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INTERNATIONAL THEATRE JOURNAL

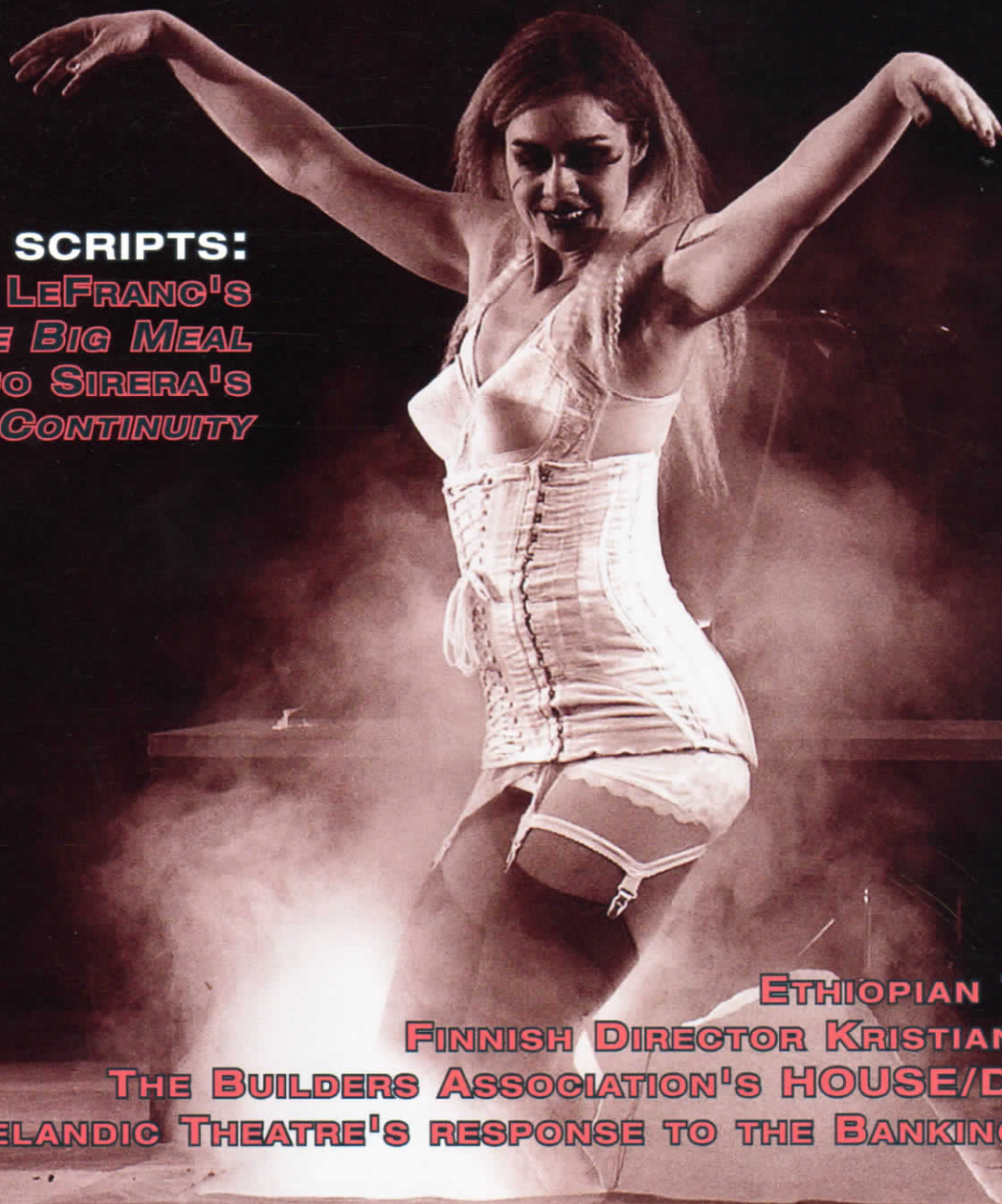
**THE SCRIPTS:**

DAN LEFRANC'S

*THE BIG MEAL*

RODOLFO SIRERA'S

*CONTINUITY*



**PLUS**

**ETHIOPIAN THEATER**

**FINNISH DIRECTOR KRISTIAN SMEDS**

**THE BUILDERS ASSOCIATION'S HOUSE/DIVIDED**

**ICELANDIC THEATRE'S RESPONSE TO THE BANKING CRISIS**

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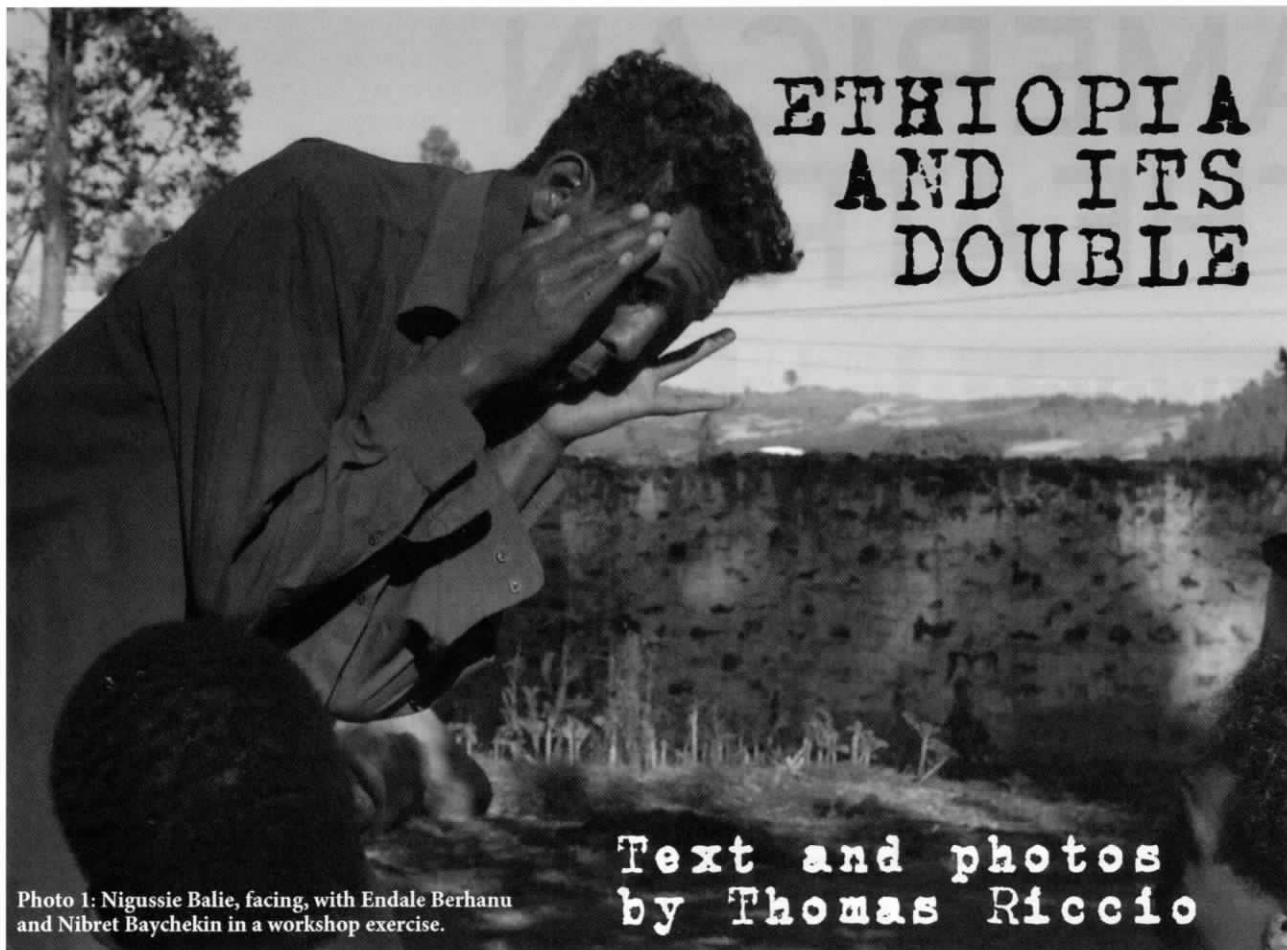


