
Entoto St. Mary Museum: the Oldest Ethiopian Church Museum

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1. Introduction

History testifies that the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church is the oldest Christian Church in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is a unique church in Africa in that it has developed its own religious traditions in which much of Ethiopian history, social life and ethics are deeply rooted. The church has been the repository of the country's rich heritage of an old civilization that dates back even before Christianity. Each of its monasteries and churches has been not only a place of worship but also a museum. In this regard, Entoto St. Mary church is one of the best examples. Fortunately, some of the priceless treasures of Entoto St. Mary church are housed in a formally established museum so that they have enjoyed better protection, preservation and exhibition. In this paper, an attempt has been made to explore the general conditions of the museum from the perspectives of the basic components of a museum such as collection, acquisition, documentation, presentation and interpretation. The issues of representation and meaning are also raised and treated throughout the paper. Much of the research was based on physical observation by the researcher and information collected through interviews with the museum administrator, guides and visitors at different times.

2. Location

Entoto St. Mary Museum is located about 7.5 km to the north from the centre of Addis Ababa. Visitors can arrive at the museum on top of the hill either by car or on foot. The journey from the centre to Entoto will take about 20 minutes by car or about 2 to 2 1/2 hours on foot. Once at the top of the mountain, the church compound can be found at the right side of the main road. The museum is easily identifiable being found to the left-hand side after entering the first gate. Within the first compound of the church, the museum is enclosed by a wall that separates it from St. Mary's Church.

The location of the museum (lying within the Church compound) has apparently become one of the reasons for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church's claim to represent and dictate the interpretation of culture in the museum.

3. Historical Development

Entoto St. Mary Museum is the oldest formally established Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church museum in the country. According to the information obtained from the museum administrator and the guides, the idea of its establishment was initiated immediately after a large number of objects were stolen and taken away from the store house of St. Mary church, by burglars in 1983. At that time the incident became a serious issue and attracted the attention of not only the senior leaders of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church¹ but also that of the leading figures of the socialist government of the day.

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¹His Holiness Abune Tekle Haimanot, the 3rd patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, played a considerable role in this regard, according to Liqe SeyumanTibebu Dagne (the Museum Administrator).

The two groups agreed to establish a museum after an intense discussion. The then Ministry of Culture sponsored the building of the Entoto Museum. It was inaugurated on 23 November 1986 in the presence of one of the leading political figures of the time, Prime Minister Fikre Selassie Wogderes.² At that time the Department of Cultural Heritage was responsible for the supervision of Museums under the Ministry of Culture.³

Hence, it can be argued that the role of the government in the process of establishing the museum was to create a conducive environment and a better ground for the government (especially the Ministry of Culture and Tourism) to claim ownership of the heritage and to reconstruct some of the history narrated in the museum.

Nevertheless, the government's involvement, interest and its significant commitment to the construction of a museum within the church compound seem to be a great paradox and has become a highly contested issue. The government was socialist in ideology. Its Ministry of Culture was created and entrusted with the task of developing a socialist culture in Ethiopia through the provisions of the proclamation of August 1977.⁴ This military government and its socialist ideology were entirely against the Church and its activities. The Church was continuously blamed by the regime for its strong association with the previous imperial government. In 1975, the Church lost its land holdings when they were nationalized by the government.⁵ His Holiness Abune Tewoflos, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, was murdered in 1979 by the government because of his opposition to its ruthless activities. Members of the Derg regime paid no attention to the religious heritage because of their materialist ideology. People who were in favour of spiritual heritage and their values were greatly discouraged, intimidated and considered as backward and as enemies of the revolution.⁶

So how could such a government promote and sponsor a museum housing religious objects within the church compound?

