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**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**

**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**MEDIA AND CULTURE: A CASE STUDY OF ASHENDA AS  
PORTRAYED IN TIGRIGNA TELEVISION PROGRAMS**

**By**

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**ADDIS ABABA**

**MEDIA AND CULTURE: A Case Study of *Ashenda* as Portrayed in  
Tigrigna Television Programs**

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University, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Master of  
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## **List of Acronyms**

<b>CAT:</b>	Cultural Association of Tigray
<b>E.C.:</b>	Ethiopian Calendar
<b>EPRDF:</b>	The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front
<b>ETv:</b>	The Ethiopian Television
<b>FDRE:</b>	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
<b>FGD:</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>HIV/AIDS:</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>N.D.:</b>	No date
<b>NGO:</b>	Non-governmental Organization
<b>NWICO:</b>	New World Information Communication Order
<b>OSSA :</b>	Organization for Social Services for AIDS
<b>TCTA :</b>	Tigray Culture and Tourism Agency
<b>TMMA:</b>	Tigray Mass Media Agency
<b>TRIB:</b>	Tigray Region Information Bureau
<b>UDHR:</b>	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<b>UNESCO:</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>WAT:</b>	Women’s Association of Tigray

## **Abstract**

*Culture is created, shared, transmitted, transformed, and preserved by communication. For we are at the age of globalization, wherein the power of mass communication is unprecedented pervasive, the mass media are highly impacting cultures positively and /or negatively. Consequently, media portrayals of cultural matters deserve special attention. However, such special attention is not observed being given in the Ethiopian media's cultural portrayals as the quality and quantity of such portrayals are said to be unsatisfactory. As a result, a media and cultural study entitled *Media and Culture: A Case Study of Ashenda as Portrayed in Tigrigna Television Programs* was conducted. It is a qualitative inquiry into how the mass media are being used for cultural development, and how they are using culture's potential for national development. This is made possible by taking Tigrigna television programs in portraying Ashenda, an annually celebrated cultural festival, as a case study. To this end data were gathered from purposively selected documents (texts), individual in-depth interviewees and focus group discussants; and were analyzed as per to the theories and principles of media, culture and communication. Taking place dominantly at Mekelle city and its surrounding villages, the research has come with the finding that despite the media's attempts to cover the cultural festival are encouraging, the way they portray the culture is deficient and shallow, thus incapable to preserve and/or to transform the culture. Plus, the very conception of culture's potential for national development at the media level is minimal.*

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Communication and culture cannot be separated from one another for they are mutually constitutive. To this end, Wood (2000:87) observes that “Culture is reflected in communication practices, and at the same time, communication practices shape cultural life.”

At this age of globalization, where communication has come of unprecedented importance, the mass media are becoming instruments of cultural development. They serve not merely as tools of promoting culture but also as conduits of transmission of the social heritage for they communicate values, norms, and styles across time and amongst groups ([www.http://encyclopedia.jrank.org](http://encyclopedia.jrank.org)).

Hence, their role in promoting, transmitting and preserving culture and cultural products is tremendously high. Likewise, Miller (2007: 320-321) posits: “Media can help people preserve and learn their ancestral languages, record traditional agricultural and medical knowledge, and otherwise protect their culture and improve their lives.”

According to Krug (2006:1), the socio-cultural and personal effects of the mediated communications have been more obvious and more celebrated and also more threatening. As a result, media representation has a very high potential impact, positive and/or negative, both on the represented issue and the target audiences. Similarly, Kellner (online) notes that: “Mass media representations of culture provide the materials for constructing views of the world, behavior and even identities. Those who uncritically follow the dictates of media culture tend to ‘mainstream’ themselves, confirming to the dominant fashion, values and behavior.”

The nature of mass communication, also, is of an advantage in disseminating the cultural information to a wide range of addressees. In this regard, Wilson (1992) contends the advantage of mediated communication over the traditional oral communication in communicating culture is its ability to reach out as broad audience as the medium can cover as target audience. Thus, if appropriately utilized, the mass media can be vital tools of cultural development, promotion, transformation and transmission due to their capacity to encode a given message to various audiences at a time.

Exploring the patterning of generalized public culture that is constructed by mediated communication, examining what stands at its center and what is pushed to the margins; and investigating the way that particular cultural forms organize meaning tell us much about the imaginative space we hold in common, (Deacon et al; 1999). Similarly, a media and cultural study, entitled MEDIA AND CULTURE: A Case Study of *Ashenda* as Portrayed in Tigrigna Television Programs, was conducted.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Many cultures of our country, including *Ashenda*, have been transmitting from generation to generation almost entirely orally. As a result, the cultural knowledge of the various nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia have been limited to respective localities. In spite of its long history and (potential) multi-faceted advantages, *Ashenda* (an annual cultural festival celebrated by Tigrean young girls), for instance, has been hardly known not only at international and national levels but also in some areas within the region – Tigray. Consequently, its contribution to the development of eco-tourism and positive image building of the region and thereby the country is claimed to be insignificant.

From the recent past, however, the mass media including Tigray Television have been playing their roles in promoting and passing on this culture to the new generation, particularly to that of the town dwellers- target addressees. Speaking of the case, despite the encouraging initiatives, there are yet emerging complaints on the quality and quantity of such media portrayals of the cultural festival- *Ashenda*.

On the one hand, at the interpersonal level of communication, a great deal of material and non-material aspects of the culture is said to be either loosely understood or totally missing in the name of modernity by the urban dwelling girls. Yet, on the other hand, regarding media coverage, village festivities which are supposed to be the mainstream culture of the particular festival with rich and truly indigenous manifestations of material and intangible aspects of the culture are claimed to be underreported.

What is more, it is also pronounced that the media tend to be less critical of some negative practices/ values of the culture. Hence, its roles of transforming and preserving the culture sound to be downplayed. However, media have a tremendous potential and responsibility to maintain the positive values and practices of a culture; and simultaneously (help) alter the negative ones. Discussing about the role that media should play in cultural transformation, Krekovic (2003) contends that the mass media should serve as agents of change for the social betterment by raising public awareness. “Indeed, it is now possible to see how new ways of creating and distributing symbols have made it possible throughout history for people to change existing cultural practices, and through these changes in the way people socialize, to transform societies.” (P: 35).

McQuail as quoted by Watson (2003) asserts that the media, among other things, play their pivotal role in preserving the culture(s) of a given society by “... maintaining commonality of values”. On top of that, Gonzalez (on line) also writes:

[The] tremendous development of the communication and information sectors, particular attention has been paid in recent years to the need for cultural diversity in the media as a way of preserving concepts of identity and social bonds within communities and cultures while promoting local cultural expression and local languages (Gonzalez, on line).

Be it in their attempt to transform and/ or to preserve, the distinct way that the mass media portray a given culture has its own influence on the cultural transmission: what keeps cultures alive and flourishing (<http://en.wikibooks.org>). As the mass media representations of *Ashenda* are said to be by and large town centered and deficient, it is likely that such portrayals would miss-teach the target addressees. And, the possibility of preserving the indigenous culture remains under a question mark, therefore.

Meanwhile, DeFleur et al (1993) assert, activities observed in media portrayals are adopted to serve as guides especially for persons undergoing socialization. As a result of which, there would be a high possibility of the media representation, no matter its accuracy, to take the upper hand in socializing and modeling the target audiences. Similarly, Bandura's (1977), as is put in Wilmer and Dominick (2003), social learning theory spells out that people learn not only from direct experiences but also from observation (or modeling); which is also profoundly applicable in the communication of issues of media and society.

Due to such pervasive pedagogic function of the mass media and the felt gaps that the media are said to have been making, there seems to be a potential danger facing against the proper transmission and preservation of the culture and thereby the social identity. Indeed, at the same time, it seems to fail in critically viewing the negative values and practices of the cultural festival. Thus, the media's attempt to transform some aspects of the culture are claimed to be minimal. Taken together, even though the media are giving a relatively good coverage to the cultural festival, the quality of the portrayals is said to be deficient.

Therefore, this research was undertaken so as to inquire how the media have been portraying the cultural festival (*Ashenda*); and analyze the influence or implication(s) of such mass communication in the overall communication ecosystem and development of the culture.

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

### **1.3.1 General Objective**

The inquiry broadly aims at investigating how the cultural festival, *Ashenda*, is portrayed in the Tigrigna television programs.

### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

Under the above mentioned general objective, the study attempts to:

1. examine the media portrayals of the positive and negative values of the cultural festival,
2. find out the efforts that the media are making to alleviate negative values and practices of the culture (if any); and to promote the positive ones,
3. appraise the depth and appropriateness of the television programs made on *Ashenda*, (from 2000 to 2010)
4. investigate whether the media use the potentials of *Ashenda* and its events for development oriented communications,
5. examine the similarities and differences of urban and village festivities; and evaluate their representation on the media,
6. analyze the impact of the media's portrayal on the cultural festival, and
7. know whether the media entertain co-cultural diversity within the *Ashenda* culture

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The researcher raised the following research questions and endeavored to come up with their findings. These are:

1. Do the media offer equitable coverage for co-cultures from different parts of the region? And what implications could that have on promoting cultural diversity/pluralism?
2. How are the media's portrayals impacting the cultural festival?
3. Which values and aspects of *Ashenda* are emphasized by the media?
4. What efforts are the media making to alleviate negative values and practices of the culture (if any); and to promote the positive ones?
5. How thorough and interpretative are the television programs so far made on *Ashenda*?
6. Do the media use *Ashenda* and its events as a means for development oriented communication purposes?

7. What kind of similarities and differences are there between the urban and village festivities; and how are they entertained by the media?

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

Due to the extremely broad nature of culture and the wide range of mass media, this media and cultural study is confined only to the *Ashenda* culture and its Tigrigna television programs. Meanwhile, the cultural festival is covered by various media genres such as radio, television, books, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, billboards, posters, photographs, websites, audio-visual music clips, etc. of different languages including Tigrigna, Amharic, Oromo and English. As a result of which, the researcher has found it mandatory to specify a given language and media. Hence, Tigrigna television programs are taken as case in point.

Put it differently, this investigation is limited only to the cultural festival of *Ashenda* and its portrayals on Tigrigna television programs. However, it should be clear that by Tigrigna television programs it is to refer to the programs produced by the Ethiopian Television, Tigray Region Information Bureau (now Tigray Regional State Public Relation Bureau) and the Tigray Mass Media Agency due to the organizational and structural changes that took place at different times in the Tigrigna television programming.

### **1.6 Limitation of the Study**

For the cultural festival, *Ashenda*, is an annual one; and thus takes place in every August, the researcher failed to gather data from direct observation of the festivity as the study period could not stretch that late. Yet, albeit the fact that participant observation could have contributed a lot to the enrichment of the study's findings, the researcher's long lived and native experience, both to the urban and village festivities, has served as a best remedy in gathering and analyzing the data obtained by textual analysis, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, particularly for subtopic of co-cultural diversity.

Had financial and time factors not been such a barrier, the researcher could have investigated the other media genres as well; both as direct subjects of study and/or supplementary documents to the available one. By doing so, the researcher believes, quite different perspectives, facts, trends, and practices might have found.

The other limitation is that the researcher could not find the entire population of the televised programs of *Ashenda*: the potential subjects of the textual analysis. This is due to the documentation problem in all organizations that the Tigrigna television programs were/ are produced\_ ETV, TRIB, and TMMA. Consequently the researcher is obliged to take only the available programs, six in number, as subjects of the study using convenience sampling technique.

Besides, lack of access to former media managers, if not producers and reporters, has forced the researcher to gain only the current media manager's impressions and ideas about the cultural portrayals in general and the televised *Ashenda* programs in particular.

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

The primary beneficiary of this study will be the current medium (Tigray Television) as the forwarded findings and recommendations would help it identify its strong and weak sides in portraying *Ashenda* and, hence, it would help it make necessary adjustments accordingly.

Besides, the Culture and Tourism Agency of the region and Cultural Association of Tigray will also be other beneficiaries as the study can assist them on how to use the mass-media for cultural development and preservation. The other importance of this media and cultural study is its potential as a bench mark and reference for further investigations to be made on media, culture, and media and cultural studies. Finally, the society at large will benefit from the enquiry in the long run as the culture's development also means, in one way or another, development of the society.

## **1.8 Organization of the Study**

This media and cultural study is presented in six chapters. The first chapter, introduction, incorporates the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the research, the research questions, scope of the research, significance of the study, limitations of the research and at last this part itself-organization of the study.

The second chapter, review of related literature, tries to set the framework of the research. The third chapter also attempts to set the social context of the cultural festival: *Ashenda*. In doing so, it discusses about the culture's background history, pinpoints its positive and negative values, presents its co-cultural diversity in different parts of the region, and finally offers the variations between the urban and village festivities. This chapter was intentionally added so as to enable the reader compare and contrast the media representations of *Ashenda* to its original sense.

The fourth chapter, methodology, presents and justifies on the use of the major research techniques implemented throughout the research work.

The fifth chapter of the study exclusively presents and discusses the findings. Finally, the study ends by summarizing the major findings and forwarding some recommendations.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The investigation into culture as represented in the media is a recent interest among academics of media and cultural studies. Nevertheless, the interplay between culture and the media is said to be pervasive. *Culture and Media: A Case Study of Ashenda as Portrayed in Tigrigna Television Programs*, also, is a study that attempts to see the pros and cons of the media with regard to their cultural dealings. Henceforth, this chapter offers the conceptual framework of the study. In doing so, it explores what culture is all about and the why of it in society, assess the connections among media, culture and communication, and provides insights into the contentions regarding roles/influences of the media on society and on its culture as well.

#### **2.2 CULTURE EXPLORED**

##### **2.2.1 Definition of Culture**

Culture is a term that scholars could not come up with a universally working definition due to the extremely broad and subjective concept that it refers to. It, as McGonagle (online) asserts, is “a very nebulous concept which explains why international instruments rarely seek to define its content or scope.” One notable exception to this general reluctance according to McGonagle is the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), the preamble of which reaffirms that culture should be regarded as: “The set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (McGonagle, online).

This does not however mean that this is the only definition ever offered on culture. Rather, culture is a word which is bombarded with so many definitions, albeit not settled yet. Accordingly, Jandt (2004:13) also offers her/his own definition of the word as

follows: “Culture is the sum total of ways of living including behavioral norms, linguistic expression, styles of communication, patterns of thinking, and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self sustaining transmitted over the course of generations.”

Rather than simply taking these definitions as best expressions for what culture is, it is still better to understand culture from its elements and characteristics.

### 2.2.2 Elements of Culture

As is tried to mention earlier, in the foregoing sub-topic, one of the reasons that make culture difficult to define is its broadness. Culture refers to such a wider concept for the reason that it entails diversified elements: norms, values, language, symbols, laws, artifacts, folkways, taboos, mores, technology, and many more. Consequently, some scholars even attempt to define the word through its elements. What follows seems to prove this argument.

“When sociologists talk about culture,” Peterson (1979) cited in Griswold (2004:36) notes, “they usually mean one of four things: norms, values, beliefs, or expressive symbols.” Therefore, discussing at least some of the elements of culture will better help to have a clear understanding of the vague word- culture- than its definitions can do. Hence, the following table offers the major elements of culture with their definition and examples.

Element	Definition	Examples
Symbols	Anything that has been given representational meaning by the members of a cultural group	Gestures, a flag, a statue
Language	A system of patterned sounds, often with corresponding written symbols, that the members of a society use to communicate their thoughts and feelings to one another	Swahili, English
Values	Cultural standards or judgments of what is right, good, or desirable	Personal freedom, egalitarianism
Norms	The rules of culture that tell the members of a culture how they are expected to behave in a given situation	Not talking out loud during a play, wearing black clothes to a funeral

Mores	Norms that carry a strong social sanction if violated because the members of a culture consider adherence to them essential to the well-being of the society	The prohibition against having sex in public, the prohibition against destroying other people's property
Folkways	Norms that carry only a weak social sanction if violated because the members of the society do not consider adherence to them essential to the well-being of the society	Washing one's clothes, eating with your mouth closed
Laws	Norms that the governing body of a society officially adopts to regulate behavior	Speed limits, not having sex with someone against their will (rape)
Taboos	Norms so strongly held by the members of a society that to violate them is virtually inconceivable	The prohibition against incest, the prohibition against cannibalism
Technology	The body of knowledge that members of a society apply to their physical environment to meet their survival needs	Using a digging stick to plant seeds, using a robot to paint a car
Artifacts	The physical things that the members of a society make when they apply their technology to the physical environment	A bed, a hammer, a bracelet, a house

Source:John J. Macionis (online)

Taken together, culture can be viewed from two broader categories: explicit/material culture and implicit/ intangible culture. According to Griswold (2004:9), the former, explicit (or material) culture, “refers to the view that regard culture as a tangible social construction, a kind of symbolic good or commodity that is explicitly produced.” Technology, artifacts, and other material elements reside in this category. Conversely, the later, implicit (or intangible) culture is “seen more abstractly, as an implicit feature of social life ... a prefiguration or ground of social relations” (Griswold, 2004:10). Values, norms, languages, folkways, taboos, practices like rituals, laws, and other immaterial cultures are instances that belong to this camp.

