

These fact sheets have been developed by the AMEP Research Centre to provide AMEP teachers with information on areas of professional concern. They provide a summary as well as identifying some annotated references that can be used to broaden knowledge and extend understanding. These references can be obtained through the AMEP Resource Centre at rescentr@nceltr.mq.edu.au

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Context

Students from the Horn of Africa have been participating in the AMEP in increasing numbers since the early 1990s. Ethiopia is one of the significant countries of origin for AMEP students from the Horn of Africa. In 2000, 350 students from Ethiopia participated in the AMEP.

Historical background

Ethiopia has a long and intriguing history. (The fossilised remains of a hominid – an early human ancestor – dating from 3.2 million years ago were found in a dry lake bed in the north-east of the country in 1974.) There was a vibrant civilisation based in Ethiopia in the first millennium BC, and in the first 700 years after the birth of Christ, the Kingdom of Aksum was one of the strongest civilisations of its time. In the 5th century AD, Christianity was introduced, and this has been a strong influence on Ethiopian culture. Today, about 50% of the population are Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. Islam was introduced during the lifetime of the Prophet Mohammed (the early 7th century), and while there have been periods of fighting between Christians and Muslims, especially in the 16th century, there have generally been harmonious relations between the two religions.

The modern Imperial dynasty that ruled until 1974 was established in the mid-19th century, when the Emperor Tewodros defeated rivals and consolidated his power. He introduced a range of modernising reforms. Such measures were followed by his successors, Emperors Yohannes and Menelik, who founded the present capital of Addis Ababa in the late 19th century. The emperors managed to maintain independence at a time when the rest of Africa was carved up by the European powers. The Ethiopians resisted European imperialism by a combination of skilful diplomacy and alliances, and some military victories – the most notable being a defeat of Italian forces at Adwa in 1896. Emperor

Haile Selassie was crowned Emperor in 1930. In 1935, Italy, under Mussolini, invaded and occupied Ethiopia, brutally repressing Ethiopian resistance. Ethiopia regained its independence in 1942. In the 1950s and 1960s, Haile Selassie pursued policies of modernisation and was supported by the United States. However, there was increasing discontent with his autocratic style, and during a severe drought and famine in 1974, he was deposed by a leftist military regime led by Mengistu Haile Mariam and supported by the Soviet Union. The Derg (as Mengistu's regime was called) implemented policies of nationalisation and agricultural collectivisation. After another severe famine in the mid-1980s, resistance to the regime increased, and an alliance of opposition groups finally succeeded in overthrowing Mengistu in 1991. A democratically elected regime was installed and a more decentralised structure, which gave regional governments more power at the expense of the central government, was introduced in 1995.

In 1998, a border dispute led to a war with Eritrea, which had declared itself independent from Ethiopia in 1993. Deportations of Ethiopian citizens identified as 'Eritrean' were a consequence of this war.

Peoples and cultures

Ethiopia has a population of just over 60 million, which is growing quickly at the rate of 3% per year. Average life expectancy is 49 years.

The ethnolinguistic structure of Ethiopia's population is complex. Not only are there different groups belonging to different language families, but within each group there are many subgroups and variations. The population is made up of groups whose language is either Ethio-Semitic (including the Amhara, Tigray, Tigré and the Gurage), Cushitic (including the Oromo, Somali, Afar and Sidama), and Nilo-Saharan.

There has been extensive interaction between these groups over the centuries, and each has influenced

the other. The Amhara, who form about 24% of the population, were the historical rulers and elite of Ethiopia. Traditionally, they have been farmers, warriors and government functionaries. They occupy the north central part of the country. They are predominantly Orthodox Christians. The Tigrayans form about 5% of the population and live in the northernmost part of the country, along the border with Eritrea. They share the legacy of Aksum and Christian tradition with the Amhara.

The Oromo (called Galla by the Amhara) form the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, constituting about 54% of the population. The Oromo are largely rural, have an egalitarian culture and are Muslim, Christian and animist in their religious beliefs. They tend to live in the south of the country, and are generally cattle farmers.

There is a plethora of smaller groups, including over one million Somalis.