Photo 1: Nigussie Balie, facing, with Endale Berhanu and Nibret Baychekin in a workshop exercise.

Text and photos  
by Thomas Riccio

The theatre is located off of a busy, exhaust filled and noisy thoroughfare in Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia. It is not far from Martyrs Square, an oversized stone tribute depicting tortured souls butchered by the Fascist Italian occupiers in 1936. The National Museum is next door, where Lucy, the three million year old skeletal remains of the oldest hominid ever discovered, resides. Farther down the street is the Papal residence of the Ethiopian Christian Orthodox Church. In the other direction is Lion Zoo Park, where nineteen caged and emaciated lions, the descendants of the pets of former Emperor Halle Selassie, are kept.

Outside the high walled entrance to the theatre compound, donkeys and cattle are herded by men wearing a style of clothing fashioned during the time of Christ. The street scene includes a colorful assortment of beggars—Lepers with eaten off noses and ears, others with stumps for hands and feet; homeless and pitiful pregnant women nursing; and every variety of the sick, destitute, and hungry in rags mingled with churchgoers, policemen, business types, a smattering of tourist, street hustlers selling bootlegged merchandise, and students.

**Thomas Riccio**, performance writer, creator, and director, is Professor of Performance and Aesthetic Studies at the University of Texas at Dallas. He has conducted research, workshops, and devised performances in Africa, Siberia, Korea, China, and Alaska. He directs the Litooma Cultural Project and Dead White Zombies, a post-disciplinary performance group.

The auditorium is the main venue of the Addis Ababa University theatre department and is part of a 1970s socialist era compound of concrete buildings. To enter requires identification, scrutiny, and being searched by two armed policemen. The compound had seen better days. The Soviet-backed, socialist dictatorship that traumatized the country from 1975 to 1991 built countless fast and poorly constructed poured-concrete buildings, which stand today as lived in, haunted memorials. Students drifting through the humid, languid haze match the fading and chipped paint, crumble, and litter. Despite this, and with resolute defiance filled with passion, heart, and generosity, our January 2010 performance took place.

The echoing, cavern-like auditorium has a balcony, scruffy walls, peeling paint, and curtains heavy with filth and fatigue, full of rips, tears, and dry rot. The musty building smells of mildew, sweat, and humanity. There is no sound system and only a few battered lights. As a cleaning woman swept, the cast and I arranged fatigued wooden folding chairs to create a circle on the auditorium floor. We spread

long-leafed elephant grass, a traditional way to sacralize a space, and waited for an audience.

Our performance was previously presented outdoors north of the city center and word had traveled fast. The national elections, however, were approaching and the single party government was skittish. University administrators, most of whom are members of the ruling political party, were encouraging but hesitated to take responsibility for a performance that had people talking. The Ethiopian National Theatre and the Hager Fikir Theatre, the two professional theatres in Addis Ababa, essentially pliant and bureaucratic political wings of the government, would not touch the performance. The state television had heard of the production and expressed interest in filming it, however that changed once they saw the tape.

If it were not for Belaneh Abune, a respected and politically savvy theatre director, party member, and chair of the theatre department at the University, we would not have performed at all. With Abune's sponsorship, permission was secured from the police and university administration to use an open space on the main campus. But that permit was withdrawn for fear the performance would incite a riot. The University had, since the early 1960s, been known as a cauldron of political activism. A 2005 student demonstration left nearly two-dozen students dead and scores injured when police opened fire on protesters.

Approval to perform at the theatre came late and we had less than a day to advertise. Despite only a few handmade posters around town and campus, word of our performance traveled swiftly by word of mouth and cell phones. By the time we began the performance, the auditorium floor, stage, and balcony were crowded with latecomers continuing to arrive to fill the room with nearly five hundred people. [Photo 2]

Our performance of *Andegna*, which means "the first" in Amharic, was charged not with politics, provocation or sedition, but rather with something far more dangerous – questions. Questions are like shadows, following and watching, dark and looming, and yet familiar. Only the hard, direct light of exposure dissipates a shadow.

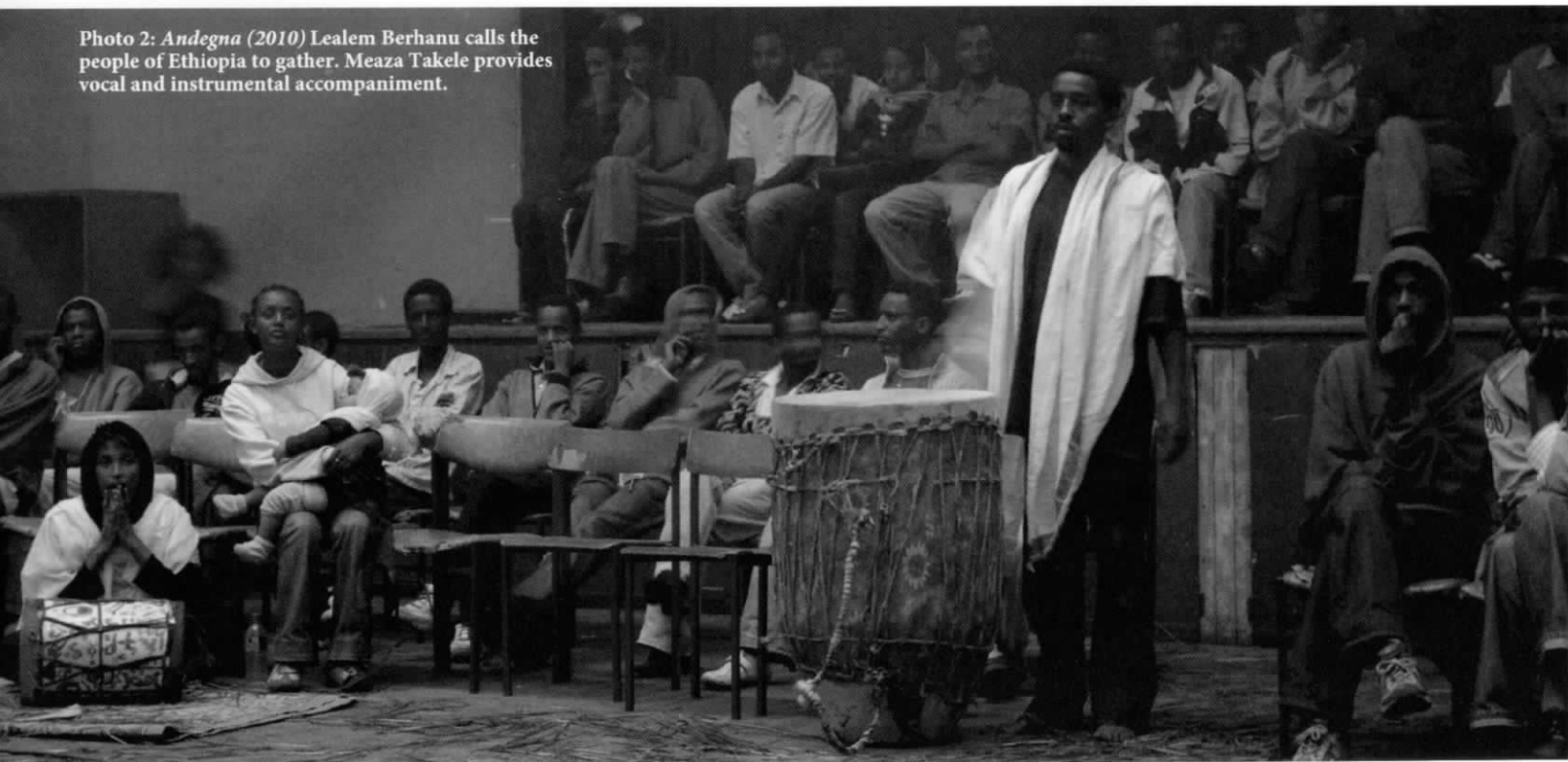
The *Andegna* project ensemble had a vivid awareness of the crossing currents of our emerging global culture. They all own cell phones, have email accounts, and are college educated. However, they live in a nation where newspapers and the media are controlled tightly by the government with dissent dealt with severely. Email service is slow and censored. Television is state controlled, offering propagandist programming and nothing foreign. Radio is either state controlled or, if independent, tightly monitored. Cinemas show only locally produced films. An average Ethiopian's sense of the greater world is restricted to control the population. Ideas are dangerous in Ethiopia.