### 2.2.3 Characteristics of Culture

Beyond its definitions and elements, it is still crucial to closely examine culture in its characteristics and their ramifications. Stemming from the firm belief that, even a brief,

discussion on the features of culture would be of assistance in trying to comprehend culture more vividly, some characteristics of culture are presented below.

It is hardly possible, and unfair to claim that all cultures share exactly all characteristics of cultures. This is dominantly because some cultures do have their own distinct features. Nonetheless, it is widely believed that different cultures throughout the world have the following characteristics or qualities (Griswold, 2004; Greffe, et al, 2005; Wood, 2000; and Baran, 2002).

### **2.2.3.1 Culture is Learned**

Culture propagates through generations which adopt their old customs and traditions as part of their culture (Greffe, et al, 2005). Culture is learned by an individual, especially if he/she grows up with that particular culture. He/she can learn behavior patterns including language and many other attributes. Congruently, Wood notes:

We learn culture's views and patterns in the process of communicating. As we interact with others we come to understand the beliefs, values, norms, and language of our culture. By observing how others communicate, we learn language and what it means. This allows [and/or teaches] us how to participate in a social world of shared meanings. (Wood, 2000:103)

Even though human infants come into the world without any cultural knowledge, scientists assert that they are genetically predisposed to rapidly learn language and other cultural traits. Accordingly, Griswold (2004) observes, any normal baby can be placed into any family on earth and grow up to learn their culture and accept it as his or her own. She further argues since human being is non culture -instinctive, we are not genetically programmed to learn a particular one.

Both conscious and unconscious learning, as Wood (2000) on her part argues, are continuous processes through which we internalize the particular ways of life in our culture. "By the time we are old enough to appreciate the idea that culture is learned, our beliefs, values, language, and practices are already thoroughly woven into who we are"

(ibid: 104). Here, it should be clear that it is not only their own culture that individuals can learn. We, as Greffe et al (2005) posit, can also learn the culture of others especially if we acquaint with them and get influenced by their personality and life style.

### **2.2.3.2 Culture is Shared**

Despite individual's contribution to a culture, no culture belongs to an individual alone. It is rather shared among many people of a certain part of the world. To this end, Macionis (2003) argues that, culture belongs to a single community and not to a single human being.

“We can consider a thought or an action as a culture if it is commonly shared and believed or practiced by a group of people” (ibid, online). Put it differently, when it is commonly shared and believed by a group of individuals, and then it can be considered as their culture.

### **2.2.3.3 Culture is Cumulative**

Every human generation potentially can discover new things and invent better technologies. And, different knowledge embodied in culture can be passed from one generation to another. As a result, the new cultural skills and knowledge are added onto what was learned in previous generations. As a result, culture is cumulative (Jandt, 2004). “Due to this cumulative effect, most high school students today are now familiar with mathematical insights and solutions that ancient Greeks such as Archimedes and Pythagoras struggled their lives to discover,” contends Macionis (online).

From every corner of the world, each may workout solutions to problems in life that pass from one generation to another. Especially in this age of globalization, as Campbell, Martin and Fobes (2010) assert, cultural knowledge and experiences are being shared and thereby cumulated. This cycle remains as the particular culture goes with time.

### **2.2.3.4 Culture Changes**

The fourth characteristic of culture is that cultures change. This characteristic unlike the next one, *culture is dynamic*, is based on the assumption that not all cultures accommodate. Macionis (online) writes, “There is knowledge; thoughts and traditions that are lost as new cultural traits are added with that there are possibilities of culture changes with the particular culture through time.” Hence, this quality (or the changing nature of culture) is more subtle and unintended than the next one: dynamic. In this regard, according to Wahlstrom (1992:103), even though cultures change overtime, they are slower to change than some other systems.

### **2.2.3.5 Culture is Dynamic**

The fifth characteristic of culture is that “culture is dynamic.” It was considered that there is no culture that remains on the permanent state. Culture is changing constantly as new ideas and new techniques are added in time modifying or changing the old ways. Wood (2000:105) points out that, “Cultures must adapt to the natural world (for example, geographic location, available natural resources, climate changes) and to events made by humans (such as war), and they must evolve in order to progress.” Likewise, Francis B Nyamnjoh (1999) posits:

[E]very culture, even in periods of relative stability, is always affected by a certain degree of internal diversity, of disorder, of dysfunction. That results from the very fact that it is inscribed in a history; given that every society is subjected to an internal dynamic, which accounts for a certain autonomy, and to an external dynamic by which it can borrow from others, sometimes significantly, while adjusting itself to create space for what it borrows...(P. 20).

According to Micionis (online) this is the characteristic of culture that stems from its cumulative quality.

### **2.2.3.6 Culture is Diverse**

The sixth characteristic of culture is that culture is diverse. It was considered that culture was formed by many separate cultures. Culture, according to Krug (2006), is a system that has several mutually interdependent parts. The constituent parts that are discussed in the sub-topic *elements of culture* earlier in this chapter lend a hand in an attempt to recognize how diverse culture is. Although those parts are separate, they are interdependent with one another forming culture as a whole.

### **2.2.3.7 Culture is Ideational**

Culture forms ideal patterns of behaviors that followed by individuals expectedly. It, in the words of Campbell et al (2010), serves as guidelines that must be followed by members to gain social acceptance from the people with the same culture.

The word ‘culture’ that hails from the Latin, word, ‘culture’ derived from ‘colere’, means, ‘to cultivate’. Hence, the way in which the minds of the masses inhabiting a particular area are cultivated, in some way determines the culture of a region (Krug, 2006).

### **2.2.3.8 Culture Gives a Range of Permissible Behavior Patterns**

The eighth characteristic of culture is that culture gives us a range of permissible behavior patterns. Culture provides us with the norms of appropriate behavioral patterns within a given society (Griswold, 2004). It involves how an activity should be conducted, how an individual should appropriately act, as husband, wife, parent, child and others. It tells us how to dress based on gender, occasions, status, and many more.

On top of this, Singelis and Brown (1995) state that, particularly with the guidance of its norms, culture offers a certain direction on how to behave within the social system, and helps the individual make sense of his or her world.

## 2.2.4 Why Study Culture?

Needless to say that culture is a widely used term. People of diversified background use it in their everyday conversation to express issues that they deem cultural. The multifaceted nature or manifestations of the word, culture, seems to take a lion's share for such everyday use. Even so, culture is one of the mal-understood words that people use in their communication patterns (Griswold, 2004).

Hence, culture though it may be something rather hard to pin down, is important to understand. Cultural ignorance or misunderstanding, (Ibid) notes, can lead to highly undesirable outcomes such as, but not limited to, lost business, interethnic tension, or inability to participate in either the comic or the transcendent moments in human experience. These are of the potential consequence that one might face due to failure in properly understanding a certain culture.

In much broader sense, however what importance(s) can all cultures potentially offer to their respective societies (and/or to others)? How central is culture, in general, to our lives, after all?

Culture impacts us all in unbelievably multidimensional ways. Greffe, et al (2005) point out that, "culture raises the level of people's thinking, contributes positively to their social and psychological well-being, stimulates their awareness, and has a civilizing impact (P.46). While the defining characteristics of each culture are unique, all cultures share certain common functions. Three such functions, as Krug (2006) points out, that are particularly important from a communication perspective are: linking individuals to one another, providing the basis for a common identity; and creating a context for interaction and negotiation among members. On top of this, Matthew Arnold (1969), a British educator as quoted in Griswold (2004:6) writes:

Culture is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. It can cure the social ills of unrestrained materialism and self-satisfied philistinism by teaching people how to live and by conveying moral ideas. In essence...culture can be the humanizing agent that moderates the more destructive impacts of modernization.

True, culture is a vital means to the betterment of humanity. It also goes without saying that, it has a tremendous, potential to build a more humanized world. Nonetheless, all its potential is not mere functional. It can have a dysfunctional potential, too. To this end, Baran (2002:499) contends that, “culture limits as well as liberates us, differentiates as well as unites us, defines our realities and thereby shapes the ways we think, feel and act.”

Beyond its close knit with social or other forms of identity, culture especially of these days, is an integral part of the development process of many nations. In line with this, UNESCO (1997) foresees “development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be cultural or nothing at all.” Cultural tourism, according to Girard and Nijkamp (2009:1), is at the focal point of such cultural development. To justify their proposition, they further argue:

Our modern world is moving towards a leisure economy, where an increasing amount of everyone’s discretionary income is spent on culture, recreation and tourism. Mass tourism... is the most pronounced exponent of the modern leisure economy, where culture, nature, shopping, or sheer entertainment form the main motives for special mobility to foreign destinations (Girard and Nijkamp, 2009:1).

In this line of thought, Greffe et al (2005), assert that, it is generally accepted today, that culture as a system of values and representations can influence the functioning of the economy at least indirectly. More precisely, culture influences local development in three ways:

1) By disseminating benchmarks conducive to synergy among players and project implementation; 2) By creating an environment that is attractive for residents as well as for visitors and tourists; and 3) By providing leverage for the creation of products that combine aesthetic dimensions and utilitarian functionality (Greffe et al, 2005:31).

## **2.3 CONNECTIONS: The Interplay among Media, Culture and Communication**

The relationship among media, culture and communication is very strong as even the existence of one is often dependent on the existence of the others. The following sub-topics are devoted to discuss the connections among the three terms or concepts.

### **2.3.1 The Interface of Culture and Communication**

No culture exists without the process of communication. Hence communication is the hub and common denominator of all cultures on earth. As a result of which, Rogers (n.d.) conclusively asserts that “cultures must communicate their content to future generations if they are to survive.” Accordingly, it can be said that communication is the lifeblood to culture as is water to fish. This is because, without communication and communication media, it would be impossible to preserve and pass along cultural features from one place and time to another.

Similarly, as Baran (2002) notes that, communication facilitates the creation and maintenance of culture and its elements within and across generations.

Creation and maintenance of a more or less common culture occurs through communication, inhering mass communication. When we talk to our friends; when a parent raises a child, when teachers teach; when grandparents pass on recipes, when politicians campaign; when media professionals produce content that we read, listen to and watch, meaning is being shared and culture is being contracture and maintained (Ibid, 2002:10).

More specifically, communication is the means of human interaction through which cultural elements\_ customs, beliefs, language, roles, rules, laws or other patterns\_ are created and shared among its members. Indeed, it works cross culturally as well. One can say, therefore, that culture is created, shaped, transmitted and learned through communication and communication only.

According to Jandt (2004), the reverse also is the case; which is, communication practices are largely created, shaped, and transmitted by culture. Any communication behavior that does not take the social context into account, not governed by the cultural patterns at hand, is likely to face challenges. Put it differently, unless the way we communicate, both verbally or nonverbally, fits to the value and norms of the communicator(s) or the dominant society, the communication process hardly succeeds to achieve its goal.

This might even extend to the extent of putting the life of the communicator(s) at risk. Discussing on this case, Rogers (n.d.) suggests that communication at the very first place, if to be fruitful and safe should be highly situational and context bound. He further writes: knowing the cultural background of your counterpart and communicating accordingly would be vital particularly in intercultural communication processes.

For culture by its very nature is subjective, Griswold (2004) observes, its subjectivity also is manifested in the communication patterns of its respective societies. Communication pattern varies as per to cultural variations, therefore.

### **2.3.2 Media Influence on Culture: Pros and Cons**

Because culture is not stagnant, the means of communicating attitudes and values often create their own contributions to the changing nature of culture. In this regard, the influence of mass communication or mass media on culture is immense. As Kellner (online) observes:

The media are profound and often misperceived sources of cultural pedagogy: they contribute to educating us how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire and what not .... They show us how to dress, look and consume; how to react to members of different social groups, how to be popular and successful and how to avoid failures, and how to conform to the dominant system of norms, values, practices and institutions.

Servaes (1999) also speculates that mass media are considered institutions by which the new meaning systems are transmitted in ritual manner in a community. The very idea is that, the media as means and agents of communication do have the potential to influence the culture of their society (indeed, that of others, too) positively and/ or negatively.

The controversial issue of cultural imperialism can show us the double sided impact of the media on culture. Fortunately (may be unfortunately too), there are few physical borders between countries in a globally mediated world. Krug (2006) contends that, this together with the technological advancements and ideological motives, paved a way for

the invasion of an indigenous people's culture by powerful foreign countries through mass media\_ cultural imperialism.

According to Baran (2002) due to the unidirectional flow of media (cultural) contents, which facilitated the realization of cultural imperialism, the third world countries feared that Western cultural values, especially those of the United States, would overshadow and displace those of other countries. "The resistance to the U.S. media would not exist among international friends if they did not worry about the integrity of their own cultures. It is folly, then to argue that non native media content would have no effect on local cultures, \_\_ as do many U.S. media content producers" (Ib id:491).

Indeed, the western culture manifested in various forms such as music, dressing style, food, furniture, language, hairstyle, etc. could not have prevailed in every corner of the globe unless and other wise disseminated in such a way via mass media. This has ended up to the disadvantage of the indigenous cultures of the rest of the world. Even though they might have benefited at least to a minimum extent, majority of the world cultures are forced to assimilate themselves into the 'dominant' Western culture (Jandt, 2004; Baran, 2002). For cultural imperialism is made possible dominantly due to the powerful influence of the media on culture, nations urged for a balanced flow of information across the globe. Such an argument finally led to the establishment of a NWICO (1980), (Baran, 2002).

Now, let us see the positive impact of media on culture again from the issues of cultural imperialism. Obviously no society or nation is cultureless. Yet, no culture is globally as omnipresent influential as the Western culture. This is not because that the Western culture is the best of all cultures on earth. Rather, it is because of the reason that it is highly promoted and disseminated through the multifaceted mass media technologies to the reset of the world (Krug, 2006).

### **2.3.3 The Influence of Culture on Media**

The influence between culture and the media is not unidirectional. It is not only the media that have the potential to impact culture (both positively and negatively); culture on its part also influences the overall workings of the mass media. McQuail (1994:80), to this end, argues: “Often media take it upon themselves to speak up for and express what they believe to be the dominant values of their own society.” Practitioners of the media as researches reveal, operate within limits of what is considered broadly acceptable in terms of criticism of government and society or matters of public morals and behaviors. Frequently these limits are set by unwritten convention rather than by law or censorship (Campbell et al, 2010).

What is more, as McQuail contends in this line of thought:

Studies of media content have often found that mainstream mass media tend to be conformist and supportive rather than critical of dominant values. This support takes several forms, including: avoidance of fundamental criticism of key institutions such as business, the justice system and democratic politics; giving differential access to the ‘social top’; and symbolically rewarding those who succeed according to the approved paths of virtue and hard work, whilst symbolically punishing those who fail or deviate. (2008:99)

Thus, culture’s influence on the mass media routines is high, albeit least recognized and rarely pronounced.

## **2.4 MEDIA AND SOCIETY**

The mass media have immense potential to impact a society for good and/ or for evil. The nature of their contents and the way they communicate the contents, among others, influence their respective addressees in quite different ways and extent. The following theories strengthen this argument.

### **2.4.1 Media Socialization Theory**

Socialization, according to Edgar and Sedgwick (2002) is the process by which the individual learns to be a member of particular society and culture, and hence to be a genuinely social and cultural being. Likewise, DeFleur defines socialization as “a

complex, long-term, and multidimensional set of communicative exchanges between individuals and various agents of society that result in the individual's preparation for life in a socio-cultural environment" (1989: 209).

As can be understood from these definitions the "member" who undergoes socialization surely needs the help of somebody else (or may be something too) to mentor him/her the experiences of the environment. Family, friends, schools, the community at large and the media are among the agents that can help socialization to take place.