The establishment of Entoto St. Mary Museum during the military regime is an exception. According to Liqe Seyuman Tibebu Dagne, the Museum Administrator, the construction of the museum was given great attention mainly because some senior leaders, including Prime Minister Fikreselassie Wogderes, were natives of the Entoto area. He also stated that the establishment of the museum was part of the preparation of celebrating the centenary of Addis Ababa. He added that the government officials decided to establish the museum at Entoto in recognition of its historical place as the first settlement in the emergence of Addis Ababa.⁷

²This information is obtained from Liqe Seyuman Tibebu Dagne, Deacon Legesse W/Mikael & Deacon Lisanework H/Meskel (guides of the museum). All of them have served there for a long period.

³Aleme Eshete, 'The Cultural Situation in Socialist Ethiopia'. UNESCO document (Paris, 1982)p.55.

⁴Aleme Eshete, p.36.

⁵Due to the Rural Land Proclamation launched on 4 March 1975, all rural land was nationalized. It was in the pretext of this proclamation that the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church lost its land holdings. The Church also lost many of its houses built in urban areas in relation to the proclamation of nationalizing all urban land and extra houses launched on 26 July 1975.

⁶ Mengistu Gobezie & Assamenew Kassa, *Yebete Krstian Tarik* No. 2 (Addis Ababa, Alpha Printers, 2000 E.C) pp.163-164

⁷It was from Entoto that the capital was shifted to Addis Ababa in 1886. Entoto served as a capital of King Menelik from 1881 to 1886.

Other informants argue that, though leaders of the Derg regime criticized the Church and its close relationship with the former imperial government, they also appreciated the role played by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church in fostering nationalism, in the process of state formation, and to the maintenance of national unity. Therefore, the government might have considered the museum as a depository of national heritage that could serve as an instrument to promote nationalism and national consciousness. The museum might have also been considered by the regime from the point of view of morality as a means of educating the public and transforming them to good citizens.⁸

On the other hand, it seems that there existed a different attitude towards the concept of 'museum' by important figures of the regime, including the President, Mengistu Hailemariam, who once made the following statement in his speech in relation to the 'Cultural Revolution':

*Culture is not something we create today, all of a sudden; but a heritage accumulated during the long history of mankind. Ethiopian society of the earlier periods transmitted to us a culture permitted by the corresponding level of development and this is our history. However, to attempt to transmit our cultural past integrally to the future generation is to misunderstand the proper progressive heritage of the past. Any cultural heritage that has no direct relation or is an obstacle to our development should be placed in historical museums.*⁹
(Emphasised mine)

As one can understand from the speech, a museum for the head of the government was the place where unnecessary things are accumulated. It might also have been seen by leaders of the regime as a place used to store objects which were considered as irrelevant and obstacles to development. At that time, it was also common to hear the socialist regime blaming the Church and the imperial government for making Ethiopia backward.

In any case, Entoto St. Mary Museum is receiving some assistance from Addis Ababa Culture and Tourism Bureau. According to Ermias Nimani, the Heritage Research and Development Officer, Entoto St. Mary museum is given great attention by Addis Ababa Culture and Tourism Bureau and several activities are planned in relation to the museum. The planned activities are the following: promotion works through documentary films, newspapers, radio programs, websites, magazines and leaflets; provision of training for guides and conservators of the museum; renovation and expansion of the museum building and employment of 24 hours security officers for the museum. However, according to Ermias, obstacles are created by the museum staff and the church that have hampered the realization of the plans according to schedule.

4. Collection

The character of the Entoto St. Mary Museum can be best understood by the nature of its collections. Meanings in the museum are constructed in relation to the collections which the museum houses.¹⁰ Therefore, it is important to know which objects have been collected and why, and what is known about them, from which perspective, so that we can easily understand the issues of representation and interpretation of culture that have revolved around the museum and its items.

⁸ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of The Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995) Chapter.2.

⁹ Quoted in Aleme Eshete, 'The Cultural Situation in Socialist Ethiopia'. UNESCO document (Paris, 1982) p.55.

¹⁰ Elican Hooper-Green Hill, *Museums and Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000) p.3.

The collections of the Entoto St. Mary Museum can be categorized depending on the nature of the objects, their purposes and relations to each other. The dominant exhibits are related to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church and include vestments, church music instruments, ecclesiastical objects (sacred utensils), crosses, bells, icons and religious manuscripts.

