, Empress Menen. Probably taken by Haïgaz Boyadjian. (Copley, *Ethiopia Reaches Her Hand unto God*).



Figure 4.29. Rastafari adaptation of one of Haïgaz Boyadjian's formal coronation portraits of Haile Selassie. (Faristzaddi, *Itations of Jamaica and I, the Second Itation*, np)



Figure 4.30. Haile Selassie and other African leaders at the Heads of State Conference, Kampala, Uganda, 1967. Photograph by Marion Kaplan. (*The Short Century*, 188).



Figure 4.31. Slightly different image of Haile Selassie and other African leaders at the Heads of State Conference, Kampala, Uganda, 1967. Photo courtesy of BenGee.

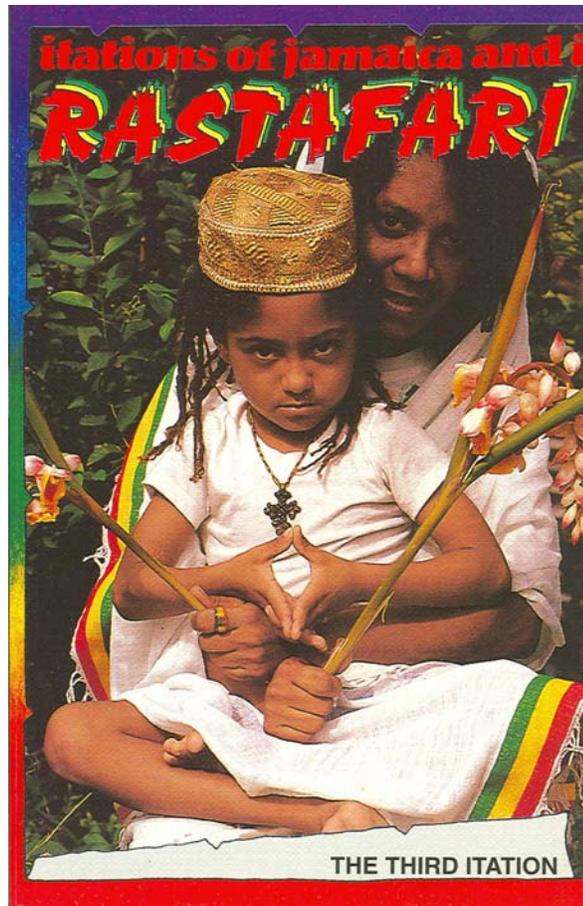


Figure 4.32. Young girl performing the sign of the heart. (Faristzaddi, Itations of Jamaica and I, the Third Itation, front cover).



Figure 4.33 BenGee (right) with Joseph Hill (left) of the Jamaican reggae group Culture. Photo courtesy of BenGee.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

Visual imagery provides an important means to access what is and what potentially will become recorded history. In my analysis of maps and historical book illustrations in chapter two, I have shown that visual representations of Ethiopia can be read to reveal information about how Ethiopia was perceived in Western history. In my discussion of Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher's photographs of Ethiopia, I have also demonstrated that imagery, particularly photographic imagery, must be read and contextualized in order to reveal the underlying power structures that either define or enable the representation. And finally, in my brief exploration of Haile Selassie's image in Rastafari visual culture in Chapter four, I have shown that images, like other kinds of objects, can acquire new and often highly specialized forms and meanings as they move through the various stages of their lives.

Lest this entire study be misunderstood as an exercise in methodology, let me conclude by stating *why* it is important to understand how visual representations of Ethiopia have been and are used in Western contexts to make meaning. Among the Rastafari, images of Haile Selassie and other signifiers of Ethiopia possess what Arjun Appadurai calls "semiotic virtuosity"—that is "the ability to signal fairly complex social messages."¹ Yet these messages, it should be noted, are generated *by* the Rastafari and they speak to and about specifically Rastafari—i.e., non-Ethiopian—practices and

¹ Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 38.

identities. Along the same lines, many representations of Ethiopia—or, should I say, Abyssinia—on historical maps shed light not so much on Ethiopia’s past, but rather, they illuminate conceptions and misconceptions that are explicitly Eurocentric.

Beckwith and Fisher’s images, however, must be treated with greater scrutiny. “Any photograph” writes Christraud Geary, “can be potentially useful to the historian.”² The historian’s goal, she then adds, is to determine “what kind of information can be gained from the images.”³ In other words, in order to determine the epistemological value of specific images, historians must utilize a rigorous investigative methodology. I hope that in this study, I have managed to demonstrate that while representations of Ethiopia and Ethiopians must be considered critically in their own right, it is the way that their meanings are mobilized in society that illuminates their primary context

² Christraud Geary, “Photographs as Materials for African History: Some Methodological Considerations,” *History in Africa* 13 (1986): note 2, 107..

³ *Ibid*, 89-90.

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