Harris (2009) observes that the media, particularly television, are extremely important socializing agents for national and cultural socialization. Children's perceived reality about the culture they live in, according to Harris is, in part, a media creation.

Moreover, McQuail (2008) contends, that the thesis of media socialization has two sides to it: on the one hand, mass media can reinforce and support other agencies of socialization; and on the other hand, they are also viewed as a potential threat to the values set by other agents such as parents, educators, religious leaders, and the like.

The main logic underlying the thesis is that the media can teach norms and values by way of symbolic reward and punishment for different kinds of behavior as represented in the media. An alternative view is that it is a learning process whereby we learn how to behave in certain situations and expectations which go with a given role or status in society. Thus the media are continually offering pictures of life and models of behavior in advance of actual behavior (Ibid: 494).

It is widely believed among scholars, that the media have a socialization effect, albeit in the nature of the case it is difficult to prove. Even so, Harris (2009) asserts that socialization effects of mass media especially television are particularly strong on frequent viewers who have few information alternatives and relevant life experiences available.

Early studies of children's use of media have confirmed a tendency for children to find lessons about life and to relate these with their own experience (McQuail: 2008). Similarly, studies of content also drew attention to the systematic presentation of images

of social life which could strongly shape children's expectations and aspirations (McQuail, 2008; Baran and Davis, 2009; Thwaites, 2002). Additionally, the mass media have a large role in initiating children into the society. According to Vivian (2001), this socialization process is essential to perpetuating cultural values, but some people worry that it can be negative if the media report and portray undesirable behavior and attitudes, such as violence and racism.

In its totality, socialization theory tends to emphasize the conformist role of media. In this view, McQuail (2008) contends, the media are neither 'pro-social' nor 'anti-social' but tend to favor the most dominant and established values". As Vivian (2001) argues that media also contribute to togetherness by creating commonality, even nationhood and perhaps, with global communication, a fellowship of humankind. What Vivian believes is that, using the media can be a social activity, bringing people together. For example, going to the movies with friends is a group activity, especially these days.

### **2.4.2 Media Social Learning Theory**

Virtually all social scientists acknowledge that attitudes, values, and behaviors of any individual may be developed, at least in part, through observational learning (Lowery and DeFlour, 1998). To this end, Bandura, a legendary psychologist who propounded the Social Learning Theory, argues that learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely merely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action (Bandura, A., 1977).

Bandura's social learning (also known as observational learning) theory stems from the basic idea that we cannot learn all, even much of what we need to guide our own development and behavior from direct personal observation and experience alone; hence we have to learn much from indirect sources, including mass media.

According to Suresh (online), Bandura identified three basic models of observational learning: 1) *A live model*, which involves an actual individual demonstrating or acting out a behavior, 2) *A verbal instructional model*, which involves descriptions and explanations of a behavior, and 3) *A symbolic model*, which involves real or fictional characters displaying behaviors in books, films, television programs, or online media.

Meanwhile, as McQuail (2008) notes, Bandura's model posits four basic process of social learning that occurs in sequence: attention, retention, production; and motivation.

Our attention is directed at media content of potential relevance to our lives and personal needs and interests. We may then retain what we have learnt and add it to our stock of prior knowledge. The third stage- that of production refers to the actual application in behavior of lessons learnt where it may be rewarded (reinforced) or punished, leading to greater or less motivation to follow any particular path (McQuail, 2008:33).

The theory has a general application to socializing effects of media and the adoption of various models of action. It, as Harris (2009) asserts, applies to many everyday matters such as clothing, appearance, style, eating and drinking, models of interaction and personal consumption. Nonetheless, in Bandura's (1986) view as cited in McQuail (2008), the theory only applies to "behavior that is directly represented in symbolic form". The theory also implies an active engagement on the part of the learner, and relies on the individuals self-reflective capability; "It is not the same as imitation or mimicry" (ibid).

Despite their tremendous provision of modeling, many scholars agree that, mass media are rarely the only sources of social learning. This is to mean that, there are strong collective influences on the process of social learning such as intrinsic reinforcement, parents, friends, teachers, and the like. For instance, Bandura described intrinsic reinforcement as a form of internal reward, such as pride, satisfaction, and a sense of accomplishment, among other things. Yet, as McQuail (2008) argues, social learning theory holds that media can have direct effects on people, and their influence does not have to be mediated by personal influence or social networks.

In line with this thought, Suresh (2003) also observes that, social learning theory specifies that mass-media messages give audience members an opportunity to identify with attractive characters that demonstrate behavior, engage emotions, and allow mental rehearsal and modeling of new behavior. The behavior of models in the mass media also offers vicarious reinforcement to motivate audience members' adoption of the behavior, Suresh further contends.

### **2.4.3 Media System Dependency Theory**

Developed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFluer, media dependency theory, also known as media system dependency theory, dictates that audiences depend on media content to meet needs and reach goals, and social institutions and media systems interact with audiences to create needs, interests, and motives in the person.

This theory, as Baran and Davis (2009) note, has been explored as an extension of or an addition to the uses and gratifications approach, though there is a subtle difference between the two theories. That is, media dependency looks at audience goals as the origin of the dependency while the uses and gratifications approach emphasizes audience needs (Griffin, 2006; Waston, 1998; and Baran and Davis, 2009). Both, however, are in agreement that media use can lead to media dependency.

“In its simplest terms” Baran and Davis (2009:273) write, “media system dependency theory assumes that the more a person depends on having his or her needs met by media use, the more important will be the role that media play in the person’s life, and therefore the more influence those media will have on that person.”

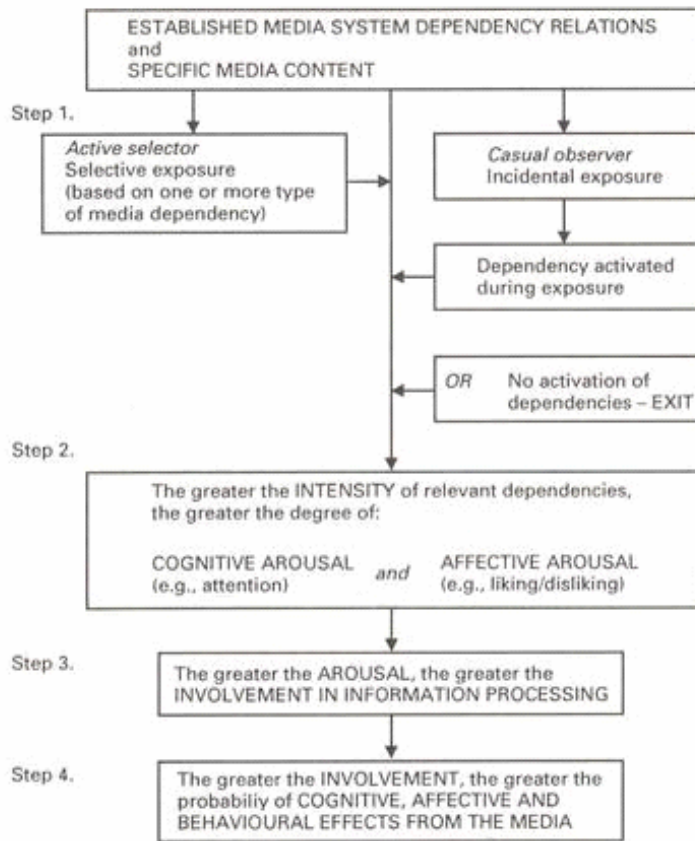
From a macroscopic societal perspective the theorists argue, if more and more people become dependent on media, media organizations will be reshaped, the overall influence of media will rise, and media’s role in society will become more central (Campbell et al, 2010). Melvin DeFlour and Sandra Bell-Rokeah (1975) as quoted in Baran and Davis (2009) have provided a fuller explanation in several assertions. First, the basis of media influence lies in the relationship between the large social system, the media’s role in that

system and audience relationship to the media. In other words, effects occur, not because all powerful media or omnipotent sources make that occurrence, but because the media operate in a give way in a given social system to meet given audience wants and needs.

Second, the degree of audience dependence on media information is the key variable in understanding when and why media messages alter audience beliefs, feelings or behavior. In further explanation of this assertion Baran and Davis (2009) note that the ultimate occurrence and shape of media effects rests with the audience members and is related to how necessary a given medium or message is to them. In this line of thought, Watson (1998) reflects the belief of the theorists as; the fewer the diverse sources of information there are in the media world, the more likely the media will affect our thoughts, attitudes and how we behave; and vice versa.

Third, "... we are becoming increasingly dependent on the media (a) to understand the social world (b), to act meaningfully and effectively in society, and (c) for fantasy and escape." As our world becomes more complex and dynamic, we not only need the media to a greater degree to help us make sense to help us understand what our best response might be and to help us relax and cope, but also we ultimately come to know that world largely through those media.

Finally, fourth, "the greater the need and consequently the stronger the dependency...the greater the likelihood that the media and their messages will have an effect." Put it differently, not everyone will be equally influenced by the media. This also is to mean that those who have greater need and thus greater dependency on media will be most influenced. DeFlour and Ball-Rokeach (1989) as taken from Suresh (2003) offer the following model that better illustrates the whole process of media system dependency theory.



Source: Suresh, 2003 (Originally from DeFlour and Ball-Rokeach, 1989)

Beyond this, Baran and Davis (2009) states that the theorists, DeFlour and Ball-Rokeah, explained “[An] individual’s (or society’s) level of dependency is a function of (1) the number and centrality (importance) of the specific information delivery functions served by a medium and (2) the degree of change and conflict present in society.” Media influence will increase when there is a high degree of structured instability in the society due to conflict and change (Waston, 1998:65).

According to Folkerts et al (1998:34), dependency theory suggests that media affect individuals in six ways:

1. Self-understanding: people depend on media to learn about themselves and to grow as individuals.
2. Social understanding: people depend on media to learn about the world and their community.
3. Action orientation: people depend on media to decide what to buy and how to act.

4. Interaction orientation: people depend on media to decide how to behave towards other people.
5. Solitary play: people depend on media to divert and entertain them when they are alone.
6. Social play: people depend on media to entertain them when they are with friends and family.

#### **2.4.4 Functionalist Theory of Media**

Society, according to Dennis McQuail (2008), is viewed as an ongoing system of linked working parts or subsystems, each making an essential contribution to continuity and order. As to McQuail, “The media can be seen as one of these systems.” (P. 96) Mass media of any kind, serve certain functions to the society that it works in, therefore. To this line of thought, the functionalist media theory “depicts media as essentially self-directing and self-correcting” (ibid). And it, as a social institution, has a social responsibility to offer some, if not all, functions.

Even when appearing oppositional, Krug (2006) congruently states, mass media function as official sources of information and social influence and contribute to the normalization of specific ideas of culture. Stemming from this notion, McQuail (2008), having analyzed the normative functions of the media proposed by other scholars earlier, provides a useful summary of his own.

Accordingly, he asserts that, mass media are essential to a society for:

##### *Information*

- ◆ Providing information about events and conditions in society and the world.
- ◆ Indicating relations of power.
- ◆ Facilitating innovation, adaptation, and progress.

##### *Correlation*

- ◆ Explaining, interpreting and commenting on the meaning of events and information.
- ◆ Providing support for established authority and norms.
- ◆ Socializing.
- ◆ Co-ordinating separate activities.
- ◆ Consensus building.

- ◆ Setting orders of priority and signaling relative status.

*Continuity*

- ◆ Expressing the dominant culture and recognizing subcultures and new cultural developments.
- ◆ Forging and maintaining commonality of values.

*Entertainment*

- ◆ Providing amusement, diversion and the means of relaxation.
- ◆ Reducing social tension.

*Mobilization*

- ◆ Campaigning for societal objectives in the sphere of politics, war, economic development, work and sometimes religion. (McQuail, 2008: 97-98).

These lists of media functions are worth of elaborating; thus what is next is an endeavor to this end. Of course, due emphasis is given to correlation, continuity and, entertainment for their excellent relevance to the area of investigation at hand: a merge of media and cultural studies.

The *information* (surveillance) function, as Baran and Davis (2009) state, refers to the media's collection and distribution of information. This is much related to the news and current affairs services of media firms.

The *correlation* function of media encompasses many tasks that the mass media can do in their day to day activities. Of which, interpreting or explaining events that impact the society is one. The mass media beyond their informing role provide explanation and interpretation on the ultimate meaning and significance of those events. In this regard, Dominick (1999) contends, the interpretation function can also be found in media content at first glance might appear to be purely entertainment. The interpretation of events, according to Dominick, exposes the individual to a large number of various points of view, probably for more than he or she could come in contact with through personal channels. Additionally, the mass media make available to the individual a wide range of expertise that he/she might not have access to through interpersonal communication.

As part of their *correlation* function, the mass media join together different elements of society that are not directly connected or are not familiar to one another. Likewise,

Dominick (1999:38) notes, "... it is entirely possible that the media can create totally new social groups by linking members of society who have not previously recognized that others have similar interest." In such a linkage role, the media can also serve as agents of socialization: provide individuals with portrayals of a society that can help them adopt the behaviors and values.

The mass media, in performing their *continuity* function, whether consciously or not, instill the mainstream culture and other co-cultural values and behaviors in their audience. To this end, Baran and Davis (2009) state that the mass media communicate values, norms, and styles across time and between groups. In other words, media not only circulate socio-cultural matters within a generation, but also manage to pass down these cultural norms, practices, values, etc. to next generations. In doing so, they contribute to the preservation of socio-cultural heritage (ibid).

Mass media's *entertainment* function, according to McQuail (2008:97) quoting Mendelssohn (1966), " may be part of the transmitted culture but it has another aspect- that of providing individual reward, relaxation and reduction of tension, which makes it easier for people to cope with real life problems and for societies to avoid breakdown."

Finally, the *mobilization* function is "designed to reflect the widespread application of mass communication to political and commercial propaganda" (McQuail, 2008). At the heart of this function is the media's intent to initiate the general public for a certain action such as voting, taking care of one's health conditions, environmental protection, defending against any foreign threats, and many more.

## Conclusion

Culture and communication are in-alienable; one cannot perfectly exist without the other. Their influence, too, is mutual. Our culture sets the context for our communication as our communication, through the course of time, also shapes our culture. This has been true for ages in the history of humankind as cultures have been transmitted, preserved, influenced, changed, developed or demolished, etc. through the process of oral communication. What is more, following the advancement of media technology, the oral communication of cultures is giving its way to the mediated communication. As a result of which, the mass media are practically showing their potential as a threat and as an advantage for the development and expansion of cultures. A typical example for such an argument would be the concept of *cultural imperialism* by which the Western cultures, as predominantly communicated via the mass media, are invading indigenous cultures in the rest of the world. Yet this potential of the mass media, if appropriately and adequately used in the non-western world, can bring a tremendous change in reviving and developing the victim cultures as well.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SETTING THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE CULTURE: *ASHENDA*

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter is included as part of the study and is a bonus to the conventional organization of chapters in scientific research. The researcher firmly believes that this chapter serves as background knowledge for the media representation of the culture which is treated in the proceeding chapter: data presentation and analysis; and avoids potential confusion on the particular culture: *Ashenda*. Its thorough analysis of the culture enables to better understand the appropriateness of its media portrayals. Thus, this chapter is similar both to the review of related literature, in its function, as it sets the conceptual framework, and to the data presentation and analysis part in that the data of which were gathered entirely from primary sources (individual in-depth interviewees and focus group discussants), and properly analyzed.

#### 3.2 What is *Ashenda*?

*Ashenda* is a cultural festival that is celebrated by a group of girls in Tigray region and some parts of northern Amhara. It takes place annually lasting for a week on average August 16-21 E.C. When *Ashenda* approaches, girls make all necessary preparations both psychologically and materially. In this regard, parents and elder brothers and sisters play a great role in identifying and fulfilling the preconditions for the *Ashenda* girls. This includes buying new cloth and shoes, hairdressing, preparing a drum, bringing the *Ashenda* leave from a field where it naturally grows, and tie it with a rope in a fashionable pattern, and allowing them a free time to play, finally.

In the very first day, the *Ashenda* girls gather together in a specific place and go to the church of St. Mary or any other (Orthodox) church in their community, playing to thank their Almighty God for keeping them all healthy and alive. After thanking their God via their songs and dances, they get back playing all the way long to the residential houses of their community. Then they begin, from one tip of the village, to express their best

wishes to the community by going to each and every household. In doing so, they spent about 20 minutes in each household entertaining the family members and themselves as well.