The *Andegna* ensemble knew they were marginalized, disadvantaged, and lacked the basic opportunities enjoyed by their contemporaries in the developed world. They live in two worlds and are deeply conflicted, proud of their nation and its culture, yet acutely aware of, and frustrated by, Ethiopia's economic stagnation, censorship, conformist thinking, political paralysis, and poverty.

"I am always looking for something to follow because I don't know who I should be anymore," said performer Nigussie Baylie, during one of the many discussions that developed *Andegna*. "How did I become shadow of myself? I am afraid I will disappear."

The performance project consisted of three distinct phases: workshop, development, and performance. The workshops (four hours a day, five days a week) consisted of general training, theatre games, improvisations, and awareness exercises. The group consisted of ten performers

Photo 2: *Andegna* (2010) Lealem Berhanu calls the people of Ethiopia to gather. Meaza Takele provides vocal and instrumental accompaniment.





**Photo 3:** Nigussie Balie and Lealem Berhanu in a Litooma workshop exercise dealing with the confrontation of shadows.

aged twenty-three to thirty-one years old. All were university trained, meaning that their experience blended western Method acting, traditional performance and dance, and street theatre. All had performed in western dramas and had worked with a variety of expressive forms including puppetry, mask, and broad burlesque/cabaret styles. A few, including Michael Million and his wife, Meaza Takele, worked in the Ethiopian film, television, and radio drama industries; others had their own companies doing theatre for for international non-governmental agencies or traditional dancing for tourists at local hotels and clubs. [Photos 3 and 4]

The performance of *Andegna* was developed working five days a week over an eight-week period during October and November of 2009. The performance development phase built on the participatory, workshop sensibility as it worked to reconnect performers with their physical, imaginative, cultural and creative selves. Initially the shadow-self theme was vague, but as the work

progressed it emerged from the work becoming a potent, centrifugal metaphor.

The workshops included exchanging skills and sharing traditional dances, songs, drumming, traditions, and stories. In this way the group explored and re-evaluated their cultural inheritance in a positive and proactive way, making it their own and themselves as participants in its evolution. Indigenous performance languages embody cultural knowledge, portraying a specific

place and way of being in and with the world. The rhythms, vocalizations, movements, and gestures are integrated components, and in a way, the narrative of a living culture. That knowledge, however, is often seen as having only a limited, culturally hermetic and contextual application.

Ethiopia has nearly one hundred ethnic groups, with a wide variety of traditional performance languages and expressions. Many major traditional expressions—ritual, rites, rhythms, songs, and dances—are widely known via cultural transmission, university classes,

**Photo 4:** Nigussie Balie in a Litooma workshop exercise with Endale Berhanu and Nibret Baycheikin looking on.



or television programs serving nationalist agendas. Ethiopian performance traditions are rich and varied, and include a wide variety of musical, dance, and verbal performance vocabularies that encompassed every aspect of daily, ritual, and ceremonial activity. Examples include professional female mourners, farming and shepherd songs, “bementa” (an insult versifying), and “incarasalamenta” (a call-response poetic versification used in traditional justice proceedings).

Ethiopia is also possibly the most religiously expressive country in the world. Each day is organized by amplified Muslim calls to prayer beginning early in the morning and continuing throughout the day becoming part of the atmosphere. Not to be outdone, the Ethiopian Christian Orthodox churches broadcasts over loudspeakers, sermons, prayers, and songs for hours on holy days. Any given day an Orthodox festival or funeral takes place somewhere in the capital, attended by thousands of the faithful.

Unlike North Americans and Europeans who value individuality and freedom, the underlying cultural impulse in Ethiopia is cultural homogeneity and conformity in behavior, dress, and thinking. Oft repeated proverbs serve as touchstones: “A fly never enters into a shut mouth,” “Being quiet is gold,” “When you open your mouth your brain is seen,” and “A shoe should be under the bed” (meaning your thoughts should be hidden). Lealem Berhanu, a twenty-nine year old performer, noted

“Ethiopians are raised not to question. To ask questions is to be threatening.” Nibret Baychenkin added, “Ask what must be done and do not ask questions. Otherwise you are criticized, maybe beaten by your father, family, teachers, the church, everyone. That is why we are the way we are.”

The history of Ethiopia is essentially a succession of religiously fueled emperors and political despots dating from the fourth century. The forty-four year capricious rule of Haile Selassie, which ended in 1974, was essentially a medieval feudal state. That era was followed by civil war and then seventeen years of violently enforced socialist rule, which was followed by the one party, ethnically determined “democracy” that remains in power today. To “not ask questions” was, and remains, an acculturated practicality. Many members of our ensemble have family members who were tortured, imprisoned, or killed as a result of the socialist reign of terror that ended in 1991. Add in religion, poverty, poor healthcare, numerous droughts, famines, civil wars, and uprisings, and you have some deep-seated insecurities generationally flowing through the culture. However, 1600 years of conformity, whether religiously, educationally, or politically mandated, has now come face-to-face with the egalitarianism conveyed by global awareness. [Photo 5]

The theme that informed our work was conformity. “We are afraid to ask questions and are ashamed to accept the opinion of another,” said Nuredin Nesro, a tall, Muslim

Photo 5: Ethiopian Orthodox Christian ceremony, St. Michaels church in the mountains surrounding Addis Ababa.



performer. "That is why we are inflexible; we are stuck in only one way of thinking and afraid of anything new," added Meaza Takele, as she nursed her baby.