Vestments are clothes worn by priests and deacons during the performance of mass and other church rituals. There are several types of vestments of different colours in the museum. There are also ceremonial clothes of bishops¹¹ and of high priests that are indicative of the church hierarchy, including those of the first administrator of the church, Melake Tshehay Afework Esdros Estifanos.

The church's musical instruments housed in the museum include ceremonial staff, drum and sistrum. Staff are used for chanting, dancing and to lean on during prayers. Sistrum is a rattle with five metal discs arranged on two traverse wires. Both church drums (the small and the big drums – nagarit) are exhibited in the museum. The big ones are war drums that were used to announce big events and proclamations as well as accompanying the troops during marches and battles. They are gifts to the church made by kings and princes.

Ecclesiastical objects of the Entoto Museum are those with which the priest administered the rituals of the church. They were mainly used for the celebration of the Holy Communion during the liturgical service. The major collections include the paten, the holy plate, the chalice, the cross-spoon, the golden basket, censor, washing vessel and incense vessel.

Several crosses of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church that differ in shape, style and size are also exhibited in the museum. Based on their size and function they can be classified into processional crosses and hand crosses. The former come with long wooden handles and have been mainly used during ceremonies. Hand crosses are usually held by priests to bless and be kissed by the faithful. Most of the crosses of the Museum are made from gold, silver or wood.

In the museum we can also find big and small umbrellas that had ritual functions. The big ones in particular were used for special ceremonies, funeral processions and weddings. Such umbrellas are fringed with golden and silver crosses and figures of Christ, St. Mary and other saints.

There are two kinds of bells exhibited in the museum: small and big bells. The small ones were rung during mass and other ceremonies while the bigger ones were used for calling the faithful to religious services as well as for all emergency calls or alarms. There are some impressive religious codices¹² exhibited at the museum. All of them are written in Ge'ez¹³ and are mainly of spiritual contents. Most of them have wooden covers and leather decor. The parchment pages are decorated by careful hand lettering and other illustrations. The most beautiful one in the museum is the Holy Bible with a gold plated

¹¹ For instance, the cloak of the Egyptian bishop Abune Mathewos (1881-1926), including the robe he brought from Egypt is exhibited in the museum. Abune Mathewos was one of the four bishops that came from Egypt in 1881 during the reign of Emperor Yohannes IV. He became archbishop in 1889 and guided the Church to 1926.

¹² Codices are handwritten books of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church written on parchments.

¹³ Ge'ez is the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church; which also served, right through to today, as the language of instruction in the same.

cover, and is colourfully decorated. There is another huge manuscript, known as *Degua* that contains religious songs that are believed to have been composed by the popular historical figure of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, St. Yared, who lived in the 6th century¹⁴ A.D.

There are a few icons of St. Mary displayed at the Entoto Museum. Most of them are gifts from foreign powers to Emperor Menelik which he then gave to the church. Examples include the 18th century traditional Ethiopian St. Mary painting, the brass plated picture of St. Mary donated by the Italian government, picture of St. Mary given by the Russian Orthodox Church,¹⁵ and icons representing the Dormition of St. Mary made by Armenian and Greek residents in Ethiopia.

The above-mentioned objects that are on display in the museum are considered to be symbols of the Orthodox Tewahido Church cultural identity. The faithful consider these collections as part of their living heritage. They have been in use in church services for a long time, and thus reflect the representation of a living past. Ritual values are associated with objects that are used ceremonially and symbolically in the performance of religious services. This is the main reason for the Ethiopian Church's claim to take over exclusive representation of those objects of the museum and to display them while still using them. Their future survival and cultural continuity is dependent on the followers of the Church.

Besides the religious collections, a considerable number of secular objects are also displayed at the Entoto St. Mary Museum. There are different types of garments that were mainly worn by high level political and religious figures of the country on different occasions during the reign of Emperor Menelik¹⁶ and his successors. The collection of the museum consists of clothes worn on special occasions by Emperor Menelik and Empress Taitu, traditional clothes of Ethiopian warriors, clothes of prominent nobility, clothes worn by Emperor Menelik, Empress Zewditu and Emperor Haile Selassie, crowns of Emperor Menelik and Empress Taitu during their coronation, and shoes of the king and the queen.