As the family members get pleased by the songs and dances of *Ashenda* girls, they finally farewell them either by their heartfelt and pleasant blessing or offer them some gift which might be in terms of money or in kind such as food and drink. They might also promise to present some gift to them in the year to come as well. Both the blessing and gifts are reinforcing rewards for the *Ashenda* girls for their decency, best wishes and playfulness/entertainment. When the house to house going is over, the *Ashenda* girls select a specific field with a potential playing mood and environment, near or in the village. Then they spent the whole day playing together for a week or so. They also approach a passerby man and urge him via their songs to give them money which together with the gifts collected from the households would be presented to the church so as to help it execute its current demands.

*Ashenda*, the cultural festival, is named after a thin and long leaf, called *Ashenda* which the girls wear/tie it over their dress on their waist down in a fashionable pattern. This leaf is what symbolizes the cultural festival most. Besides, it is the main reason that causes the *Ashenda* dance to be unique even in the context of Tigrean dancing culture. The *Ashenda* dance centers at the waist down, (particularly moving the bottom from right to left and back to the right that causes the tied *Ashenda* leave to shake in an eye-catching manner) where as the main stream Tigrigna (Tigrean) dancing culture centers at the waist up. Indeed, movement of the majority body parts is common to both. *Ashenda's* singing melody also is unique from the rest Tigrean cultural singing melodies.

The *Ashenda* girls, in their songs, raise a lot of issues that range from social criticism of some behaviors to their philosophies in life. While they are playing, for example, they sing as “ኣዋልደየ በላ ዕበዳ ላዕላይ ሰማይዶ ኣለዎ ማዳ” which literally means: *Let's go crazy playing as there is no a playing ground on the sky*). Via this particular song, the

girls not only express their belief that entertainment is vital in life, but also reflect their philosophy that there is no access to entertainment in the so called life after death.

They also use the freedom of *Ashenda* as a golden opportunity to critic social problems in their community. Here is a typical example “አገለዋይ ባይቶ ዓዲ ኣልዩስ ንሉ ኣብያቶ”. In this song, the *Ashenda* girls are critiquing the governor of their community who failed to properly manage his daughter; hence conveying the message that proper management ought to begin at home before it goes to the societal level.

What is surprising, here, is that no one accuses the *Ashenda* girls for whatever they say. They are culturally entitled to speak of their gut feelings. What is most saddening, however, their unprecedented freedom vanishes as the cultural festivals ends. It thus is a “time bound” freedom that comes and goes with the *Ashenda* culture.

Ideally, *Ashenda* is celebrated by virgin girls only. In practical terms, however, particularly in towns it is celebrated by young mothers as well. For it is highly gender based festival, *Ashenda* is chiefly celebrated by females. Males, even if they participate, play an escorting role to defend the girls from any potential threat, or become just audience. They can enjoy the girls’ songs and dances passively, though.

*Ashenda* has been colorfully celebrated for the last about ten years in Mekelle which is the capital city of the region, Tigray. This is made in a very organized form of festival which incorporates performance contest among various groups of the *Ashenda* girls, poetry contest on the theme of the cultural festival, modern band performances, etc. In doing so, *Ashenda* as an event has been used as a social gathering forum and its songs as a communication strategy to convey selected socio-economic themes such as gender equality, ecotourism development, anti-HIV/AIDS awareness creation and the like.

Understanding its eco-tourism and other potentials, the regional state of Tigray has officially decided to celebrate *Ashenda* as a regional festival since the launching of the

third Ethiopian millennium- 2000 E.C. Hence, zonal and woreda towns, also are giving due attention and support to the proper arrangement of the festivity.

Even though there is no such a fundamental difference, *Ashenda* slightly varies in some of its aspects from place to place within Tigray. In Temben, for example, *Ashenda* owns contextual dancing styles called *Awris* which is unique to the area. In Agame (around Adigrat) it is celebrated at night: girls settle at a certain house and play almost all night long for a week. In Axum and its surroundings, *Ashenda* is known as *Ayni-wari* or *Marya*; and starts from August 24 E.C and lasts for almost a month up to September 17 E.C or Mesqal (Finding of the True Cross). In Raya, the culture is different in the dressing style (Boufie and Shifay Sa-eni) and the accent of their songs, among other things. (Note: These and other co-cultural variations are worth of further investigation that is specifically assisted by participatory observation.)

### 3.3 Historical Background of *Ashanda*

*Ashenda* is widely perceived to be a religious holiday. Its historical background is mostly linked with the ascension of the virgin St. Mary. Lieke Likawint Yared Kassa claims that *Ashenda* is one of the religious holidays of the Orthodox Christianity by providing some contextual evidences.

እቲ ክብረ በዓል ዝጅምረሉ መዓልቲ ማለት'ውን ነሓስ 16 “እመቤታችን” ቅድስቲ ድንግል ማርያም ዝዓረገትሉ ዕለት እዩ ዝሕብር። ኣሸንዳ ካብ መበቆሉ ብኣናእሽቲይ ዘይተመርጸዎ ኣዋልድ ዝኸበረሉ ምክንያት ድማ ተምሳሌት ቅድስቲ ድንግል ማርያም ንምኻን እዩ።

The commencing date of the festival, August 16 E.C, signifies the day when St. Mary ascended. Besides, the reason why that the cultural festival is originally celebrated by unmarried small girls is to show their representation to the virgin St. Mary. (Lieke Likawint Yared Kassa, personal interview, translation own)

However, the religiosity of the festival seems to be argumentative. Elias Abera who is from the same religious background, Orthodox Christian, posits that *Ashenda* is purely a secular cultural festival.

ቀዳማይ ነገር ንመዕሐፍ ቅዱስ ሓዊሱ ብዛዕባ ኣሸንዳ ይኹን ኣራፃዕምኡ ዝገልፅ ዋላ ሓደ ሃይማኖታዊ መረዳኢታ የለን። ካልኣይ ነገር ድማ ኦርቶዶክስ ክርስትና ኣብ

ዝምላኽሉን ካልኦት ሃገራት ዓለም ጥራሕ ዘይኾነስ ብዘይካ ገለ ኣዋሰንቲ ክባቢታት ክልል ኣምሓራ ኣሸንዳ ካብ ትግራይ ወፃዒ ኣብ መላእ ኢትዮጵያ ኣይፍለጥን።

For one thing there is no single religious manuscript, including the bible, which states about *Ashenda* and its religious background. For the other *Ashenda* is not celebrated not only in other countries where Orthodox Christianity is exercised, but also in other regions of Ethiopia except in very some parts of the Amhara region that are found in the border areas. (Elias Abera, personal interview, translation own)

What Elias further claims is that, *Ashenda* probably is a “pre-Christian culture” which as he speculates is manipulated to serve as a means for the expansion of Christianity; and thereby through the course of time Christianized. “It is a common phenomenon of religious indoctrinations that cultures are key instruments to get the heartbeat of the target society and by which preaching missions can be realized at ease.”

*Ashenda* can, therefore, be taken as cultural festival at least for the following reasons. First, no religious manuscript including the bible speaks of the religiosity an even the very existence of the *Ashenda* festival. Second, it is exceptional to majority of Tigray and some bordering areas of the Amhara region; no other Orthodox Christian societies, outside and within Ethiopia, celebrate the festival. Even the geographical proximity of the two regions’ peoples can signal that this festival is cultural as it likely that it has been shared, as any other cultural exchange, through their long-lived communication. Third, even within the Tigray region, the festival varies in its nomenclature (*Ashenda*, *Ayniwari*, *Marya*, etc.), commencement date, and duration from place to place; and, thus, these and other distinctions show us that it is not clearly determined by religious principles or commands. Rather, it is determined by cultures of specific societies. And, fourth, *Ashenda* unlike other religious holidays has been celebrated by Muslims and non-Orthodox Christians.

### **3.4 VALUES OF ASHENDA**

The *Ashenda* culture has many values, both positive and negative, attached to it; most of which are abstract and thus cannot be understood easily. But, when one interprets the lyrics of the songs, behaviors and customs that manifest in the entire festivity, he/she

comes up with quite many constructive and destructive values. Of which, the researcher after thoroughly analyzing and interpreting the behaviors, songs, etc. of *Ashenda* girls, has managed to identify the below discussed values.

### 3.3.1 Positive Values of *Ashenda*

#### 3.3.1.1 Fairness

Originally in the rural areas of Tigray, the *Ashenda* girls go house to house in their community and express their best wishes to every single household without any discrimination. They sing and play in all households in the same manner no matter how much the households differ in possession, prestige, or any other criterion.

ቆልዑ አሸንዳ ናብ ዝኾነ ገዛ ከይደን ሰብ እንተስኢኑን ቆዕሊ አሸንዳ ቀንጢበን ኣብ መረባ ይሓድጋሎም እሞ እቶም ሰብ ገዛ ኣብ ዘየለውሉ እንኳኔ ኣብፀሓኩም ከም ዝበለኦም ይርድኡ።

If the *Ashenda* girls go to a given house in their community and found no body there, they leave a piece of the *Ashenda* leaf in the compound so as to inform them that they had come and expressed their best wishes in their absence. (W/ro Meaza Girmay, Personal interview, Translation own).

In addition to their physical going to each and every household, theme of the songs they sing, the duration they stay playing at each, the style of their dance, etc. are the same. Thus, every household is pleased by their fairness in their playing and route.

#### 3.3.1.2 Dignity for the Female

Rape and abduction are almost common phenomena all over the country: Ethiopia. These behaviors, according to Anthropologist Shewit Abraham, emanate from the prevailing male dominated culture. Nevertheless, such gender biased negative practices do not take place during the festivities of *Ashenda*.

Even though unprecedented beautiful and attractive, the *Ashenda* girls enjoy their freedom and equality better than any time else. No one dares to commit rape or abduction over any one of the *Ashenda* girls even if he found her alone. Like Likawint Yared Kassa reasons out:

እንተድኣ ሓደ ወዲ ንቆልዑ አሸንዳ ዓጣቡ ወይ ጠሊፉ እቲ ተግባር ኣብ ልዕሊ ቅድስቲ ድንድል ማርያም ከም ዝተፈፀመ እዩ ዝቐፀር። ምክንያቱ እተን ቆልዑ አሸንዳ ዕርገት ቅድስት ድንግል ማርያም እናዘከራን ንክብራ እናብዓላን ስለዘልዎ።

If one commits rape or abduction over the *Ashenda* girls, it is considered as if the action was made on the St. Mary. This is because the *Ashenda* girls are commemorating the ascension of St. Mary and celebrating for her glory. (Lieke Likawint Yared Kassa, personal interview, translation own).

*Ashenda*, generally as a culture, is a privilege for the female. Females are not merely dominant, but also they are the only actors throughout the festivity. Whereas males could attend the festivity they have no active role at all: their appearance never goes beyond escorting the girls and audience-ship. Hence, *Ashenda* is a gendered cultural festival which exclusively entitled to the female. The female enjoys unprecedented dignity and is socially respected during the cultural festival for her being an *Ashenda* girl. As a result, *Ashenda* is the time when females most proud by her gender identity.

በዘበነ ኦሪት ንል ኣነስተይቲ ከም መስሐሓቲትን ሓጥያተኛን እያ ትርእ ነይራ። “እመቤታቸን” ቅድስት ድንግል ማርያም ንጎይታና እየሱስ ክርስቶስ ምስወለደት ግና እዚ ኣረእኒያ ተቀይሩ፤ ቅድስት ድንግል ማርያም ባዕላ ‘ውን ከም መሓበሊት ደቂአንስትዮ /ምኹንስ ለደናግል/ እያ ትውሰድ።

During the Old Testament, the female had been perceived as “misleading and sinful”. But after St. Mary gave birth to the Lord Jesus Christ, such perception was disproved and thus, St. Mary herself is well thought-out as “ምኹንስ ለደናግል” (a Geez phrase to mean ‘a pride of the female’). (Lieke Likawint Yared Kassa, personal interview, translation own).

### 3.3.1.3 Expressing Best Wishes

It is a clear fact that, in the western world, people express their best wished during public holidays by presenting post cards or other means of communication. In our context however, such best wishes are expressed orally. Specifically in the case of *Ashenda*, girls go house to house and express their best wishes to each family in their community.

ኣሸንዳ ዝበዓለሉ ቅነ ማለት'ውን ካብ ነሓስ 16 ክሳብ ነሓስ 20 ብፀልማትነቱን ሓደገኛነቱን ንዝምስል ወቕቲ ክረምቲ ስዲቡ፣ ደስታ፣ ስናይ ዘበነንን ፅቡቕ ኣየርን ሓዚ ንዝመፅእ ሓዱሽ ዓመትን ቀዲሙ 'ዩ ዝመፅእ። ስለዚ ኣሸንዳ ብወቕቲ ኣንጻር እንትንሪኦ ካብ ፀልማትን ሓደገኛን እዋን ናብ ብሩህ፣ ፅቡቕ ምህርቲ ዝኣፈሱሉን ሰላማዊን ዘበን ዘሸጋግረና ቅነዮ። ነዚ እዩ'ውን ቆልዑ ኣሸንዳ ካብ ገዛ ናብ ገዛ እናዞራ ብደርፈንን ስዕስዲታንን እንኳኔ ኣብፀሓኩም እናበላ ሰናይ ትምኒተን ዝገልጻ።

The festivity time of *Asenda*, 16-20 August E.C, is preceded by a rainy season called *kremti* which is perceived as dark and risky; and followed by a new year that supposedly brings happiness, maximum productivity and good weather. Hence, *Ashenda*, calendarically speaking, is assumed as a transitional period from the dark and risky time to the bright, productive and peaceful one”. That is why the *Ashenda* girls go to every household

and express their best wishes via their song and dances. (Lieke Likawint Yared Kassa, personal interview, stress and translation own).

When the girls are done with their songs and dances, persons whom to the best wish are expressed in return wish the girls to live long and stay healthy and united. Indeed, this often times takes place in the form of blessing.

### 3.3.1.4. Thanks Giving

The *Ashenda* girls, prior to any where, go to the church of St. Marry or any other church available in their area, early in the morning of the very first day of the festivity. They first pray for a while privately, and then sing to thank their Lord in a mass.

Lieke Likawint Yared Kassa contends, “[The *Ashenda* girls] first rotate the church three times thanking their God with their songs for keeping them all healthy and alive. And then they find an appropriate playing ground where they can sing and dance exclusively for the glory of the Almighty God.” Besides, when the girls are given a gift, in kind or in money, they express their gratitude to the one who offered them with.

### 3.3.1.5 Innocence/Cleanness

Before the *Ashenda* girls go to the church to thank their God, they first go to a near-by river or spring water and wash their hands, feet, and face in a mass. The value behind this a ritual-like practice according to religious leaders and elderly people is innocence/cleanness.

[ቆልዑ ኣሸንዳ] ናብ ቤተ-ክርስቲያን ክኸዳ ከለዎ ብኣካልን ብሕልናን ክነፅሃ ስለዘለዎን ብሓባር ኾይነን ይሕፀቡ። እዚ ድማ እኩይ ባህሪ ኣወጊደን ሰናይ ምግባር ከማዕብላ የዘክረን። ብሓባር እቲ ዝሕፀቡ ኣይዲ ናይ ዕድቂ ወይ ንፅህና ተምሳሌት'ዩ።

They [the *Ashenda* girls] wash in a mass before they go to the church to remind them that they have to be clean both physically and mentally. It reminds them to avoid evil behaviors and to develop the good ones. In short, it symbolically represents the sign of righteousness or innocence. (Lieke Likawint Yared Kassa, personal interview, translation own).

This ritual, therefore, carries a number of constructive and corrective values ranging from positive thinking and forgiveness to keeping one's personal hygiene.

### 3.3.1.6 Team Working

*Ashenda* girls are not a mere group of playing girls. They do have members with their own respective roles and functions. They do have a leader known as *Haleka*, logistics girl, lead singer called “*Menguhit*”, drummers, and the rest audiences. Except in the cases of the leader (*Haleka*) and logistics girl who are permanently assigned for their respective duties, the rest take turn to be a dancer, drummer, signer, audience, etc. according to their individual interests, their skills and acceptance by the group.