Interethnic relations in Ethiopia are extremely complex. Over the centuries there has been blending and intermixing between groups. Some non-Amhara have assimilated with the Amhara and have become indistinguishable from them. Even Amhara from different areas see themselves as different from other Amhara. Historically, some groups have aided the Amhara, while others have opposed them. Most notable among the latter are the Tigrayans and the Somalis of the Ogaden, the easternmost part of the country, and an area that has been the source of conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia on a number of occasions.

Rural populations are static and isolated, while the cities and towns are ethnically diverse and dynamic, and are sites of considerable social diversity.

More than 70 languages are used in Ethiopia, but Amharic is the official language and is spoken by about 50% of the population. It is also the language of education, the media and government. Great value is attached to eloquence, and a man who can use evocative language to create ambiguity and subtle shades of meaning is highly regarded.

Economy and education

Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries on Earth, with an annual average per capita income of approximately US\$115. Ninety per cent of the population live in the countryside, mostly as subsistence farmers, growing either cereal crops or raising livestock. Coffee is widely grown on the highland plateau and is the most significant source of export income. Although the country is potentially quite productive, at times prolonged droughts have created uncertainty in food supply, and problems of food shortage have been exacerbated by political problems.

Under the Imperial regime, literacy rates were about 10%. There were extensive literacy campaigns under the Derg, which claimed to have increased the literacy rate to about 60% in 1985. However, more recent estimates put the literacy rate significantly lower at somewhere between 25% and 36%. Rates of school attendance at present are 28% for children in primary school and 15% for secondary school. A university and technical colleges are situated in Addis Ababa.

Classroom issues

Diversity within Ethiopia means that students may come from different regions, speak different first languages and have different cultures and religions. There is considerable social diversity, and so teachers need to be careful about making generalisations about 'Ethiopians' or assuming that different students from Ethiopia will automatically relate to each other. While low levels of education are widespread, there is also a well-educated middle class in the cities.

There is no standard orthography for transcribing Ethiopian names to the Roman alphabet, and so spellings of names can vary.

The Western clock and calendar may be relatively new for some students from Ethiopia. Ethiopia uses a distinctive clock system, in which one o'clock in the day is sunrise, two o'clock is an hour later and so on until sunset, when it becomes one o'clock at night. The Ethiopian calendar is out of synchronisation with the Gregorian calendar – 2001 is 1993 in the Ethiopian calendar, with 11 September 2001 as the date on which the Ethiopian New Year for 1994 falls.

In Amharic, all syllables are given equal stress, so it may take time for students to adjust to the stress-timed rhythms of spoken English.

Annotated bibliography

Gordon, F L 2000. *Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti*. Melbourne: Lonely Planet Publications (Lonely Planet also have a website on Ethiopia at www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/africa/ethiopia)

This travel guide provides a wide range of information about Ethiopia – obviously written from the perspective of the tourist or potential tourist. The introductory sections provide useful summaries of important aspects of the country, and the descriptions of different cities and parts of the country provide a feel for regional variations within Ethiopia. Snippets of 'boxed text' provide interesting insights into various aspects of history, culture and travel experience. It could provide teachers of students from Ethiopia with a very readable and evocative feel for their students' country of origin, which is treated more respectfully and sensitively than is often the case with travel guides.

Ofcanzy, Thomas P and LaVerle Berry 1993. *Ethiopia: A Country Study*. Washington DC Federal Research Division, Library of Congress (Also available online at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/ettoc.html>)

This comprehensive volume was prepared by the US Library of Congress for the Department of Army and the US Diplomatic Service. It includes sections on the Historical Setting, Society and its Environment, the Economy, Government and Policy, National Security, as well as a bibliography and glossary. The information provided is extremely detailed, and often comparison is made regarding conditions under the Imperial regime and the Derg. Data for this volume was collected in 1991, so little information is provided on more recent conditions and developments. This is a useful source of extensive and detailed information, although it is rather 'dry' in its style, reading like a social sciences textbook.

The online version claims to have updated information when appropriate. The online version is easy to navigate, with the home page being the contents page of the book.

Marcus, H G 1994. *A History of Ethiopia*. Berkeley: University of California Press

A comprehensive and authoritative history of Ethiopia up to 1991. Chapters cover significant periods in the history of the country, and black and white photos illustrate and supplement the text. Useful if you want a solid understanding of Ethiopia's history.