Some other objects on display are associated with Emperor Menelik and the Battle of Adwa. For instance, the big war drum that was used to announce the call to army for the war against Italian colonial army in 1895 that ended with the epic victory at the battle of Adwa in March 1896 is found in the museum. Also the big ceremonial umbrella used by Emperor Menelik during the campaign and during the battle of Adwa is shown in the museum.

There is also an accordion, which was presented to Emperor Menelik by German officials and was used during Menelik's coronation as Emperor of Ethiopia in 1889. There are also other objects like the bed of Emperor Menelik (made from wood and animal skin), the chair of the Emperor Menelik (made from wood with carved decoration), a well-equipped and colourfully decorated saddle of Menelik's horse, and the shield, the sword¹⁷ and the rifle carried by Menelik during the Battle of Adwa.

¹⁴St. Yared is regarded as the composer of the music of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, in the 6th century. He was also the author of religious documents known as *Degwa*, *Tshome-Degwa*, *Zimare*, *Mewasit* and *Mieraf*. The Holy Bible and the *Degua* were presented to Entoto St. Mary Church by King Menelik and Queen Taitu.

¹⁵This picture is said to have been used by Emperor Menelik in times of his prayer.

¹⁶For instance, the cloak worn by Menelik II when he was crowned as Emperor in 1889 by the Egyptian bishop Abune Mathewos is exhibited in the museum.

¹⁷On the sword it is written that "God is the hope of Menelik".

There are also other objects exhibited at the Entoto Museum including black and white photographs, medals, and a gold plated watch presented by the French government to King Menelik, coins, currency notes and other gifts by the faithful.

The photographs include those of Emperor Menelik, Empress Taitu¹⁸, Emperor Haile Selassie, the first Ethiopian Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (His Holiness Abune Baslios), the first administrator of St. Mary Church and the original church building. The coins and notes are of Ethiopian currencies from the time of Menelik II up to the present. There are also Maria Theresia Thaler coins that were used in Ethiopia until and during the time of Menelik. Different medals were donated to the museum by different individuals. Many of them have been provided by a nun called Emahoy Konjit Abnet¹⁹. There are also some gold medals given by the renowned long-distance runners such as Birhane Adere and Gezahagn Abera. Other museum exhibits include ornaments, neck rings, ear rings, necklaces, neck crosses and so on, which have been given by the faithful of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church as a result of the fulfilment of their vows.

group of important national heritage items belonging to dominant historical figures of the country, in particular, Emperor Menelik II and his wife, Empress Taitu. Personal and institutional experiences are encoded in those museum objects which represent the memory, significance and emotional power of those experiences. In other words, selected images are embodied, and associated histories are transmitted by the museum objects that mainly revolve around the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church and the dominant figures of the eras of the Menelik II and Haile Selassie I.

5. Acquisition and Documentation

Another aspect that needs to be discussed in relation to the issues under consideration is the question of how the museum objects were acquired and who decides what is to be displayed and why. According to informants, at the beginning many of the objects of the Museum were taken from the warehouse of St. Mary Church.

They stated that only the most important objects were selected and transferred to the new museum building for better protection and exhibition.

During the selection, objects have been chosen largely in terms of the worthiness of its donors. Most of them were originally gifts to the church during the reign of Menelik II. The Emperor and the Empress were the main benefactors. There were also many other dignitaries including Empress Zewditu Menelik, the late Emperor Haile Selassie, his wife Empress Menen, Archbishop Mathewos, Princess Yeshashwork and several prominent nobles. There were also donations from abroad that were initially given either to Emperor Menelik or the Empress Taitu in various times from different countries, including Russia, Germany, Britain, Greece, Armenia and Italy. Other objects, including the medals, were recently acquired by the museum.