ንግዴ ካብ ኩሉ ዘግረመላይ ናይ ቆልዑ ኣሸንዳ ናይ ጉጅለ ውህደትን ሓቢርካ ናይ ምስራሕ መንፈስን፡፡ እዚ ካብ ከም ትምህርቲ ዓለም ዘኣመሰሉ መዓልታዊ ሓባራዊ ስራሕትና ኣይንረኽቦን፡፡... እዚ ዓብዩ እሴት ናብ ካልኦት ንጥፈታትና እንተተግቢርናዮ ዓብዩ ረብሓ ክህልዎዮ፡፡

What surprise me most are the group cohesion and the spirit of team working of the *Ashenda* girls which one cannot get it in our day to day team works such as the academic arena.... It would be of much importance if we could apply such a great value to the rest of our walks of life (A member of FGD one, Translation own, Feb. 29, 2011).

### 3.3.1.7 Leadership

The whole girls of a given village form single large group and spend the week playing together. To make their time of festivity pleasant and effective, the group members select a group leader called “*Haleka*”. The *Haleka* is expected to offer guidance to the rest of group members on what to do and what not, where to go and when, how to act and behave; co-ordinate group members, manage potential and/or emerged conflicts, take care of and socialize the newly joining young girls, make decisions, and so on. Moreover, she proves her role modeling to the rest members of the group in her totality of behaviors especially pertinent to the *Ashenda* culture.

On the other hand, according to Elias Abera, the group members obey to and respect the instructions and guidance of the *Haleka* as far as she works according to the customs and norms of the *Ashenda* culture. Therefore, the key elements of leadership such as group members, common agenda (celebrating *Ashenda*), the essence and functional existence of subordinates and leader, and decision making process are at the hub of the *Ashenda* culture.

### 3.3.1.8 Socialization

In the rural areas of Tigray, *Ashend* girls of a given village form only single group no matter how large it might be. Unlike the town dwelling girls, they do not divide themselves into sub groups depending on age, social status, style or any other factor. As a result, beginner young girls get a golden opportunity to socialize themselves with the values, rituals, norms, songs, dancing styles, etc. of the culture by joining to the large group. The senior girls, thus, teach them all of the dos and don'ts of the culture, directly or indirectly.

ጀመርቲ ኣናእሽተይ ኣጓላት በቢዓመቱ እንትመፃ እተን ዓበይቲ ሓላፍነተን ስለዝፈልጣ ሳዕስዲት፣ ደርፊ፣ ጣቕዲት፣ ከበሮ ምውቃዕ...የምህረአን፤ ናበይ፣ መፃዝን ንምንታይን ከም ዝኸየድ ይነግረአን። እተን ኣናእሽተይ እኹልን ንቡርን ፍልጣት ይረኽባ። ንላተንውን ምስ ዓበያ ብግደአን ንኣናእሽተይ ኣሕዋተን ከምኡ ገይረን የምህረአን።

When new young girls join the group every year, the senior ones know and discharge their responsibility to take care of the kids by helping them enjoy the festivity, showing them how to dance, how to sing, how to clap, how to bit the drum; tell them where to go when and for what purpose, etc. As a result, the young girls learn and obtain enough and appropriate knowledge and practices of the culture; and they in turn do the same for their young fellows when they grow up. (W/ro Kiros Tesfay, personal interview, translation own).

The socialization value of *Ashenda* according to the elderly people is the key factor for the so far preservation of the culture. Whereas it is still widely taking place in the village festivities, this value is on its extinction in the urban areas due to the disintegrated group formation of the town dwelling *Ashenda* girls.

### 3.3.1.9 Child Care

One can dare to say that the society at large has a poor culture of child rearing. It is a common fate of almost all male children of village Tigray, even Ethiopia at large to look after their parents' domestic animals. This starts from the age of four or five as the duty is culturally assumed as an easy task even though its psychological and physical burden exceeds the assumption. Female children also are expected to assist their mothers in their domestic activities such as cooking, collecting fire wood; fetching water, taking care of their siblings specially babies, washing clothes, and dining/cooking, performing agricultural activities, such as weeding and harvesting as boys do.

For these and other reasons children are obliged to spend their childhood in laborious duties. Hence, they lack the opportunity both to care for themselves and to be cared by their parents or guardians. Their rights are observed to be abused, therefore. During the *Ashenda* week, however, all children are given the chance to enjoy the colorful festivity. Parents also buy new dress for their children. According to W/ro Tsilalmuz Baraki, even if the parents could not afford to buy clothes to their children, they borrow some from neighbors or relatives so as to keep the morals of their children who might have suffered from envy of seeing others wearing new dresses.

Moreover, parents get the hair of their daughters done on the eve of the launching day of the festival. They, also, keep them their personal hygiene. They bring them or help them bring the *Ashenda* leave and tie it in a fashion pattern at their waist. Getting them feed properly they bless and let them go to play freely.

### 3.3.1.10 Indigenusness

The *Ashenda* girls use a number of materials or material cultures, ranging from cosmetics to musical instruments. All of the materials they use are locally produced. Their hairstyles and dressing style are indigenus. Even where there are modern substitutes on the nearby markets, the *Ashenda* girls prefer to consume the locally produced dresses, cosmetics, musical instruments, etc. This according to Ato Kassahun W/giorgis has multifaceted advantages. Of which:

ናይቲ ከባቢ ሰራሕቲ ወርቅን ብሩርን፣ ሸመንቲ፣ ቆነንቲ፣ ሰራሕቲ ኸበሮ ወዘተ. የበረታት፣ ንዕቡት ህዝቢ እቲ ከባቢውን ኣስተዋፅኦ ይገብር። ካብዚ ሓሊፉ ድማ እቲ ብፍላይ ኣብ ከተማታትና እናጠፈኦ ዘሎ ብፍርያት ውሽጢ ዓፄ ናይ ምኽራብ ኣተሓሳስባ የፅቢ።

It encourages, local producers such as gold and silver smiths, weavers, hair dressers, drum makers, etc.; and thereby contributes to the economic development of the local people. Besides, it develops the mentality of priding on indigenus products which we are terribly missing it especially in our urban areas. (Kassahun W/giorgis, personal interview, translation own)

Such a sense of indigenouness, also, preserves and enhances indigenous knowledge of the society which is part of its culture. In line of this thought, a member of FGD four, views *Ashenda* as an even that reminds her “true self”.

ሐቂ ትሕሽኒ ብሃዕባ ሃገረይ ካብ ዝፈልጦ ብሃዕባ ኣሜሪካ ዝፈልጦ ይበዝሕ። ናተይ ይኹን ናይ ሙብሃሕትኡም ኣዕሩኽተይ ኣከዳድና ሙሉእ ብሙሉእ ክፋል ናይ ምዕራባውያን ባህሊ'ዩ። ዋላ'ኳ ኣካልና ኣብዚ እንተሃለወ ሕልናና ግን ወፊሩ'ዩ። ምስጋና ንባህላዊ በዓላትና ብፍላይ ኣሸንዳ ግን ጠጠው ኢሉ ብሃዕባ ዓርሰይ ይሓሰብ። ኣሸንዳ ናብ ትክክለኛ ኣነተይ ንክምለስ ዓብይ ዕድል ይፈጥረሉይ። ብነበረያ ነበረ ዝስምዖ ዓይነት ችንዕና፣ ፍቕርን ምሕዝነትን ብተግባር ይረክቦም።

To be frank, I know a lot about America than I do about my country. The way I and most of my friends dress is purely part of the Western culture. Our mentality, if not our physical body, is already gone. But thanks to our cultural holidays, especially, *Ashenda*, I stop and start thinking about myself.... *Ashenda* gives me a great opportunity to retain my true self. I enjoy the innocence, love and companionship that I heard of it fore fatherly. (A member of FGD four, Translation own, March 05, 2011)

### 3.3.1.11 Forgiveness

Two different groups of *Ashenda* girls representing their respective villages meet at a certain place for playing contest. Each group plays to its fullest potential by praising itself and down playing (demoralizing) the other. This heatedly goes on for an hour and more in the presence of no judge.

In doing so, each group might raise from general humorous songs to a very serious private life issues to demoralize the other group or a single girl (often to the *Haleka* or another actively playing one) from. The group which is outnumbered by playing and thus could not tolerate the insulting songs of the dominating group starts to stone at the opposing girls. Hence, the conflict becomes both verbal and physical one to the extent that some girls might get seriously injured.

After such a serious fight, however, they instantly change the tone of the contest and urge for reconciliation via their songs such as “ንዕነንዶ ንተሓዋወስዮ ዘመን ክምለስ” (*Let's make peace and play together*). Then both groups stop fighting to create a joint large group and play together peacefully. Everyone, even the bitterly injured girl, forgives right away. Hence no more conflict or revenge takes place.

### 3.3.1.12 Unity/Togetherness

The *Ashenda* culture is never possible without social gathering and group making. It is only when the *Ashenda* girls gather together and unite themselves that they effectively and properly spent the festival. Thus, *Ashenda* creates a golden opportunity for the girls as a means of social gathering. Starting from the very first day of the festivity, they begin to reset their unity as they collect the *Ashenda* leave going to the field singing and playing together. Even in the beginning day, they sing as: “ዓርከይ መሓዛየ የዓወይ በላ ምሳየ” (*Oh my fellow come and enjoy Ashenda with me*).

Besides, *Ashenda* particularly these days is creating opportunity for cross-cultural relationships and enter-ethnic unity. Likewise, Ato Fisehatsion Teka believes that it has a great potential to strengthen the long lived relation between the Tigray and Amhara regions both at state and societal levels.

በ2001 ዓ.ም ንተጋሩ ቆልዑ አሸንዳ ዝውክላ ከዋልድ ናብ ዞባ ዋግኸምራ ክልል ኣምሓራ ልኢኸና ነይርና። ንሳቶምውን ኣብ ዝሓለፈ ዓመት [2002 ዓ.ም] ናብ መቐለ ልኢኸም ነይሮም። እዚ ድማ ታሪኻውን ማሕበራውን ርክብ እተን ኣሓት ክልላት ብዝበለፀ ከጠናኸር ይኸእል እዩ ተባሂሉ እዩ ተኣሚኑሉ። እዞም ናይ ባህሊ ምምስሳላት ኣብ ክልቲኦም ህዝብታትን መንግስታትን ዘሎ ሕውነትን ሓድኑትን ንምጥንኻር እጃሙ የበርክቱ።

A representative group of *Ashenda* girls had been sent to the Wagkhumra zone of the Amhara region in August 2001 E.C.; and they also sent theirs to Mekelle last year (2002). This is believed to better consolidate the historical and social relationships of the sisterly regions. The cultural commonalities contribute to the brotherhood and unity between the two peoples and states. (Ato Fisehatsion Teka, Personal interview, Translation own).

### 3.3.1.13 Beauty

The *Ashenda* girls give due emphasis to their dressing style, hairstyle, bids and crosses tied on the neck, traditional lead (*Kuhli*) put on their eyelids and eyebrow and other beautifying objects.

For the *Ashenda* girls become unprecedented beautiful the elderly tell their male youth a Tigrigna proverb “ቆልዓ ኣሸንዳ ርኢኻ ኣይትተሓፀ” which literary means: “*Don’t engage*

*a girl merely seeing her in the festivity of Ashenda*”. This proverb hence implies that all girls are beautiful during the *Ashenda* time as they give due attention to their beauty, more than any time else. On top of this, “ኣውላድ ስኒ ፀባዩ ምሰላ ዕምበባዩ” is a song sung by the *Ashenda* girls themselves. Translated into English this means: *Oh my Ashendagirls, be as beautiful as a flower!* Thus, beauty is a value that rests at the focal point of *Ashenda*.

### 3.3.1.14 Entertainment

The female, in the Tigray culture in general, is busy engaged in both domestic and agricultural activities. Consequently, she gets little time to refresh herself. This is true for the small girls, too. That is chiefly, why all girls zealously wait for the coming of *Ashenda*. (This zealousness also works for the town dwelling girls as well, despite their better access to both free time and entertainment facilities.)



A group of *Ashenda* girls, playing.

Accordingly, *Ashenda* can be considered as a programmed and budgeted time for entertainment, particularly for girls. This is so, because girls play together singing and dancing ranging from three days to one week (or in some places even more) the time during which the girls are free from academic duties and agricultural activities (The whole days in the week are days off for a religious reason: *Be-ale Filseta*). In other words, *Ashenda* is a cultural entertainment festival that takes place annually lasting for averagely a week.

### **3.3.1.15 Democracy**

With regard to democracy, *Ashenda* has of course quite contradictory values. On the one hand, it can be labeled as undemocratic culture in that the *Ashenda* girls are intolerant and aggressive in some of their communication contexts such as when they collect money and when they held their enter-group playing contest.

On the other hand, however, *Ashenda* is democratic for at least six reasons. Firstly, we can mention the *electoral process of the leadership*. The leader of the *Ashenda* girls, *Haleka*, is elected by the consent of the majority of the group, not to mention all, for her good understanding of the group's and society's values and norms, leadership potential, interpersonal communication skill, excellent negotiation and decision-making skills, playfulness, and the like. What is surprising is, the *Haleka* can be stepped down peacefully if the group found her ineffective even within the first day. Nevertheless, she might be re-elected in the year(s) to come if deemed successful.

Secondly, *Ashenda* is democratic in that it is *participatory*. Any member, rich or poor, smaller or bigger, etc. can take part in dancing and singing with no privilege or discrimination. As to the tasks of drumming, leadership and financing, what matters is excellence that can win the consent of the group; even so they are open to everyone's participation.

The third democratic value of the cultural festival is the *freedom* that glorifies to the group members. The freedom value of *Ashenda* manifests in two ways. One is the

physical freedom of the girls. Every *Ashenda* girl is free of any domestic duty and thus enjoys her unprecedented freedom in the way she dances and behaves. According to Shewit Abrham, Anthropologist, no social controlling factor can have, unlike in the other days, its suppressing influence over the *Ashenda* girl. And, the other means by which the *freedom* value manifests is the verbal communication that can be taken as equivalent to the concept of *freedom of speech*. As Ato Fisehatsion Teka asserts, “It is in this, [*Ashenda*] event that girls can speak of their suppressed feelings. They never worry about the social taboos including the use of sexual terms.”

Be it in the form of insult, joke or cursing, the *Ashenda* girls are in a “guaranteed” context to express their gut feelings. Very surprisingly, even the society at large acknowledges such a “time bound” freedom.

እቲ ህዝቢ ብሓፈሻ እንተርእዮ መክረራይነት ባህሪ ዘለዎሮ። ብዘይረብሕ ፀርፊውን ከይተረፈ ብቕልጡፍ ይናደድ። ግብረ መልሱ ድማ ቕልጡፍን ዕዕፍን፣ ኣብ በዓላት ኣሸንዳን ግና ፀርፍታት፣ መርገም ይኹን ስላቓት ኣቕሊልኻ እዩም ዝረከዩ። እቲ ግብረ መልሱውን መብዛሕትኡ ግዘ ብግልባጡ እዩ። ስሊቕኻ እዩ ዝሕለፍ። ስለዚ ኣነ ከም ዝመስለኒ እዚ ንዝተረፈ ህይወትናውን ዓጣቕ ትምህርቲ ዘሕልፍ ዓብዩ እሴት ኣሸንዳዩ።

The society at large is a kind of conservative one. It feels very offended even by a simple insulting and the reaction is very quick and two-fold. But, in the time of the festivities of *Ashanda* such insulting, cursing and jokes are taken easy; and the reaction is mostly the reverse: smile. So to me this is a great value of *Ashenda* that could owe a great lesson to the rest of our lives. (Mesele Zeleke, personal interview, translation own)

The fourth manifestation of *Ashenda's* democratic value is *the principle of rule of law*. The girls are, more than anything else, governed by the society's norms and their own agreements on contextually specific matters. Consequently, no girl including the elected leader (*Haleka*) can deviate from these unwritten but binding rules. It is the responsibility of any girl to behave as per to the group's consent and the society' norms and values.

Fifth, *Ashenda* is democratic culture in that the principles of *equality* and *fairness* are at the hub of the entire festivity. The *Ashenda* girls view or are culturally expected to view all members of their community equally. This can be practically reflected in the girls' un-discriminatory behavior of house to house going to express their best wishes to each household, for instance. Besides, any member girl is entitled to equally enjoy the

festivity. With regard to the electoral process of the leadership, any girl can be elected *Haleka* as far as she managed the consent of the majority girls for her multi-faceted excellence.