Ethiopia Online website:
<http://www.ethiopiaonline.net/>

This site has links to a number of organisations within Ethiopia, including the Tourism Authority and the independent English language newspaper site (*The Addis Tribune*). This can be used for teachers to access sites and learn more about the country – or for AMEP students to look at details of their country – in most cases described in English. This site is hosted at NetNation (an organisation providing sites to non-government

organisations and businesses) – and a number of the links are sites actually hosted in Ethiopia.

Columbia University African Studies website:
<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/africa/cuivl/Ethiopia.html>

This site has links organised in four sections: General Resources and Online News; Economic Development, Environment, Health, and the Internet; Education, History, and Culture; and Politics and Human Rights. There are links to a number of sites related to various aspects of Ethiopian life, politics and economy, and academic essays on Ethiopia's history. Of interest to AMEP teachers may be the Eritrea–Ethiopia conflict site, on which the arguments behind the military clashes in 1998 are presented from the Ethiopian perspective. (This may help teachers to raise their awareness of the perceptions of Ethiopian and Eritrean students to this recent conflict and provide some details of those events.)

University of Pennsylvania African Studies website:
http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Country_Specific/Ethiopia.html

This site has a large number of links to other sites with a wide variety of information about Ethiopia, including the 'Anything on Ethiopia' site (<http://www.anythingonethiopia.com/>), and other sites that have current news bulletins from Ethiopia, academic discussions, business and other information. It also has a map and basic statistical information about Ethiopia.

Stanford University 'Africa South of the Sahara' website:
<http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/ethio.html>

This site contains links to over 120 sites with information about Ethiopia on a wide range of topics including women's issues, the Constitution of Ethiopia, bird-watching in Ethiopia, the autobiography of Haile Selassie, the Oromo Liberation Front, the walled city of Harer, international aid projects in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopian Jews, and so on. Well worth a visit if you want to find sites with all sorts of information about Ethiopia.

Ethnologue website:
www.ethnologue.com

This site carries encyclopaedic entries on world languages – numbers of speakers, where they are spoken and so on. By selecting Ethiopia, data can be obtained about Ethiopia's languages, including a map showing the distribution of speakers of different language across the country. The site does not contain detailed descriptions of the languages for which it provides data.

Ethiopia website:
www.anythingonethiopia.com/aoed/home.asp

This site is maintained by Unity College, a private higher education institution in Addis Ababa. It provides a comprehensive coverage of information on a variety of

topics about Ethiopia. The home site has links to pages on the following topics: About Ethiopia, travel and tourism, news, entertainment, business Centre and shopping. The 'About Ethiopia' link will be of particular interest to teachers wishing to learn more about Ethiopia. It has two sections – 'Country profile' and 'Culture' which provide further links to pages on facts about Ethiopia, geography, demography, history, politics, economy, environment, biographies, society and a bibliography on Ethiopia. These links feature brief introductory paragraphs on the topic, often with a graphic, and a link to further information. Within this site there is information on literature, Ethiopian food, famous people, ceremonies and a wealth of other information.

Abyssinia Cyberspace website

www.abyssiniacybergateway.net/ethiopia/index.html

This site provides links to other sites on a wide range of topics on Ethiopia (and Eritrea and some other parts of the Horn of Africa) maintained by many different organisations. It contains no information – only the links to the sites. The links are grouped into categories such as 'Educational Institutions', 'Art and Culture' and 'Ethiopia on the Net'.

IRC (International Rescue Committee) and UNHCR websites

<http://www.the IRC.org/index.cfm>

<http://www.unhcr.ch>

These sites provide information on relief and support programs of non government organisations and the United Nations to support refugees in Ethiopia and surrounding countries. These sites may provide AMEP teachers with some background information on events that have led to the displacement of Ethiopian students, and the sorts of protection and resettlement programs that students and their families may have experienced.

Oromia Online Website

www.oromia.org

The Oromo people form the largest Ethnic group within Ethiopia (about 32%). They see themselves as oppressed by the Amharic elite which controls Ethiopia's government and economy. There are significant numbers of Oromo people among Ethiopians settling in Australia. Since 1974 there has been a resistance struggle against Ethiopian rule. This site gives the perspective of those struggling for Oromo independence, and provides both background to conflict within Ethiopia and an alternative reading of Ethiopia's history and current events in Ethiopia.

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