¹⁸ There is a photograph of King Menelik and Queen Taitu in the museum presented by Queen Victoria of England

¹⁹ She was the wife of Ras Abebe Aregay, the famous Ethiopian patriot during the fascist Italian occupation of Ethiopia and herself a third cousin of Emperor Haile Selassie; who later in life became a nun.

²⁰ Kelvin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and heritage in the post-modern world* (London : Routledge, 1992) p.79

Here it appears that the criteria by which the objects of the museum revolved around Ethiopian Church with a view of constructing historical narratives of the period of Emperor Menelik II. In regard to this Walsh has stated: *...Those who decide what is worthy of preservation and how it should be preserved are basically deciding what is worth remembering.*²⁰

The parish council of the church, headed by the parish clerk, has become responsible for recognizing acquisitions. Donations should only be accepted if they conform to the previous collecting and exhibition traditions of the museum. In addition, newly acquired objects should be relevant for the purpose and activities of the museum.

The proper recording and documentation of new acquisitions has to be made in accordance with the appropriate traditional standards and the internal conventions of the museum set by the parish council. Eventually, the acquired object is sent to the museum in order to be exhibited like other objects. Then the museum curator (who is not professional however) receives the object, gives its permanent identity number, writes a caption for it, and places it in the appropriate showcase. Unfortunately, so far, the museum does not have a written statement of its collection and acquisition policy; rather it works based on the basis of traditions. It is also known that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has registered all the objects housed in the museum and supervises them in collaboration with the head office of the Church.

6. Presentation

A visitor can make a detailed observation on how the Entoto Museum curators arrange objects in order, shape knowledge and construct views. Many of the museum objects are displayed in closed transparent glass containers. There are several closed display cases that are arranged along the entire hall of the museum building. However, at the centre, there is also an open showcase that contains huge objects such as the bed, chair, rifle and saddle of Emperor Menelik. A group of objects are being displayed together in a closed container.

Roughly, the visit may take from 45 minutes to one hour. Curators or guides show groups of objects with associated images and texts providing visitors with interpretations.

The first difficult thing for a new visitor without a guide is where to start. The entrance and exit door of the museum is one. The displays are not designed to be seen in any particular order. Therefore, sometimes visitors find themselves in a dilemma to decide which way to go. In fact, this can be solved if the museum people could arrange various visual aids, encouraging visitors to follow the proper sequence. This could be done by using arrows, numbered panels and other simple mechanisms. It is advisable for visitors to circulate in the direction from left to right.

Entoto museum has employed curators or guides to present its collections to visitors. A guide usually takes a group around the displays. In most cases, large numbers of people come to visit the museum. It is very difficult for visitors without guides because the captions of some of the displays are incomplete and some others are totally without captions. This has obliged visitors, mainly foreigners, to be wholly dependent on guides. In some cases, the guides will be the sole sources of information in the museum.

7. The Tourist Gaze

Obviously, prior knowledge and experience is useful to shape the understanding by the visitors. According to John Urry, the tourist gaze is a 'constructed gaze' that is, socially organized and systematized.²¹ Preconceived images play an important role in the determination of destination choice by tourists.²² In view of this, it is important to assess what the tourist gaze looks at this Museum.

As it has been learnt from many visitors, the museum was not the prime reason for a considerable number of them to climb the Entoto Mountain. Many of the visitors did not have prior knowledge of the museum. The image constructed at Entoto site is based on many other things rather than the museum. Most visitors have found out about the museum when they have gone to Entoto motivated by other things. Some of them have been inspired by the historical significance of the Entoto area. Entoto is said to have been the capital of the 15th century monarch, King Dawit, from whom Emperor Menelik claimed descent. Entoto was also the capital of King Menelik from 1881-89 before his accession to the Imperial throne and the foundation of Addis Ababa, from 1881-1889.