And, sixth, the principle of *majority rule* is what manifests in the *Ashenda* culture. While it is true that the *Ashenda* girls are distinguished for their group cohesion and team spirit, they as human beings would obviously have some diverging interests. Such differences when needed to be narrowed down, for group decision making purposes for instance, are solved by the principle of majority rule. Thus, an idea or a girl that won the will of the majority of the *Ashenda* girls takes the lead.

Taken together, the principles of rule of law, freedom (of speech), equality, majority rule, participation and fair electoral process are at the center of *Ashenda*; hence, it is quite a democratic culture.

### **3.3.1.16 Charity/Fundraising**

While the *Ashenda* girls go house to house to express their best wishes, any interested person may grant them gifts either in the form of money or in kind for their interesting songs and dances. Particularly mothers offer them foods and drinks, while fathers give them money. Indeed, it is also customary to farewell the *Ashenda* girls simply by blessing them and expressing them best wishes as a feedback to theirs.

Meanwhile, the girls also purposefully stop passersby and urge them for money via their songs and dances. What is good here is that, the whole money they collected is presented to the church at the end of the festivity. The church then fulfils its current demands by the money donated from the *Ashenda* girls. Hence, the entire money, either offered in the form of reward for their interesting playing or given for their pressing demand is invested to strengthen the community's institution. Thus, the money they collect has the mission of fundraising. The girls, in doing so, do not give priority to themselves over the society. Their individual and group interest is willingly suppressed for the sake of serving the interest of the entire community: strengthening one of the social institutions, which is the

church. As such, the girls in line with their entertainment are highly committed to fulfill their social responsibility.

### **3.3.1.17 Virginit**

Ideally, *Ashenda* is not a mere girls' festival but that of virgin girls. That is why *Ashenda* is often attended by underage girls. Even though it is becoming argumentative that *Ashenda* is and originally was a religious festival, its virginity value appears to stem from the culture's linkage with the Orthodox religion, particularly with the efforts that have been made to associate *Ashenda* with the virgin St. Mary.

For what so ever reason, the society still highly values virgin girls; and vice versa. In cultural weddings, for instance, it was a common practice, and still rarely happens, to return a bride who is not found being virgin to her parents' home for ones and for all on a donkey's back wearing her "*wocho*", a black and rough blanket purposefully put on the bride for her disgrace or humiliation. Generally, the one who is not found virgin on her wedding day is culturally considered as disloyal and rude; and her case becomes a burning issue in her society. As part of such a virginity valuing society, the *Ashenda* girls criticize pre-marriage sexual practices via their song: "እንጅራ ሃንዛዮ እንጅራ ሃንዛ ንል እንዳበልናያስ ኣብ ኸብዲ ሒዛ" This literally means: *Whereas we are relying on her virginity, she, to our surprise, has become pregnant.*

The culture's virginity value therefore seems to be so vital and lesson-full in the fight against HIV/AIDS. And, the safest sexual behavior, abstinence, could be better communicated from the perspective of this cultural ground.

### **3.3.2 Negative Values of *Ashenda***

Despite its constructive values, practices and rituals, *Ashenda* has some dysfunctional practices. Of which:

### 3.3.2.1 Violent Communication

The society at large is very polite and respectful. Especially children do not disrespect their elders. If they do, it surely is not of the norm. But in the case of the *Ashenda* girls they verbally attack both to their contesting group members and to the ones who failed to reward them for their demanding songs and dances. They even challenge passersby by pulling and pushing them on their way from the opposite direction. When the requested individual insists to the end not to give them anything the girls bombard him/her with insults and cursing. Most of these insulting and cursing are funny, while some are demoralizing and socially taboo: sexual terms.

### 3.3.2.2 Non-Fair Play/Intolerance

The time when the *Ashenda* girls meet with the other group from another a nearby village for playing contest, the group that is outnumbered by playing fails to appreciate the success of the counterparts. It rather starts to physically attack the other group which leads to serious injuries from both sides. Even though *Ashenda* girls are very democratic in most of their festivities, they are unfair and violent in some aspects like this one. However, the society does not take such violent communication behaviors as serious and harmful. Ato Mesele Zeleke, for instance, observes:

እቲ ኣብ ሞንጎ ጉጅለታት ቆልዑ ኣሸንዳ ዝግበር ባእሲ ከም “ኣድቨንቸር” ዓይነት እዩ ምባል ይከኣል። ኣበር ዘለዎ ነገር ኣይኮነን። ንቁምን በቐልን ኢለንውን ኣይኮናን ዝበኣላ። ቅድሚ ምርኻቦንውን ከምዝበኣላ ይፈልግ እዩን። ሳዕቤን ዘለዎን ኣሉታዊን ዋላ እንተኾነ ብስሩ ግን ኣካል እቲ ፀወታኡን እዩ።

That specific inter-group conflict is a kind of adventure for the *Ashenda* girls. It is not something like feuding. They really do not mean it. They already know that they would fight before they met. Of course they also knew that they will forgive and reconcile before they led into their inter-group conflict. It simply is part of their entertainment, albeit potentially risky and negative (Mesele Zeleke, Personal interview, Translation own).

One fact is however vividly observed in the *Ashenda* culture; the failing group never appreciates the success of its counterpart, or it does not admit its failure in a costructive manner. The group that is beaten in the playing contest admits its failure by stonning and fighting the succeeding seriously lacks faireness. That is why it is identified as a negative value of the cultural festival: non-fair play.

### 3.5 WHAT DISTINGUISHES URBAN FESTIVITY FROM THE VILLAGES’?

It goes without saying that indigenous cultures of any given nation change, positively and/or negatively, mainly for factors associated with urbanization and globalization. To this end, everyone of my sources, including the texts, assure that the *Ashenda* culture is better reflected in rural areas, in terms of the culture’s originality, than it is in towns. Of course, there are some aspects that the urban festivities exceed in. The following are diverging points between the festivities of villages and towns.

#### 3.5.1 Group Formation

In the village areas of Tigray, there only is single group of *Ashenda* girls. This, according to Fisehatsion Teka, results from the communal life style of the villagers and their relatively small sized of population. In the towns of the region, however, the *Ashenda* girls are divided into extremely numerous groups.

Some informants associate this into the larger population size of the towns. While this truly is one factor for such extreme division of groups, Meresa Hiluf sees “unnecessary” criteria for their over-division. These in addition to the areal factor are age, style, status, money, and many more. Very small girls form their own kids’ group and they miss the value of proper *socialization* as the senior girls fail to discharge their responsibility of socializing as do the villages. This age dependent division, as Anthropologist Shewit Abraham, fears would create its own problem in preserving the culture as the kids could not get the chance to learn each and every element of the cultural festival from their elders.

Many informants also see money as the most powerful factor for such disintegrated grouping. Of these, one group discussant (*Ashenda*) girl discloses:

ናብ ኣናሕሽተይ ጉጅለታት ክንከፋፈል እንደልየሉ ኣውራ ምክንያት ገንዘብየ። ምክንያቱ ቁፅሪ ኣዋልድ ብዝወሐደ ቐፅሪ ዓቕን እንካፈሎ ገንዘብ ኣዝዩ ስለዝውስኽ።  
We want to have a very small group mainly for a financial reason.  
Because, the smaller the number of the group members, the more the

chance to increase the amount of money we share among each other. (A member of FGD two, Feb. 24, 2011)

The other new trend, according to another group discussant, is strata based group. As to her, there are girls who gather from different parts of the city, Mekelle, and form their own distinct group based on their academic or economic status and on their unique intra-group style.

Generally, the group formation of the town dwelling *Ashenda* girls seems to be very dangerous as it is highly business oriented; misses the values of socialization and unity, to mention some.

### **3.5.2 Church Going**

In the rural areas, *Ashenda* girls launch their festivity by going to the church to thank their God for keeping them all healthy and alive. This, until the recent past, was true for the town dwellings girls as well. Now days, this is becoming history, however. This according to Ato Elias Abera is “a sign of retaining of secularity of the cultural festival.” Ato Elias, indeed, claims that *Ashenda* is a pre-Christian culture, adding: “In most towns of Tigray, *Ashenda* is being celebrated by followers and non-followers of the Orthodox Christianity. This shows us that *Ashenda* is regaining its secularity and becoming a public or cultural festival.

### **3.5.3 Clothing and Costume Use**

During the time of *Ashenda*, most girls, village and town dwelling, wear traditional dresses and make ups. They villagers wear “Kemish,” a traditional dress made up of cotton which is locally produced by weavers in their community. In towns, however, some girls wear modern pants and mini-skirts that are quite foreign to the culture. As to the use of costume, the village girls beautify themselves by wearing “*Kuhli*” (a traditional powder lead put on eye brows and eye lids) and putting butter on their braided hair. On the contrary, some of the town-dwelling girls wear modern pencil lead; and do not get their hair braided in the traditional style. Besides majority of the town dwelling girls do

not wear traditional bids, cross and other ornaments on their neck as do the villagers. Hence, they generally lack cultural manifestation.

### 3.5.4 Duration of the Festival

The duration for the festivity of *Ashenda* in the village areas varies from place to place. In most villages it takes only a week whereas it takes place for almost a month in others such as around Axum. Yet, there is still a big difference in the duration of *Ashenda* between a given town and its surrounding villages. For example, in Mekelle town *Ashenda* is celebrated only for three days; where as it takes place for the whole week in very nearby villages.

### 3.5.5 House to House Going

As is mentioned earlier, one of the positive values of *Ashenda* is expressing best wishes to one's community. This, in the villages, is made possible by going to each and every household. In towns however, this does not take place.

አዋልድ አሸንዳ ካብ ገዛ ናብ ገዛ ከምገዘራ ይፈልጥዮ። ገዛራሉ ምክንያት ግና ኣይፈልጥን። ብጣዕሚ ዘኸዘነክ ግን እዚ ዓይነት ተግባር ኣብ ናይ ከተማ በዓላት የለን።  
I do have the mere information that the village girls go to every household but I don't really know what their very purpose is....Unfortunately, in town festivities; there is no such a practice at all. (A member of FGD four, Translation own, Feb. 15, 2011).

Due to the absence of home to home going in the towns, one value is totally missed; the value of expressing best wishes. This value and the way it is expressed, going to each household, better strengthens the society close knit and affiliation. However, this crucial purpose, too, is missed in the towns. Another group discussant congruently reflects his view as:

ስለ እውነት ኣብ ጎሊ ገዛይ መንከምዘሎ ኣይፈልጥን። ዋላ እንተተራኽብና 'ውን ሰላምታ ኣይጎለጥወጥን። ብስም ዘመናዊነት ናይ እንስሳዊ ባህሪ እናተላበሰና ኢና። ርግፀኛ እዩ እዚ ኣጎላት ገጠር ዝገብርኦ ቱብ ገዛ ናብ ገዛ ዘይርኻ ሰናይ ትንቢት ምግላፅ] ኣብ ከምዚ ዓይነት ኩነታት ንዘለና ኩለና ብዙሕ መልእኽቲ እዩ ዘለዎ።  
I really do not know who in my next door is. Even if we met we do not exchange greeting. We simply are developing animals' behavior in the name of modernity. I am sure what the village dwelling girls do [the home to home going] would mean a lot to us all who are in such a context.(A member of FGD Two, Translation own, Feb. 06, 2011).

### 3.5.6 Motive of the Festivity

Both the village and town dwelling girls eagerly wait for the coming of *Ashenda*. Their eagerness however emanates from different motives as the finding of this research reveals.

እተን ቆልዑ ገጠር ካብ ኩሉ ዘብህገን ደርፍን ሳዕስዒትን ወይ ድማ እቲ ባህሊ'ዩ። ብጣዕሚ ተፃውትን ኣብ ምሕዳስ ዘድህባን እዮን። ብኣንፃሩ እተን ቆልዑ ከተማ ብዝተበለፀ ገንዘብ ተኮር'ዮን። ሙብዛሕተኦም ደርፊታተን ገንዘብ ስለዝተጠልቡ ካብ ግጥምታት እቶም ደርፍታተን ዋና ድሌተን እንታይ ከምዝኾነ ማንም ሰብ ብቐሊሉ ክርዳእ ይኽእል።

The villagers are fond of the songs and dances or just the culture. They are highly playful and entertainment oriented. The town dwelling ones, on the contrary, are more of business oriented. One can easily understand the very motive of the festivity, from the lyrics of their songs, as most of which [the songs] urge for money. (Ato Fisehatsion Teka, Personal interview, Translation own).

The elderly mothers that I interviewed also are very much concerned by this “disastrous trend” as they believe that it threatens the preservation of most of the culture’s elements.

The focus group discussant girls also admit such an accusation.

ንባህሊ ኣይንግደስን ክብል ኣይኽእልን። ብኣካዳድናና፣ ኣቆናንናና፣ ሳዕስዒትና ወዘተ ንባህሊ ኣሸንጻ ክነንፀበርኛ ንፍትን ኢና። ገንዘብ ተንክፍ ኣብ ዝኾነ ደርፍታት ትኩረት ትገብራ ኢክን፣ ካልኦት ሙግለዕታት እቲ ባህሊ ዘንፀበርቁ ነገራት ከፃ ዕሸሽ ትብላ ኢኽን ዝብል ሓሳብ ግን ኣሃውን ይካፈሎ እዮ።

I cannot say that we [the town dwelling girls] do not care about the culture. We do try to reflect the *Ashenda* culture by our dressing, hairstyle, dances, etc. But I do share the view that we give more emphasis to the money related songs; and neglect the rest that manifest the other aspects of the culture. (A member of FGD three, translation own, Feb. 10, 2011).

### 4.5.7 Official Intervention

The *Ashenda* culture, at least for the last more than ten years, has been officially celebrated in Mekelle and other towns of the region. This has been so as a result of cooperation made among various governmental and non-governmental organizations such as CAT, TCTA, OSSA, TWA, and Mekelle City Administration Office, to mention some. Accordingly, lots of activities have been taking place including cultural performance contest among various groups of *Ashenda* girls and co-cultures, poetry contest among any interested writers, modern bands’ staged performances, advocacy

works on selected themes (anti-HIV/AIDS awareness creation, gender equality, etc.), among others.

Such officially intervened festivities have been viewed from different perspectives on the development and preservation of the culture. The need for such intervention according to Ato Solomon Gebremedhin, Public Relations Officer at the CAT, stems from the very aim to correct the emerging negative trends in the *Ashenda* of the town dwellers that deviate from the “original culture” and to “fill the knowledge gap”. Besides, the official interventions have caused the *Ashenda* culture to convey development related messages on selected themes. It can be said that they have opened the door to link culture with the issues of development.

#### **4.5.8 Songs Variety**

Many of the oral literatures of the culture such as the lyrics of the *Ashenda* songs with their respective melodies, and panegyrics that are commonly communicated during the festival, among others are on the risk of extermination. This is so because of, the lack of knowledge of the town dwellers’ on the culture and the money oriented festivity they practice. As a result, the songs of the towns’ *Ashenda* lack variety in their content and are limited almost only to matters pertaining to money.

# **CHAPTER FOUR**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This media and cultural study attempts to investigate how the mass media portray indigenous cultures and how such portrayals influence the culture. To achieve this end, the inquiry employs a qualitative research methodology and adopts the interpretative approach. What this chapter does, therefore, is present all the methodological discussions that are employed in this study.

### **4.2 Research Design: Why Qualitative?**

The central aim of this research is to understand the influence of the mass media, positive and/or negative, on culture by investigating the cultural television programs made on *Ashenda* as a case study. For culture by its nature is highly subjective, the researcher has adopted the interpretative approach as a broader research philosophy so as to “make sense of the ways other people make sense of their worlds...,” (Deacon et al., 1999:7). Hence, the researcher in order to achieve this foremost objective and address the research questions employed qualitative research methodology.

According to Natasha et al (2005) qualitative research offers complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. “It provides information about the “human” side of an issue that is, the often contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions and relationships of individuals.” (p. 1)

Furthermore, Fossey et al (2002:717) contend that qualitative researches particularly in mass communication research are geared towards “attending to questions concerned with developing an understanding of meaning and experience dimensions of human life and social world from the perspective of the social actors themselves.”

Another reason why the researcher opted for qualitative method in the investigation is its use of open-ended questions and probing aspect. Such open-ended questions according to Natashan et al (2005) give participants the opportunity to “respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses as quantitative methods do.” Open-ended questions, which are of the advantages of qualitative research, have the ability to evoke responses that are: meaningful and culturally relevant to the participant, unanticipated by the researcher, and rich and explanatory in nature.