Endale Berhanu, a former church deacon, was angry: "And when people talk it is all about nothing. People talk around things and are afraid to say anything meaningful. That is why Ethiopia never gets anything done." Daniel Gumatain, recent university graduate, was frustrated,

And that is why people are suspicious of one another, we don't trust one another, we think everything has a subtext. What did they mean by that? You ask all the time. It is how we are raised. That is why we stay silent. Silent, unless talking about nothing.

The group described their culture as one of recitation, a "mimic culture."

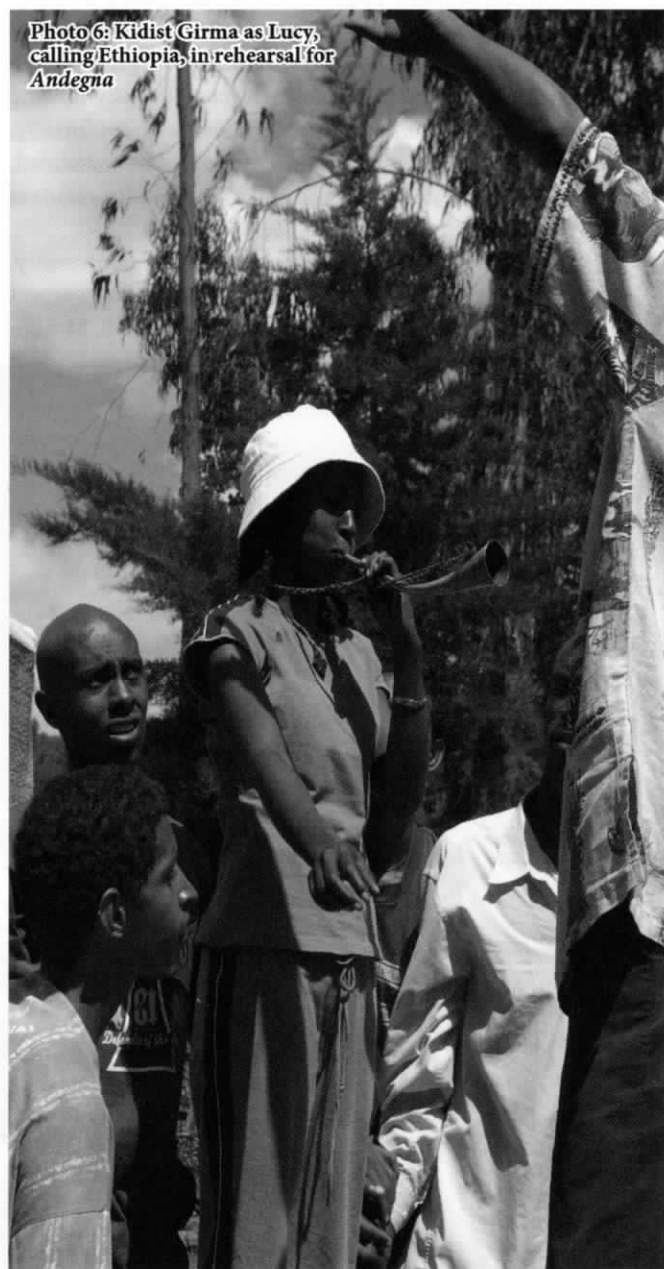


Photo 6: Kidist Girma as Lucy, calling Ethiopia, in rehearsal for *Andegna*

The project asked the performers to question and re-conceptualize their cultural resources so as to express their present moment and place. Rather than blindly accept western modes of performance creation and expression or, alternatively, revert to the strictures of traditional performance, the ensemble members were charged with the creation of an expression suited to their specific needs. Our work was not about creating nostalgic, museum renderings, but rather access all resources to serve the reimagining of Ethiopia through their bodies and performance.

Yoga and mediation were introduced as were other culturally non-specific exercises exploring trust, awareness, stillness, concentration, leadership, and imagination; movement, vocal, and language explorations were integral. All of our work was discussed to establish an open dialogue and ensemble. Through exercises – dialogue, personal, bodily, emotional, racial, and physical – cultural barriers were broken down. As the work progressed, an awakening unfolded. Giving expression to personal feelings and the unleashing of creativity was an unexpected discovery for the ensemble.

Our exercises and explorations provoked wide ranging discussions, which, in turn, spurred further explorations and improvisations, each step building and referring to the previous steps, culminating in the performance of *Andegna*. The process, methods, and objectives were continually adjusted and discussed, often in Amharic, with my presence being advisory. The work ethos was transparency and shared ownership, so as to enable the ensemble to continue without me. To this end, the group was often divided into smaller groups to work on specific scenes or tasks they determined. This strategy served short-term and production objectives, developing leadership skills as it allowed the process to breathe and adjust with the unexpected.

*Litooma*, my ongoing indigenous performance project, produced with and hosted by *Lul Theatre*, was produced in a large, walled compound in the mountainous area north of the city center. Anatoly Antohin, a well-known Soviet-era playwright and former colleague at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, had recently retired there and invited me to develop a project. His wife Esther Selassie, a princess of royal book, is the great-granddaughter of Haile Selassie, the former Emperor of Ethiopia. She had left the country thirty years earlier, narrowly escaping death squads. The current government, hungry for foreign investment, was luring exiled Ethiopians back and repatriating confiscated properties.

It was a beautiful afternoon, under the clear blue, cloud-dappled sky, when I asked a question, "If Ethiopia is such a great nation and culture, one going back thousands of years, what happened? Why is life so miserable now? Why is it at the bottom among the world's nations?" The ensemble members stirred uneasily.

An Ethiopian's connection to their land is sacred, beyond patriotism – almost spiritual. The afterbirth