Among the most visited sites of the Entoto museum is, therefore, the ruins of the palace outside the church compound that includes the reception hall and the banquet. Many Orthodox Christians have visited the museum when they have gone there as pilgrims of St. Mary and St. Raguel churches. There are also visitors that are drawn by the St. Raguel church that is located close by with its interior decoration and biblical paintings by Ethiopian artists. Some visitors also go to Entoto to enjoy the panoramic view of the surrounding area including Addis Ababa, because of its commanding height. Entoto Mountain is located at an altitude of 3200 metres above sea level. There are also a few people that visit the museum for personal reasons, for projects or for research.

However, despite the low awareness of many of the visitors, Entoto St. Mary Museum is a major part of the city tour of Addis Ababa and thus has been packaged together with other sites of the Entoto area. According to Rassool and Witz, tourism is not limited only to business activities. They argue that *Tourism is also about the construction, packaging, transmission and consumption of images and representations of society and its past.*²³

The museum as a heritage site is sold for tourists as a packaged commodity in which chosen items are transformed into products through interpretation. However, it is not the physical objects that are commoditized, but the intangible ideas, feelings and experiences that are conveyed through the interpretation of those material components.²⁴

²¹John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990) p.10.

²²Reisinger and Turner, *Cross-Cultural Behaviour in Tourism: Concepts and Analysis* (Butterworth-Heinemann, 2003), p.65.

²³Rassool and Witz. "South Africa: A World in One Country: Moments in International Tourist Encounters with Wildlife, the Primitive and the Modern", *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines*, 143,XXXVI-3 (1996)p.57.

²⁴J E Tunbridge and G J Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage.11.*

8. Who are the Visitors?

As mentioned before, visiting Entoto Museum looks like a social activity because the majority of museum visitors come to the museum in groups.

The majority of the museum visitors are elementary school children mainly from private schools. They are organized in groups to visit the museum largely as part of their formal education. It has been observed that the children are not guided; they do their visiting by themselves. Some of their teachers explain that students are expected to report to the class what they have seen. However, it is found that for a large number of school children, it is very difficult to understand either the displays or their associated meanings. When some of them were asked what they have learned from their visit, they simply said that it was enjoyable and interesting. It seems that things were very difficult to comprehend for them because they were beyond their experiences. Here, it is important to comment that an effort should be made to help school children on visit, not only about the things they are seeing but also about why they are seeing.

The other group of visitors includes religious association members. Members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church associations, many of which are youngsters come to the museum as part of their pilgrimage. They perceive the museum as a principal means to access their religious history and culture. They consider themselves as legitimate and pertinent part of the church community to construct proper cultural interpretations. They have shown such attitudes when some of them have been asked to whom does the heritage belong and who should have the right to interpret and present the museum collections to others.

Muslim visitors rarely come to the museum apparently because they feel that the museum is part of the Church and some think that they are excluded from the history narrated in the museum which is dominated by Orthodox Christianity. According to the museum staff, the cloak of Amir Abdulahi, who was taken captive by King Menelik at the battle of Chelenko,²⁵ used to be exhibited in the museum until some years ago. However, owing to the opposition raised from the priests who blamed the cloak as a Muslim heritage; it was later taken out of the museum and is kept in the store house of the Church with many other treasures. There are also some Muslim visitors that asked the museum staff the reason why treasures related to Lij Iyasu²⁶ are not displayed since objects associated to other rulers of Ethiopia before and after him are displayed.

²⁵ Abdulahi was the last emir of Harar (1875-1887) and taken as a captive by King Menelik after his defeat at the battle of Chelenko on 6 January 1887. *Bahiru Zewde, 1991. A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1974.* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1991), p. 63

²⁶ Liqe SeyumanTibebu Dagne

Entoto St. Mary Museum is also being visited as part of the city-tour by a number of international visitors who come to Addis Ababa for various reasons. Addis Ababa, being the capital city of Ethiopia and the seat of the African Union (AU), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and many other international and regional organizations, hosts a number of people from inside the country and abroad.

However, according to the museum curators, the average number of visitors that come to the museum is lower than what can be expected. According to the curators, reasons like lack of awareness of the museum's existence, its remoteness, lack of means of transportation and lack of information are the main factors limiting the number of visitors.