What is more, qualitative methodology is used in this study for its advantage of providing “thick description”. Unlike the qualitative researcher who seeks to analysis variables and the relationships between them in isolation or in artificial settings, primarily for the sake of ensuring generalization, the thick description bestows qualitative researcher to gain a rich and complex understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon than eliciting data that can be generalized to other geographical areas or populations (Natasha et al, 2005:2). Similarly, this research will also attempt to come up with a rigorous description of the cultural festival as represented by the mass media.

### **4.3 The Need for Case Study**

It goes without saying that, the two core terms in the very topic of the study, media and culture, are too broad to investigate unless and other wise each is narrowed down into a case. Only in doing so would be possible to address the very important question(s): “Which culture is to be investigated as portrayed by which medium/media?”

Case study, as Creswell (2009) defines, is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process or individual(s). Poindexter and McCombs (2000:289) on their part offer “case study can be thought of as a study of one.” In line of this thought, a single cultural festival, *Ashenda*, is thoroughly examined, among other cultures.

Yet, this cultural festival has been communicated by multiple media outlets such radio stations, television, newspapers, magazines, website (or the Internet), audio and audio-

visual music clips, photographs, pamphlets, books, posters, and the like. Therefore, the researcher still is forced to narrow down these media arrays into a single case for time and resource reasons. For such considerations, Tigrigna Television programs are purposefully selected due to their ability to communicate the culture both in image and sound to, relatively, broader addressees.

#### **4.4 Methods of Data Collection**

Thus, this study employed textual analysis as a predominant method of data gathering so as to make sense of the cultural portrayals accompanied by focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews. The following sub-sections, therefore, are discussions on the whatness, and justifications for the use of the methods of data collection employed: textual analysis, focus group discussion and individual in-depth interviews.

Even though (participant) observation would have been very appropriate method of data gathering, the study period could not allow the researcher do so for *Ashenda* is an annual festival that takes place every August 16-21 E.C.: the time by which this research is expected to be finalized months earlier. Yet the researcher's background, being native to the culture, served as a best remedy in appropriately using the available methods.

##### **4.4.1 Textual Analysis**

This media and cultural study employed textual analysis as a predominant method of data gathering. In doing so, special programs made on *Ashenda* in the previous about ten or more years were selected (according to the sampling technique to be discussed latter) for thorough examination. According to Lindolf and Taylor (2002:159) "we use the term text," in textual analysis, "to emphasize how qualitative researcher is inherently concerned with describing and interpreting the symbolic qualities of social action." And, thus, the word text here does not necessarily refer to the printed documents. It rather specifically in this case study refers to the audio-visual documents that are produced and televised by the media on the cultural festival.

Textual analysis adopts an interpretive approach that endeavors to explore the ways in which language and images are presented, combined and used in media discourse (Poindexter and McCombs, 2000). As a result, words, images, symbols, ideas, themes or any nonverbal or verbal messages that can be depicted from the media texts are subjected to investigation.

#### **4.4.2 Focus Group Discussion**

Focus group discussion, as method of data collection, is chosen for this inquiry for the multi-faceted advantages it offers. Focus groups are vital in yielding data that are usually useful to enhance understanding and to reveal a wide range of opinions (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006).

Its flexibility in question design and follow-up also is the other reason why focus group discussion is preferred for this research. Furthermore, focus group discussions are found significant in that their responses are often more complete and less inhibited than that of individual interviews. This is also, as Berger (2000) argues, because the presence of the group members and their engagement in the discussion create an opportunity for diversity of viewpoints and information richness.

Natasha et al. (2005), also, contend that focus groups are effective in eliciting data on the cultural norms of a group and in generating broad overviews of issues of concern to the cultural groups or sub-groups presented. This is the leading reason why focus group discussion is used as a method of data gathering in this media and cultural study. Put differently, focus group discussions has provided the investigator with diversified points of view of the participants that in return lend much to better understand the issue, look for new insights and offer thick description of the cultural festival and its media portrayals.

#### **4.4.3 Individual In-depth Interview**

On top of the textual analysis and focus group discussions, this research employs in-depth individual interviews so as to obtain much more detailed background information from religious leaders, media's practitioners, cultural experts, social anthropologist, writers

and elderly people, among others. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) also notice the wealth of detail that in-depth interviews provide in the process of data collection. Elaborating data concerning respondent's opinions, values, motivations, recollections, experiences and feelings are obtained from in-depth interviews (Ibid, 2006).

Moreover, in-depth interviews contribute a lot in the qualitative inquiry by offering the researcher multiple insights into how people interpret and order their worlds. As Natasha et al (2005:29) believe this can be made possible "by being attentive to the causal explanations participants provide for what they have experienced and believe, and by actively probing them about the connections and relationships they see between particular events, phenomena, and beliefs."

## **4.5 Sampling Techniques**

Deacon et al. (1999:40) discussing on the subjects of sampling contend that "in communication and cultural studies, sampling issues involve all kinds of area, most commonly people, social groups, events, activities, institutions and texts." Accordingly, the researcher sampled informants (both for the in-depth individual interviews and focus group), and the documentary programs of *Ashenda* (texts) that were televised over the past 10 or more years.

### **4.5.1 Purposive Sampling Method**

In this study, for human subjects, the researcher employed purposive sampling method. The researcher believes that this sampling method enabled him to select subjects with rich experience and knowledge of the culture and/or the medium.

Purposive sampling in general is employed when the researcher needs to focus on a limited number of informants, whom you select strategically so that their in-depth information will yield optimal insight into the issue which in turn would help to better understand and come up with highly detailed description (Berger, 2000).

As such, to be more specific, the researcher employed *snow-ball sampling*, among other purposive sampling techniques, both for individual-in-depth interview and focus group discussions. Snowball sampling according to Deacon et al. (1999:53) is “mainly used where no list or institution exists that could be used as the basis for sampling.” Also in this research, the subjects are potentially scattered in every part of the region. Anybody can be a potential subject as the culture belongs to anyone around there.

In practical terms, however, the investigator carefully looked for individuals and or groups who are presumed to be with rich information and experience on the culture: *Ashenda*. To this end, informants were selected after direct and/or indirect contacts. “Like a snowball rolling down a hill, a snowball sample grows through momentum: initial contacts suggest further people for the researcher to approach, who in turn may provide further contact,” (Deacon et al, 1999:53).

#### **4.5.2 Convenience Sampling Method**

Even though the researcher, in his proposal, had planned to employ purposive sampling method for the televised cultural programs, he later on found it mandatory to change his mind. The initial assumption was that all aired programs would be available; and, thus, sampling what is needed was possible. However, this could not be so on the ground. Only six of the more than 12 years’ annually produced documentary programs were found; and all are taken as subjects of the study using the convenience sampling method. In convenience sampling, according to Deacon et al (1999), the researcher uses subjects that are easy to reach. As the name describes, the researcher chose subjects because of convenience and availability.

#### **4.6 Sample Size**

Taking the time, access and financial constraints into account, the inquirer was obliged to limit the sample size; of course, in such a way that does not affect the research’s objectives. As a result, only six years special programs made on *Ashenda* were taken for

textual analysis (single special program is produced every year for *Ashenda* is an annual festival) as per to the aforementioned sampling technique.

For individual in-depth interview, on the other hand, 14 informants were selected from different backgrounds. Cultural experts, media practitioners, religious leaders, anthropologist, elderly people, writers, etc. were of the key informants and in-depth interviewees. As to the focus group discussion, four group discussions were held, each comprising seven to twelve members.

#### **4.7 Study Area**

The inquiry took place mainly in Mekelle town and its surrounding villages. However, it also covered other areas in the region so as to gather as diversified information as possible. Hence, it extended to Raya (Alamata), Tembyen (Abyi-Adi), Axum, and Agame (Adigrat). These areas were purposefully selected for their potential of distinct co-cultures. Generally, even though the research took place dominantly in major towns of the region, due emphasis is given to the rural culture by going to some villages and interviewing individuals with rural background and good knowledge of the cultural festival.

#### **4.8 Method of Data Analysis and Interpretation**

As this study is a qualitative in its approach, the data analysis and interpretation process was made inline with the process of data gathering. In support of this thought Creswell (2009) asserts that qualitative data analysis is conducted concurrently with gathering data, making interpretations, and writing reports.

Following to the gathering of the desired data from texts of the cultural programs, individual in-depth interviewees and focus group discussants, all data were transcribed, translated from Tigrigna into English, and categorized into topics and sub-topics of their relevance. To do this task more effectively and easily some guidelines that direct the categorizing, analysis and interpretation process were developed in advance.

More specifically the textual data are analyzed from the view points of human sources (purposefully selected informants: regarding the particular culture) and theories, principles, etc. of culture, communication and media; most of which treated in the review of related literature part. Images, words, behaviors, values, artifacts, feelings, etc. of the media's texts were subjected to thorough analysis and interpretation.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Legislative Framework and Media Attention to Cultural Reports

The cultural policy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia urges the mass media to strive for the development of all cultures of the country. In its article 9(2) for instance, states: “Educational programs reflecting the various cultures of the country shall be transmitted by the mass media institutions in order to promote the cultural knowledge of the peoples of Ethiopia.”

On the ground, however, the media are claimed to give much less attention to cultural reports. This is especially true when it is compared to the other areas of reporting such as good governance, education, health, environment, science and technology, etc. This, of course, partly results from the very broad and complex nature of culture; as, for example, even these listed areas, too, are part and parcel of it. Each is a manifestation of the grand term “culture”. However, it should be clear that the concept of culture has not to be diluted as its components get more diverse and disintegrated. It rather should serve as a thread that connects such components, therefore.

Unfortunately, however, as one informant from the Tigray Culture and Tourism Agency, who preferred to remain anonymous, observers culture is being denied of proper attention not only by the media organizations but also by the government itself. She/he adds:

ኤጀንሲ ባህልን ተረጋግጦን ምስ ካልኣት ሴክተራት ብመንፅር ካብ መንግስቲ ዝረኽቦ ትኩረት እንተረካኻዮ ተስፋ ኢኻ ትቐርፅ። ካልኣት ኣብያተ ዕዮታት ከምዝረኽብዎ እኹል በጀትን ሪሶርስን የብሉን። ቁሩብ ዘመሳሰሎም ነገር እንተተረኺቡ ካብ ሓደ ኣብያተ ዕዮ ናብ ኻልእ ስለዝንገላታዕ ክሳብ ሓዚ ቐዋሚ ዝኾነ ትካልዊ መዋቕር የብሉን። ስለዝኾነ ቐድሚ ሓዚ ዝተሰርሑ ስራሕቲ ኣፅገብቲ ኣይኮኑን። ባህልና ንምምዕባልን ንምዕቃብን ዓብዩ ዓቕሚ ምስ ዘለዎም ሚዲያትን ንዘለናርክብ ሓዊሱ።

If you see culture and tourism agency in relative to the other sectors you become despaired by the attention it gets from the government. It does not have enough budget and resources, as do the other sectors. Nor does it have reasonable and stable organizational structure as it has been floating from one organization to the other deemed to have more or less some relevance. As a result, the so far achievements are unsatisfactory including

our relationship with the media institutions that have immense potential to develop and preserve our culture.

Asked about the media's own initiation to produce cultural programs that can contribute to the development and preservation of the indigenous cultures, AtoMeseleZelege responds in negation.

አነ ዝፈልጥ ጋዜጠኛ ሓበሬታ አልሹ፣ ጎርጎሩ አውጧኑ ናብ አድመዕቱ ወይ አንበብቲ ከምዘብፀሕ እዩ። ዘይምዕዳል ግዲ ኮይኑ ግን አብ ትካላት መራኽብቲ ሓፋሽና ዘሎ መስርሕ ከምዚ ኣይኮነን። ሽፋን ሚደያ ዝግበኦም ዛፊባታት ናይ ምሽታት ተክእሎ አየጥረዩን። ክሳብ ሓዚ ብአውርኡ ብዓውዲት ናይ ምስራሕ ልምዲ እዩ ዘለዎም። አብ መቐለ ንዝተገበረ በዓል አሸንዳ ክፅብፅቡልና ካብ ቢሮ ብስልኪ ሓቲትናዮም ደብዳቤውን ክንልእኸሉም ዝጠለቡና እዋን ድማ ይዝክር።

What I know is a journalist seeks for potential information, digs out and presents it to the target addressees. But unfortunately, this is not the case in our media organizations. They have not developed the nose to sense issues worth of coverage. Yet, their work culture predominantly relies on working up on request. I remember that some media demanding us to send them a letter in addition to our official telephone calls if they would cover an *Ashenda* festival that took place at Mekelle. (Ato Mesele Zelege, personal interview, translation own).

The media people that I approached, both formally and informally, also assure that their media institutions do not give due attention to culture. The issue of culture, according to the journalists, is often covered if it is prepared as an event by other concerned bodies like culture and tourism agency; and when an official letter is due urging for coverage.

Meanwhile, the editorial policy of the Tigray Mass Media Agency (TMMA) says nothing on how to develop and preserve culture. Its half a page article that is devoted to the issue of culture does not go far beyond guiding how to treat religious and cultural differences, and avoiding traditional harmful attitudes and practices. The very theme of the article is preventing potential conflicts that might arise following to inappropriate media portrayals of cultural matters and creating societal awareness on the potential dangers of culture. This, of course, is a positive aspect of the article of the editorial policy as it might pave a way to endeavors pertaining to cultural transformation. However, it still fails to recognize the rich potential of culture; and consequently it does not attempt to offer any guideline on how to exploit it for the benefit of the society.

## 5.2 Rural and Urban Coverage of the Culture

The media's minimal attention to culture could also be proven by investigating the ratio of its rural and urban coverage. Whereas all of my informants, including the journalists and media managers, agree that *Ashenda* as celebrated in the towns has lots of problems that jeopardize the culture's positive aspects, no single program is produced targeting at any of the village festivities. All are produced on an officially celebrated festivity; many of these have taken place at Ze-selassie square of Mekelle city, one at Addis Ababa's Exhibition Center and another at Abyi Adi town, Tembyen.

However the media are well known for the rural reporting particularly for matters pertaining to agriculture. Journalists are, at daily basis, assigned to remote rural areas so as to produce and report development programs. Yet, this has never been a case for cultural programming. This, according to Ato Abraha Gebre-aregawi, Media Process Owner at TMMA, is due to "lack of appropriate planning at the managerial level". It, thus, could be a manifestation of the absence of the media's own initiation to cover and develop the culture.

Televising the town centered and officially intervened programs, however, is viewed as inappropriate by many informants, including the programs' producers themselves for many reasons.

ብሓደ ገፅ እዞም ስሩፅ መደብ ተታሊዚሎም ዝኸበሩ በዓላት "ድራማታይዝ" ስለዝገበሩ ወይ ኣብ መድረኽ ስለዝኸወኑ ትኽክለኛ መንፈስ እቲ በዓል ይጎድሎምዮ። ብኻልእ ገፅ ድማ ከም ባህላዊ ኸበሮ ዝኣመሰሉ ብዘበናዊ መሳርሒታት ሙዚቃ ስለዝትክኡ መብዛኢትኦም ባህላዊ ትሕዝቶታት ቦታኦም ይለቁዮም።

For one thing these staged programs lack naturality as they are dramatized or staged performances. For another most of the cultural elements such as the local drum are missed as they are replaced by complex modern musical instruments (A member of F.G.D one, Translation own, Feb. 02, 2011)

The discussant's observation is, indeed, found to be true as the modern bands' instruments and songs replaced not merely on the stage but also on the televised cultural programs. LLR-12,262 and LRR-13,247 can be typical examples for this as modern non-*Ashenda* songs, are aired in both programs. Whereas the media people claim lack of

airtime as a major reason for such shallow and immature programs, they also incorporate such irrelevant modern songs that have immense opportunity to be aired out of that context-*Ashenda*.

As the so far produced programs, on *Ashenda*, are heavily town centered, they could not be able to appropriately portray the cultural festival.