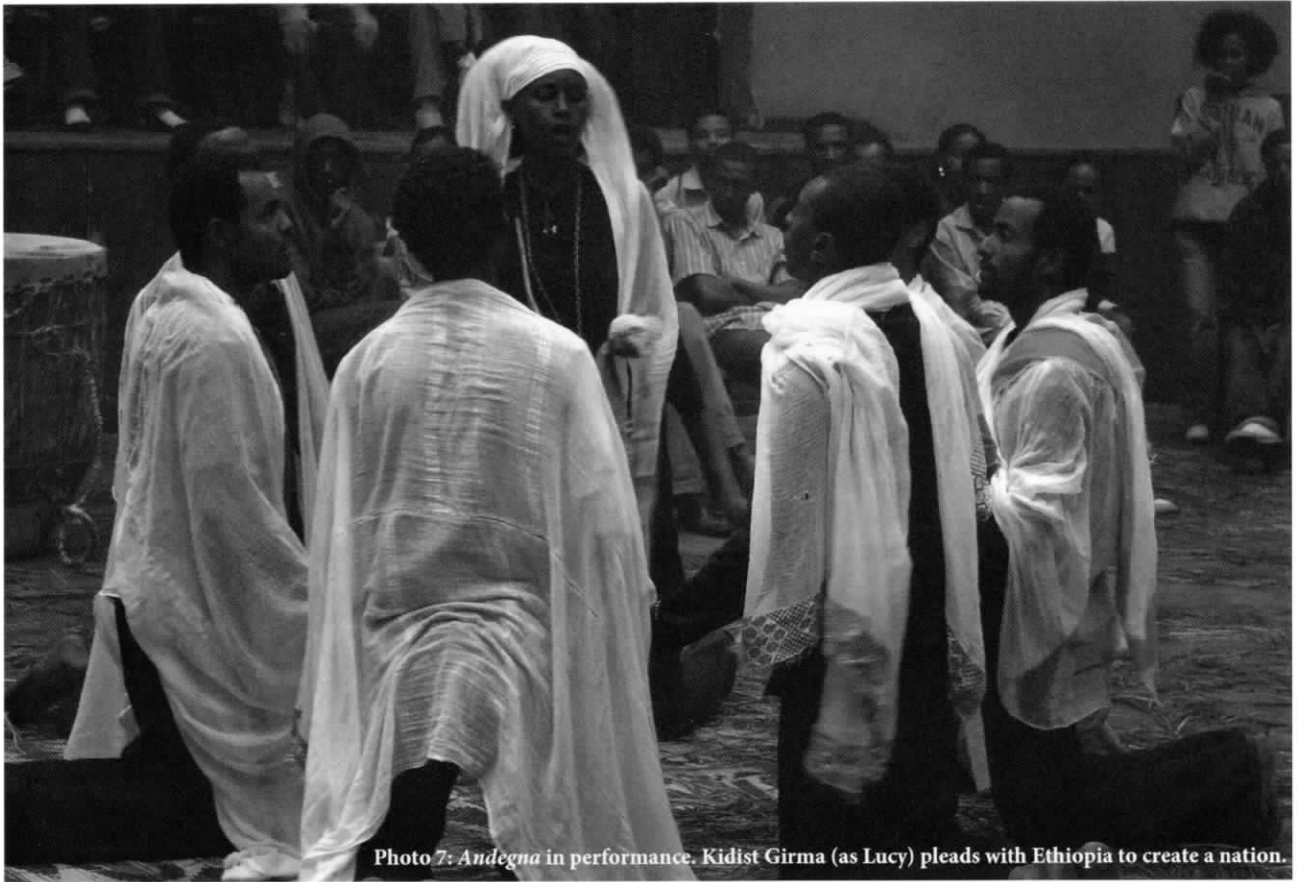


Photo 7: *Andegna* in performance. Kidist Girma (as Lucy) pleads with Ethiopia to create a nation.

of several ensemble members had been buried as a demonstration of their connection to the land. They are not a nation of immigrants but of people who had inhabited a land for thousands of years, developing a place-based culture and worldview that is difficult for migration-formed cultures, such as the United States, to comprehend.

For a week, after mornings of performance work, we sat under a tree on the soft grass and went through the highpoints of Ethiopian history and mythology, trying to unravel why and how Ethiopia had fallen behind the rest of the world. These bright, hard-working young people, the future of the nation, looked hard at their collective past and the grim prospects of tomorrow.

The unemployment rate in Ethiopia is about 45 percent, higher among young adults who are forced to live with parents, marry late, and scrape by with low-paying jobs and their wits. Occasional radio drama, theatre, and film roles provide performers with some income. Several occasionally teach drama classes at international schools, one had a puppet theatre, others cobbled together income doing day labor, working in shops, doing translations, and street vending. Many in the group could not afford bus transport, which equaled 80 cents a day.

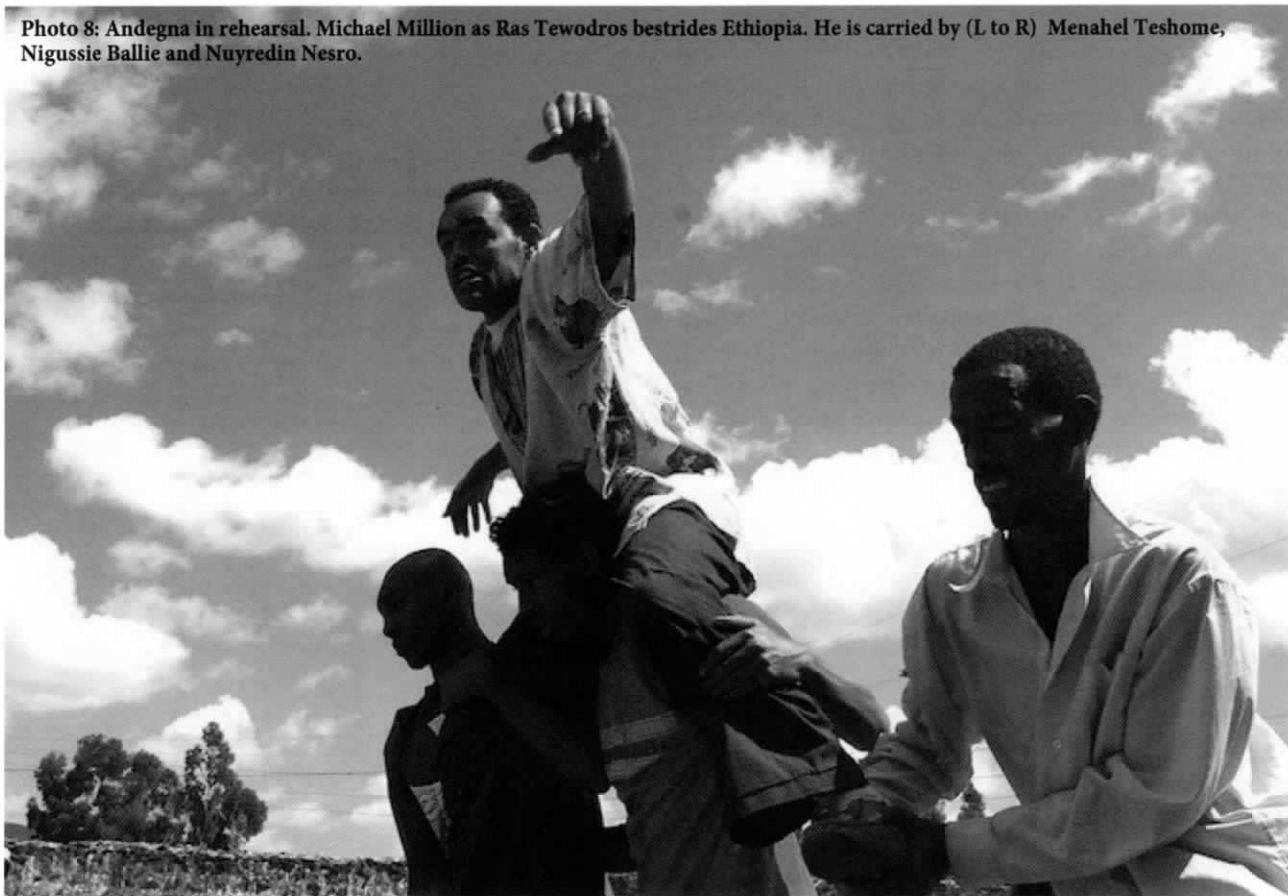
The group decided on a historical approach outlining historical high points. In this way, they hoped to unravel the tightly knotted Ethiopian culture and character to understand their contemporary predicament better. Like any culture, history melds with mythology, willing

into existence an idealized, prideful, self-image, which, if not counter-balanced with honest evaluation, leads to delusion and the perpetuation of dysfunction. For many of the performers, disillusionment and distrust in their system was an accepted fact. "We have not learned from the past because we are so prideful, and we are so prideful because in reality we are afraid and insecure," Endale Berhanu said during a discussion later incorporated into our performance. "We accept we are poor because we know no other way."