Misconceptions regarding the museum could also be a factor for the small number of visitors. For a considerable number of visitors, the museum is perceived only as a collection of old cultural objects. However, as argued by Henrietta Lidchi, a museum is not only about objects. She gives more emphasis to 'ideas' rather than museum collections. For her what is more important is the notion of what the world is, or should be; not a simple description of objects. Accordingly, she stresses that what is most valuable about museum objects is the message they communicate, the meaning they provide, the value they attribute and the representations they generate corresponding to a particular historic notion.²⁷

9. Interpretation

Eventually, it is important to see how visitors construct meanings from what they see, and how the meaning is influenced by the intentions of the producers of the exhibition. Different interpretations from a number of historical and present day perspectives are forwarded; but most of the meanings that visitors attach to the museum are similar and revolve around the following points. Some of the audiences give more emphasis for the importance of the museum to understand the history of the late 19th and early 20th centuries Ethiopia, the Menelik era. Others say the museum shows the strong ties that existed between church and state in Ethiopia. Some others stress the role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church in maintaining the spirit of nationalism and in keeping the cultural heritage of the country. There are also visitors that give more weight for its contribution in showing the role of Emperor Menelik II in ensuring the victory at Adwa and the significance of the victory for the Ethiopian sense of national pride. Therefore, from these visitors' perceptions, it can be learnt that historical narratives, representations and constructed meanings in the museum are generally associated with different aspects of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church and Emperor Menelik II.

²⁷ Henrietta Lidchi, 'The Poetics and Politics of exhibiting other cultures' in Stuart Hall (ed), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997) p.160.

10. Conclusion and Recommendation

Visiting Entoto museum can help visitors understand the role of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church in keeping and preserving the cultural heritage of the country. However, the museum needs some form of transformation as the idea of a museum is itself changing and being re-imagined in the contemporary world. The museum stories, dominant interpretations, present-day processes and practices have to be reviewed with new and alternative perspectives. The museum should also remap its cultural territory and reshape the geographies of knowledge. The church and visitors should also see things beyond the cultural objects and focus on the idea behind the object and the message it conveys.

The Museum should not be guided alone by the tourist-driven stereotype image and should not be seen only as a tourist destination. It should go beyond this and stakeholders of the museum should recognize it as mediator of knowledge, information and experience to Ethiopians. It should be known that a museum helps citizens understand themselves, their communities and their place in the world. It is also an essential element to bring about social cohesion, to promote solidarity and strengthen people's desire to live together in a peaceful and cooperative co-existence.

Local visitors are still below the level of expectation according to the guides of the museum. It is most likely because of the absence of a visiting culture and lack of awareness about the museum and its displays. Therefore, there is a pressing need for awareness creation and promotion that would tell the people why and how the museum is important for them. It should also be able to communicate to the public how the objects were collected and the meaning that they have had for makers and users, and those they retain for the society today. Besides promotion, organizing domestic tourism could enhance the number of public visitors to the Museum. Moreover, domestic tourism can help visitors of Entoto museum to share experiences, develop national understanding, appreciate and know what type of heritage they have as citizens of the nation in general and for their local area in particular.

Responsible bodies of Entoto Museum should go beyond routine activities. They should create networks and links with various interested institutions and organizations and enhance the financial capacity of the museum. It is also advisable for the museum to have its own vehicles and thus minimize the problem of transportation for the visitors which could also serve as means of income generating activity.

As the museum building is very narrow and needs to be expanded so that it can be more convenient for visits by large parties and can also be properly ventilated. Other facilities such as a recreational centre, cafeteria, a toilet, resting place and furniture for it has to be given great attention.

Last, but not least, taking Entoto St. Mary Museum as an example, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church should establish similar museums in other areas, at least in some of the large monasteries and churches that house tremendous number of valuable treasures. Museums are better places for the preservation, protection and presentation of cultural heritage. They could also make treasures accessible for public entertainment, education and research.