"We have become deceitful and dishonest. A man may be hungry, but he will act like he is wealthy. A man may tell you he is your friend, but he is really working against you. This is the way we are. We like the past because our present is so pitiful," remarked Berhanu. "We hide the truth. There is always a subtext, we have public faces that hide our private faces. For so long we have not been able to say what we really think or feel. Now it is the way we are," Mehyahel Teshome continued with words to be included in the performance.

Ethiopian culture is one of the oldest continuing cultures in the world, born at the cross roads of ancient civilizations, and, arguably, the first in many things. Although no longer the first today, a culturally embedded and propagated sense of superiority, if not arrogance, lives on. It was this inflated self-image the ensemble wanted to expose. Where did it come from? Why and how did it persist? When it was pointed out to me, I became aware

Photo 8: Andegna in rehearsal. Michael Million as Ras Tewodros bestrides Ethiopia. He is carried by (L to R) Menahel Teshome, Nigussie Ballie and Nuyredin Nesro.



of oft-repeated advertising slogans of “The First” and the “The Best” all around the city. In everyday conversation, body language, and interactions, a sense of anointed entitlement, if not racism, became increasingly apparent. Ethiopia’s mythic self-image had a “co-existing evil twin,” a “ghost” and persistent “shadow that had turned on and destroyed its master, reality.”

The oldest human remains in the world were found in Ethiopia, which is often referred to as the cradle of the human species. “Lucy” was the name given to ape-like and fragmentary remains, the genetic mother of us all, the “first,” and a point of national pride. It was with the character Lucy that our performance began. [Photo 6]

The performance opens with the stage empty and circled by the audience. Behind and surrounding the audience the performers use a variety of traditional “calls.” These codified and stylized calls, still used in rural and urban settings today, are familiar to Ethiopians and are evocative of traditional ways of being. The calls, serving as a sort of town crier system, were inspired by that which echoed on the streets outside the compound where we rehearsed, announcing deaths, births, or marriages. Such traditional calls have been colorfully adapted to announce junk collectors, merchants, or fruit and vegetable sellers who ply their trade through the streets.

The multiple and simultaneous traditional calls immediately establish the context for our performance,

with the overlay of calls suggesting a stylized reinvention and application of the tradition. In a sense these calls serve as a preface. A traditional announcement by a brass horn beckons the ensemble to the circle, the metaphoric and mythic Ethiopia. Once in the circle the performers, each representing a different and far-reaching ethnic region (conveyed by dialect or local language), use traditional call-responses to convey why they are calling. One is making a call to war, another for a death, and others for a land dispute, auction, celebration, and the like. Then the action switches to dialog: “Why are we all called here?” “You are disturbing me, I was busy.” There is anger and confusion, which persists until the fragmented Ethiopian culture, calling and arguing for so many different reasons, falls to the ground once they realize that Lucy, their mother, has called them. The weight of the truth coupled with the recognition of Lucy makes them ashamed and afraid.

Unlike the performers and the myriad ethnic groups they represent, Lucy is without shadows. She implores them to stand much like our evolutionary ancestors had to stand and adapt. They try, stumble, and falter. Some are afraid or use crutches, others make excuses, or make fun, imitate, mimic, or ridicule those who try, or refuse defiantly, self-righteously, preferring their crippled status quo. The inability to stand on their own resonates loudly with our audiences. Complacency, excuses, and fear are established as themes. Hoots and hollers of audience recognition tell us that we have hit a nerve.



Lucy leaves and those left behind miss her and bemoan their missed opportunity, crying and calling out for another chance. Slowly, they stumble awkwardly, but learn to stand on their own. The Queen of Sheba returns from Jerusalem and in her womb is Menelik the First, son of wise King Solomon. Sheba is, of course, the most beautiful woman in the world, her child fathered by the wisest man in the world. This is the origin of Ethiopian cultural and mythic narrative. The ancient kingdom of Axum is established and is equal to the other great empires of the ancient world.

Soon Emperor Menelik returns to his father and steals the Ark of the Covenant – the stone tablet on which God inscribed the Ten Commandments. Ethiopians do not see this as thievery, but destiny, for the Jewish temple would soon be destroyed, and it was they, the Ethiopians, who saved the sacred tablets for all of humanity. To this day, Ethiopians insist the Ark of the Covenant resides in their country, its exact location kept secret for its protection. Ethiopians, and many of the young ensemble members, vehemently insisted that they are the God-ordained keepers of the sacred tablet on which civilization stands. It is for this reason that Ethiopia is said to be one of the lost tribes of Israel and why Haile Selassie, the direct “descendent” of Sheba, came to be God incarnate for the Rastafarians. The history and culture of Ethiopia is based on an inexplicable folding of myth and history often serving political or religious agendas.

Ethiopia was the first to adopt Christianity as its religion in the year 420. Orthodox means the “correct way” and, of course, Ethiopians feel that only they practice Christianity as Christ had intended. Today, one cannot underestimate the pervasive influence Orthodox Christianity has on Ethiopia. Ethiopia is religious to an extreme: its history, politics, mythology, and religions blur. Ensemble member Lealem Berhanu told me: “Religion and Ethiopia cannot be separated because they are the same. It is how the people survive and are controlled. If not for religion, there would be violence because our situation is very bad.”

It is not an exaggeration to say that the Ethiopian psyche and identity were shaped, and are today maintained, by repressive Christian Orthodoxy which resists any social, cultural, or individual advancement. But, in an uncertain, changing, and challenging world, religion has become a salve holding great sway over the people and perpetuating an unhealthy co-dependency.

Ensemble member Endale Berhanu, former seminarian and church deacon, remarked, “It is like family, you know it may not be correct, but it is your mother and father and you can do nothing but love and protect them. It doesn’t matter what you feel and know otherwise.” This line was incorporated into the performance, which voiced the widely felt, but unspoken. [Photo 7]

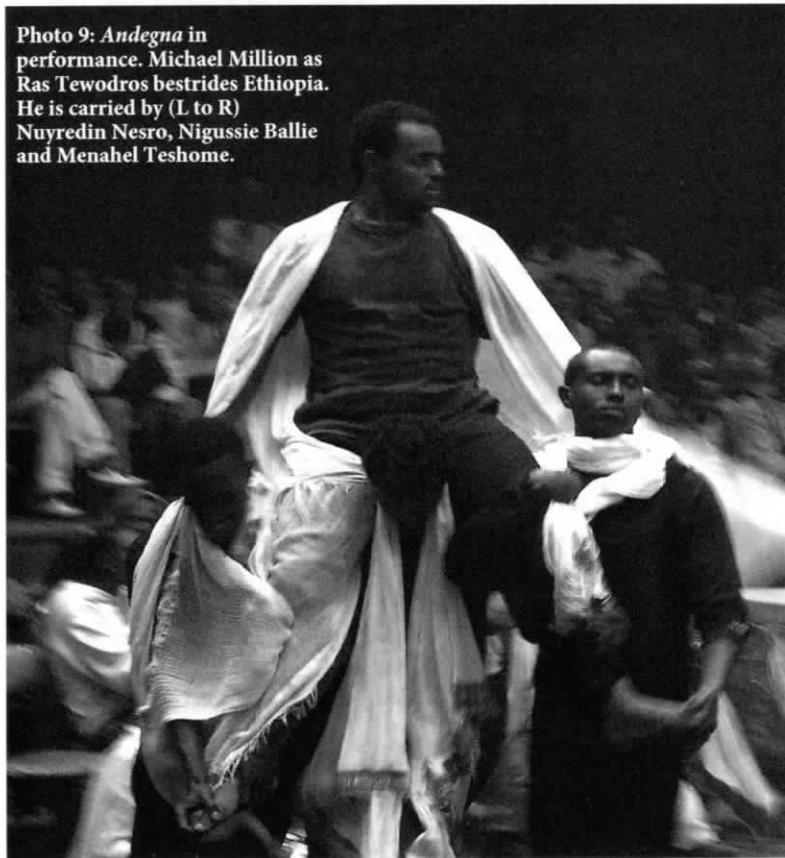
The religious righteousness of Ethiopia was further solidified when, in the eighth century, it became the first nation to accept and offer refuge to Islam. At the behest of

the prophet Mohamed, persecuted Muslims were offered sanctuary in Ethiopia. Many stayed and made Ethiopia their home, and today Christians and Muslims live in relative harmony. Because of their generosity, Ethiopia is mentioned in the Koran: “Ethiopia shall not be touched.” Nuredin Nesro, a Muslim performer, remarks in the performance ironically, “Surely Ethiopia is a special land and people blessed and protected by all Gods and religions.”

Ethiopia was the first African nation. Under the strong-arm of Ras Tewodros and then solidified by Menelik II, Ethiopia united varied and often rival ethnic groups into a modern nation state. Ethiopia was the first and only nation to defeat a European power (the Italians in the late nineteenth century) and the only African nation never colonized; they consider the five years of Italian Fascism (1936-1941) an occupation. Ethiopia was also the first African nation to modernize. The forward thinking, yet often despotic, Menelik II forced Ethiopia into the modern era becoming the first Africa nation to have telephones, automobiles, hotels, and cinemas, and the first to adopt modern education and warfare. [Photos 8 and 9]

In performance Menelik II is introduced as a character bestriding the country, forcibly transforming rivals into a nation. The scene transforms into a schoolroom that is metaphoric of a modernization. However it becomes an argumentative free-for-all. Everyone wants to lead and no one is listening. Some refuse to accept the possibility that others might be correct and finding fault is rampant. One student cries out, “Why are we always talking and never getting anything done?” Another replies, “What did you mean by that?” Others are afraid to ask questions of the increasingly demanding schoolteacher. “Stay silent, that

**Photo 9: Andegna in performance. Michael Million as Ras Tewodros bestrides Ethiopia. He is carried by (L to R) Nuyredin Nesro, Nigussie Ballie and Menahel Teshome.**



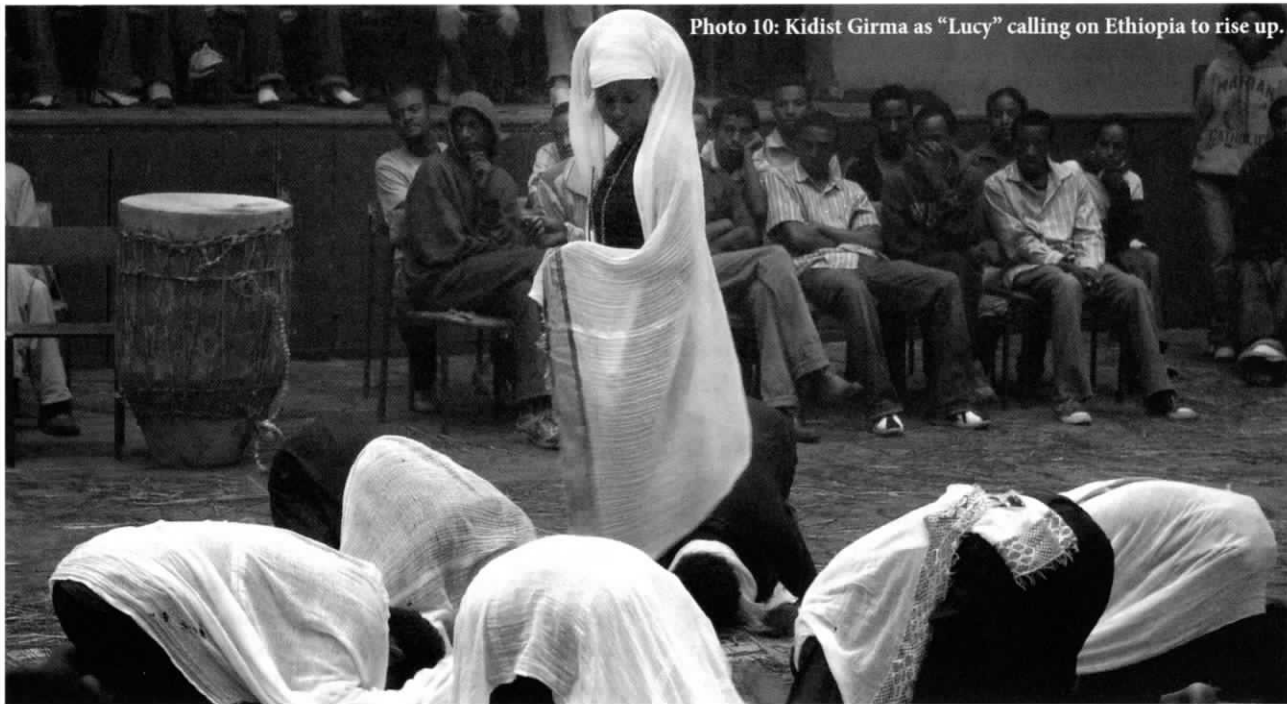


Photo 10: Kidist Girma as “Lucy” calling on Ethiopia to rise up.

is the safest way to go!” declares another as the teacher responds, “Yes, silent unless talking about nothing!” The scene spins into absurdity. Lucy, a student, speaks out, admonishing her classmates, only to be shouted down. “What you are doing will have consequences! You are eating one another!” she declares, as she is banished from the scene.

The performance either directly applied or reworked traditional performance, dance, song, and stylized forms of dialogue to retrace the high points of Ethiopian history and mythology. The weaving of traditional expression with contemporary perspectives proved to be a potent mix. The juxtaposition and conflict of form and content pointedly revealed to our audience the disconnection between idealized Ethiopia and modern reality. The strength and hollowness of a spent vision of Ethiopia exposed.

The performance was presented, excepting a few lines, entirely in Amharic; it was created for its community, not for export. It was not a parody or satire, nor was it a history lesson, but a thematic interrogation of Ethiopia’s willful self-delusion and interpretation of events. Each scene wove familiar thematic threads of a mytho-historical narrative, questioning and showing them not as heroic, but rather religiously and politically motivated. The performance traced Ethiopia from its ancient roots to empire to modern nation, characterizing it as having always served a hierarchical ruling or religious elite rather than the will and needs of the people whom it controlled and exploited. [Photo 11]

Ethiopia continued its misguided, corrupt and self-serving journey under the rule of Haile Selassie. “His shadow is long and still with us,” remarked Nesro. Ethiopia under the forty-four year reign of Selassie created

the Pan-African Union, a sort of United Nations of Africa, which made him a de facto spokesperson for Africa during the Cold War, a point of Ethiopian pride. Shrewd and self-aggrandizing Selassie self-mythologized, presented himself as the “Lion of Africa,” promoter of modernization, independence, and Rastafarian Godhead.

Selassie had a dark side, namely, his feared secret police and prisons, his opulent lifestyle, his capricious feudal rule, and a gross insensitivity to the needs of his people, which caused the deaths of millions during some of Africa’s worse droughts. Selassie’s official title was so grandiose it verged on self-parody: “King of Kings, Emperor and Conquering Lion of Judah, Elect of God and Imperial Majesty of Ethiopia.” Selassie’s long rule needed only a suggestion in *Andegna*, his myth is so well known. The crumbling of his reign is what the performance focused on, particularly when he was photographed in one of his gold-flaked palaces feeding large steaks to his pet Lions, the symbols of his rule, as millions died in one of Africa’s worst famines.

Willful self-delusion did not end Selassie’s feudal empire. Ethiopia suffers from a willful amnesia and although it embraces and lives in the past, it does not seem to learn from it. Selassie was overthrown by Africa’s first Soviet-styled socialist regime, the Derg. In performance, traditional dances and songs mutated into Socialist slogans, marches, and songs. One brutal rule morphed into another. “Ethiopia repeats its past because it is afraid to move forward. The past is where we live,” the Lucy character intoned.

In performance, as in history, the Derg hunted down and killed anyone who was educated, could read, write, and think. Those who could not escape were shot once in

the head, their bodies dragged into the street to rot. To add to the horror, the family of the murdered had to pay for the bullet with mourning forbidden under penalty of death. Over the course of sixteen years of rule, millions of Ethiopians died. The shadow of the Derg, which lost power in 1991 after a bloody civil war, haunts the psyche of the nation today (Marcus 216-17).

Throughout the performance of *Andegna*, the spirit of Lucy returns to witness, comment and ask questions. Sometimes she is recognized, becoming a battle cry or a political symbol when needed, but usually she is ignored. At the end of the performance she returns for a reckoning.

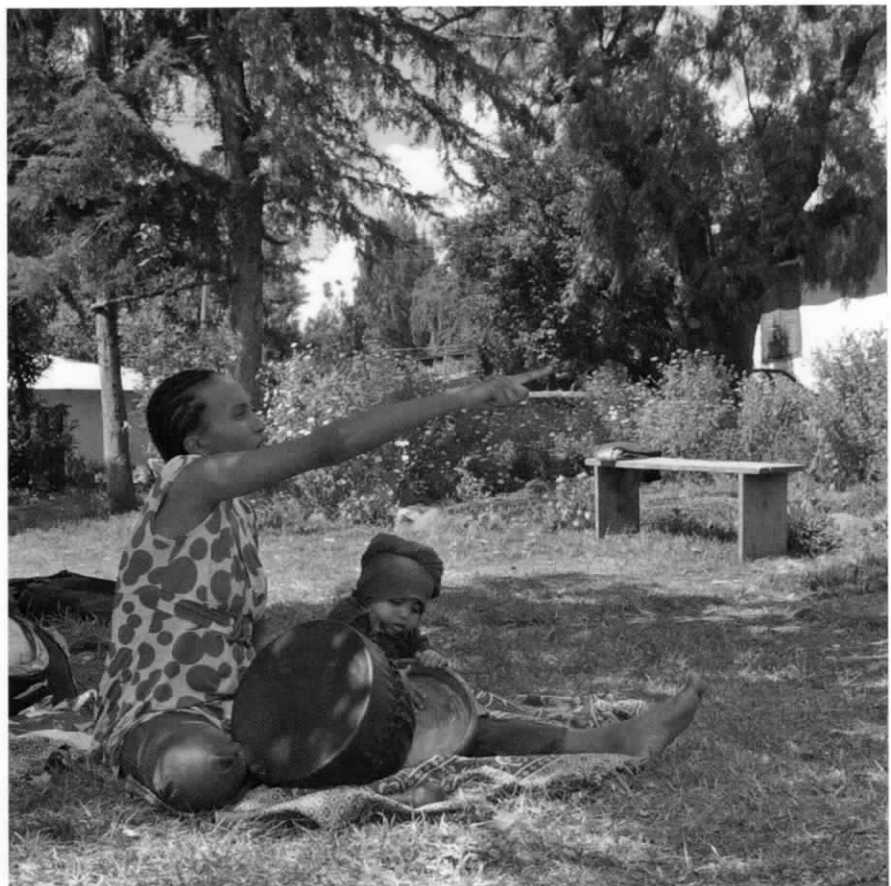
The gentle and petite Kidist Girma performed Lucy with quiet simplicity, trudging through the Ethiopian psyche like an understanding and long suffering mother. It isn't until the present day – the now, the where and when of the performance – that the ensemble begins to respond to the questions Lucy has been asking all along: “We have made ourselves the way we are, and we can make ourselves the way we want to be.”

The performance of *Andegna* could not critique the present government; to do so would have been dangerous. I would have been deported; the performers would have been threatened, beaten or jailed. Such a possibility was real and very much on their minds.

The last ten minutes of the performance was a quiet conversation after much physical action, singing, dancing, and some hard-hitting dialogue during the performance. The ensemble sat in a circle and talked informally about what it had discovered during the process of the performance. They revealed what they had learned about themselves, about Ethiopia, the need to change and their hopes for the future. Any direct criticism of the present government was avoided.

Until this point the audience had variously cheered, whistled and openly commented, while singing and clapping along with the performers. During this last section they sat motionless. Performers, working off of the theme of shadows simply had an open dialogue in front of their community, and that was radical. Performers and audience alike were witnesses and participants. The theatre and its double—the shadow and reality—conversed.

At the very end of the performance Lucy, the symbol



**Photo 11:** *Andegna* in rehearsal. Meaza Takele directs the movements of a scene. Next to her is her child who was included in the performance.

of standing up, is elevated by the ensemble and carried into the future. The performance, developed and offered with generosity, was met with a generous response. For generosity, not selfishness was how Ethiopia's future would flourish.

At the end, as audience mingled and talked with the ensemble and among one another, I was then told that the planned second performance in the space was cancelled and our permit revoked.

During the performance, the two policemen assigned to us had threatened to shut the show down. Quick thinking Lealem Berhanu promised that I would pay the equivalent of \$50 if allowed to finish.

Freedom has a price in Ethiopia.

*Special thanks to the ensemble of Angena (The First): Endale Berhanu, Kidist Girma, Nigussie Balie, Nibret Baychekin, Daniel Gumatain, Menahel Teshome, Meaza Takele, Lealem Berhanu, Nuredin Nesro, and Michael Million.*

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