እቶም ኘሮግራማት ኣብ ገጠር እንተዝስርሑ ነይሮም በዓል ኣሸንዳ ብዝበለፀ መንፀበረቹዎ ነይሮም። ኣነባብራን ከባብደዊ ከነታትን እቲ ኣብዘሓ ክፋል ሕብረተሰብ ከምዘለዎ ክርእዩና ምኽኣሉ ነይሮም። ከምኡ ተዝገብሩ ንዓና [ንነበረቲ ከተማ] ድማ ብዛዕባ ፀገማት፣ መፍትሕታት፣ ኣመለኻክታታት፣ እሴታት፣ ኖርምታት እቲ ገጠረታይ ንክንፈልጥን ንክንርዳእን ዓብዩ ዕድል ምፈጠራልና ነይሮም።

Had the programs been produced in the rural areas, they could have much better reflected the *Ashenda* culture. They could have shown us the lifestyle and environment of the majority of the society very lively. The media, by doing so, could have created better opportunity for us [town dwellers] to know and understand the challenges, solutions, attitude, values, norms, etc. of the villager (A member of F.G. D one, Translation own, Feb. 02, 2011)

A single shot, which is captured from a village around Tembyen and sandwiched in a program that targeted at the village festivities, appears to prove this view. It shows a group of handful children, comprising males and females, with contradicting interests and responsibilities. They are looking after their cattle in a sloppy field, and simultaneously taking care of their sibling babies holding them on their shoulders and backs. Yet, they attempt to entertain themselves drumming jerry cans and singing in a childish and melodious sound; but conveying much matured message as:

**የዓወይ ስየ (ስየ)**

**ክፀወትየ (ስየ)**

**ኣይቐልዓ እንድየ (ስየ)...**

This literally means “*Oh Ashenda is coming and, thus, I will enjoy playing as I’m a child.*” This song, thus signals that the young children are (unconsciously?) calling for the respect of the child right(s), the right to be free from workload or labor abuse which is clearly put in the FDRE constitution (Article 36), and the UDHR, about which they are not informed, indeed. Quite surely, however, they are expressing their desire or belief that a child deserves entertainment not shouldering such multi-faceted burden.

The image and song of this particular shot, hence, reveals at least two facts about culture. These are the “poor” culture of child rearing and the potential of the cultural festival, *Ashenda*, as a vital means of communication to cure the deeply rooted problem. Nevertheless, the producer of the program does not seem to understand the ironic song of the kids. All he narrates is about “how eagerly the children are awaiting for the coming of *Ashenda*”. He utters no single word about the context that they are in: the very reasons that let them link their childhood with playing and child labor abuse. Cultural communication, as Jandt (2004) points out, should take the social, economic, historical, and environmental contexts into consideration.

*Ashenda* has been celebrated in towns mainly Mekelle, with an official intervention and organized way. According to the organizers of the festival, such intervention was found mandatory to prevent some unnecessary trends or practices that are observed to be followed by the town dwelling *Ashenda* girls.

አብ መንጎ ቡዙሓት ጉጅለታት ናይ መድረኽ ውድድር እካይድ እቲ ባህሊ ንክርድኣ፣ ክትግብርኣን ብኡ አቢሉን ድማ እቲ ትክክለኛ ባህሊ ዓቁበን ንክኸዳን ንምሕጋዝዮ። አብ ዙርያ ባህሊ እንሰርሕ ትካላት ከምምኻና መጠን ንዓይ እዚ ካብቶም ዝፈፀምናዮም ዓብይቲ ስራሕቲ ሓደ እዩ ኢሉ እዩ ዝኣምን። ሚዲያ ግና ካብዚ ብላዕሊ ክነጥፉሉ ይግባእ። ንዓርሶም ኣብዚ ናይ መድረኽ ክብረ በዓላት ጥራይ ካብ ዝግድቡ ትክክለኛ ናይ ኣሸንዳ ትሕዝቶታትን ክነታትን ናብ ዝርከቡ ገጠር ክኸዱ ነይርዎም።

We host performance contest among various groups so as to help them understand, practice and thereby maintain the original culture. I believe that this is one of the good achievements that we made as organizations working on the cultural sector. But the media had to go beyond this. Instead of limiting themselves to these stage bounded festivities, they had to go to the villages wherein *Ashenda*'s truer cultural elements and contexts exist. (Ato Solomon Geberemedhin, personal interview, translation own)

### 5.3 Values Emphasized by the Media

As it is discussed in the foregoing chapter, *Ashenda* is a cultural festival with multifaceted values. The lyrics of *Ashenda* songs and the practices or behaviors of the entire festival, especially in the rural areas, are embedded with a lot of values; positive or negative. But how are these observed and portrayed in the television programs made on this particular culture\_ *Ashenda*?

In all of the documents (programs) that I analyzed as subjects of the study, two values are given due attention. These are *beauty* and *entertainment*. Another value, *dignity for the female*, also is well observed and emphasized, albeit merely in a single program.

A cultural saying “**ጌል አሸንዳ ርኢኻ አይትተሐፀ**” (which literary means: *Never engage a girl merely seeing her in the festivity of Ashenda*) was a point of discussion in all the programs investigated. And, its theme or objective was to tell the viewers how the girls of *Ashenda* become unprecedented beautiful. On top of the oral discussions with male and female interviewees and narrators’ own words invested to appreciate the astonishing beauty of these girls, the images also are selectively displayed to accompany the, particularly, beauty related narrations. Put it differently, the media have given due emphasis to the *beauty* value of the *Ashenda* culture. However, this could have been better emphasized by the girls’ own beauty related songs such as: “**አውላድ ስኒ ፀባዩ ምሳላ ዕምባዩ (ምሳላ)**” (Oh my *Ashenda* girls, be as beautiful as a flower!), and others, rather than repeating the same saying year after year.

Yet, one thing is still missed in the examined television programs with regard to beauty. All of the producers of these texts, television programs, could not see the so called *internal beauty* of these girls: their matured mentality. The mentality behind the good values of *Ashenda* like fairness, socialization, indigenouness, democracy, expressing best wishes, forgiveness, innocence, leadership, team working and division of work, virginity, unity, charity, and many more are not viewed and incorporated as expressions of their beauty in any of the programs. (Please refer to the preceding chapter to better understand the thinking maturity of the *Ashenda* girls and, thereby their internal beauty)

The *entertainment* value of the cultural festival also is another one which the media focused upon in every production year. The joy and refreshment that the girls enjoy during the festival is not merely shown from the image of playing girls but also repeatedly told by the narrator of each program. Moreover, the very theme and nature of this *entertainment* value is explained only in one program: LLR\_13,247. According to this program, “one needs budgeted or programmed time for relaxation in his/her

lifetime.” Nonetheless, the rest of the examined programs say nothing about the context of the cultural festival with regard to its *entertainment* value. (*Ashenda* takes place once a year after accomplishing intense and multifaceted agricultural activities in addition to the common but rarely recognized domestic duties of the female).

These values, *entertainment* and *beauty*, are stressed in all the examined programs, despite slight difference in perspective and approach. However, *Ashenda's* value of *dignity for the female* is reflected and emphasized in merely one program: LLR\_11,135. The producer of this particular program took a feminist angle/approach for her *Meskote Martha* program; a weekly television program which strives to bring about gender equality and better life of the female. Appreciating the society's acknowledgment and contribution to the dignity of the female during *Ashenda*, the narrator worriedly asks why such a positive value of feminism should be time-bound; is limited only to a week or so. Plus, she further urges the entire society (the viewers) to bring about attitudinal change with regard to gender equality, at least, learning from its own culture, *Ashenda*; and defuse this great feminist value to its entire life.

Having gone through all the texts (previewing the television programs), I found no value recognized and presented by the media other than these three\_ *beauty*, *entertainment* and *dignity for the female*. In this regard, Ato Mesele Zeleke, former chairperson of CAT, is of the view that the media did nothing beyond stating the obvious. He goes on:

አሸንዳ ብባህልነቱ ብመራኸብቲ ሓፋሽ ዘይተነገሩሉ ብዙሓት እወንታዊ እሴቶት ኣለውዎ። ብቐሊሉ ዝፍለጡ እሴታት ፅባቕን ፀወታን እቶም ቀንዲ ብተደጋጋሚ ዝተነገረሎም እሴታት እዩም። ካብዚ ኣቶም ሓሊፉ ብዛዕባ ካልኦት እሴታት ዝዛረብ ዋላ ሓደ ኻሮግራም ግና ርእየ ኣይፈልጥን።

*Ashenda* as a culture has a number of positive values that are yet unrecognized and untold by the mass media. Beauty and entertainment, albeit obvious are the most repeatedly told values of *Ashenda*. However I have never watched even a single program that speaks far beyond these. (Ato Mesele Zeleke, personal interview, translation own).

Selamewit Kahsay, a Senior Reporter at TMMA, admits that the *Ashenda* programs fail to speak of other values than *entertainment* and *beauty*. According to her, other values such as fairness, indigenouness, socialization, child care, leadership, unity, thanks

giving, forgiveness, expressing best wishes, charity, democracy, innocence, etc, are never reported. The reason for this, as Selamawit says, however, is the time limitation that the medium generally has.

እቲ ሚዲያ ኣብ መዓልቲ ናይ ሓንቲ ሰዓት ጥራሕ ኣየር ሰዓት እያ ዘላቶ። ኣሸንዳ እንተበዘሐ ናይ ክልተ መዓልቲ ሸፋንዩ ዝረክብ። ምክንያቱ ካልኦት ክሸፈኑ ዝግባእም ልምዳዊ ፀብባባትን መደባትንውን ስለዘለውና። ስለዚ ብዛዕባ ሕድሕድ እሴት እቲ በዓል ምዝራብ 'ውን ኣብ ክምዚ ዓይነት ኩነታት ኮይንኻ ኣይክኣልን።

The medium [Tigray Television] has only an hour airtime a day. *Ashenda* programs have maximum of two days coverage. Because we do have other development reports and programs that are worth airing. Hence, to talk about every single value of the cultural festival is contextually impossible.

However, Hailu Gessesse, another Senior Reporter and former producer at ETV's Tigrigna program, sees the case from a different angle. According to him, values of *Ashenda* are very much under reported for at least two reasons; Personal and structural.

ብሓደ ወገን ጋዜጠኛታት እሴታት እቲ ባህሊ ብኣግባቡ ኣብ ምርጻእ ሕፅረት ኣለዎም። ሐዚ ክም ዝሰመዒ ካብ ፀወታን ፅባቕን ሓሊፋ ካልኦት ሕቡኣት እሴታት ፈልፊልና ክነውፅእ ነይሩና። ብኻልእ ወገን ድማ አመራርሓ እቲ ሚዲያ ካብ ካልኦት ልምዳዊ ፀብባባት እንትወዳደር ንባህሊ ተንክፍ ፀብባባት ዝሓተታ ትኹረት ስለዘህቦ ናይቲ ጋዜጠኛ ብቑዓት ባህሊ ተንክፍ ፕሮግራማት ናይ ምስራሕ ትኹረት፣ ተበግሶ፣ ምድላውን ተገዳስነትን ብተዘዋዋሪ መንገዲ ይፅሎ ።

For one thing, the journalists lack a good understanding of the culture's values. I now feel that we could have depicted more abstract values other than *entertainment* and *beauty* which are almost obvious. And for another, the media management gives less attention to culture than to other development reports which indirectly influences the attention, motivation, preparation and commitment of the journalist to produce effective cultural programs. (Hailu Gessesse, Personal interview, Translation own)

Abraha Gebre-aregawi, Media Process Owner at the TMMA, also shares the later, Hailu's, idea. "The journalists lack accurate and adequate understanding of the culture as most of them do not have an experiential knowledge of the villagers' livelihood."

## 5.4 The Use of Culture for Development Communications

If appropriately used, culture's potential for over all development process of a given country is tremendous. UNESCO in its 1991 report asserts that "development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be cultural or nothing at all." Likewise, the cultural policy of the FDRE in its introduction, also posits that "...any development program that does not pay attention to culture cannot bear fruit."

The public not to mention state, media of Ethiopia go for the principle and practice of development journalism. Hence, beyond theoretical principle, they are practically giving much of their airtime to cover the planning, implementation and achievements of development projects of the private and governmental sectors.

Yet, one thing seems to be missed in such a wide range of application of development communication. That is, the use of culture's potential for notional development. Development reports or programs rarely take culture into consideration as a proper communication approach. But Shewit Abraham, Anthropologist and former journalist at ETv, stresses that development communication would better win the heartbeat of the society and achieve their goals when they are spiced by indigenous cultures. Unfortunately, however, the very conception of culture's potential for national development is not developed yet, as Shewit observes.

This problem indeed seems to leak to the overall planning and implementation of development policies and projects at the national level. Even the organizations that primarily work on the cultural sector lack proper understanding, commitment and organization in their culture centered endeavors.

Even though some governmental measures were recently been taken to promote the cultural sector, they fell short of creating a proper understanding of the concept of culture. Instead, these measures were limited to organizing a few narrowly envisaged cultural establishments. In relation to the modern political, economic and social establishments and enterprises created in the country, these cultural establishments came very late and this indicates the low consideration that was given to the sector. This low consideration hindered the sector from contributing its part in development programs of the country. (<http://www.ethioembassy.org>.)

In this regard, Ato Mesele Zeleke, ex-chairperson of the CAT, expresses his concern on the very conception of culture in relation to development.

እቲ እዝዩ ዘሕዝካ ኣብ መብዛሕትኦም ዝኖረቡ ባህሊ ተኮር መደባት ባህሊ ንምዕባይ ካብ ዝብል መነፅር ጥራሕ'ዩም ዝሰርሑ። ምስ ብዙሕ ዓቕሞም እናሃለው ንኻልኦት ልምዓታዊ ዛዕባታት ኣይተጠቀሙሉምን።

What is most saddening in most cultural portrayals of the mass media is that they are almost all the time made from the perspective of developing a culture. They are not reported and used to communicate to foster other development agendas despite their rich potential. (Mesele Zeleke, personal interview, translation own)

Similarly, the editorial policy of the TMMA says nothing on the use of culture for the development process, whereas it generally gives due attention to development reporting. Of course, it has half a page article that deals on the issue of culture. Yet the major concerns of the article are respecting cultural/ religious differences, and preventing traditional harmful practices. It does not have any idea on how to use the mass media for developing and preserving the culture. Nor does it say anything on the use of culture for development communications purposes. (Please see the article on Appendix III).

Abraha Gebre-aregawi, Media Process Owner at TMMA, admits that there is no proper understanding of the very conception of culture's potential for development not only at journalists' level but also at the top management. The editorial policy, as is aforementioned, also stands to prove thereof. Nevertheless, due to the focus given by some stakeholders, *Ashenda* has been colorfully celebrated in many towns of Tigray region. Makelle could be taken as a typical example for this case. Different interested organizations and bodies such as OSSA, WAT, CAT, TCTA, etc. have been taking part in the official celebration of the *Ashenda* festival for different motives and agendas.

Accordingly, *Ashenda* has been carrying various development themes such as anti-HIV/AIDS campaigns, women's equality, cultural preservation, eco-tourism expansion, etc. Hence, it has been used for these and other development related agendas which are initiated by the non-media organizations. The role of media in such organized public mobilization, therefore, was limited only to giving coverage to what is communicated on the staged festivals.

For example, in the 1994 E.C. *Ashenda* festival, staged at Ze-Selasie Square of Mekelle town, advocacy works targeted at awareness creation on the fight against HIV/AIDS have

taken place. As a result, the then produced television program gives due emphasis to the theme: awareness creation on issue of HIV/AIDS. Consequently, *Ashenda* girls together with famous artists, as is observed from the television program, strive to harness the prevalence of the epidemic. The late legendary artist Eyasu Berhe hands over packets of condom prepared by OSSA, a local NGO, for the *Ashenda* girls. General manger of the OSSA's Mekelle branch, Ato Yirga Gebre-egizabher, urges the *Ashenda* girls to teach their society using their songs of the *Ashenda* culture.

The *Ashenda* girls in return distributed the condoms to the mass audience. Very surprisingly, the girls were successful in grabbing the attention of the mass not only by their courage but also by their newly adopted songs purposefully sung to help achieve the objective behind the theme. Hence, they sung in their Tigrigna language “ኣነ ክጥቀምዮ ሰብ ዝበለ ይበልዮ፡ ኮንደም ክጥቀምዮ ሰብ ዝበለ ይበል” which literary means: “*I will use condom no matter what people say.*”). This lyric, which is sung by another lyric's melody, is intentionally prepared to address the then, of course still exists, attitudinal problems towards using condom as a safe means of sexual practice for self censorship and other reasons.

Women's Association of Tigray (WAT), a local NGO, also has been actively participating in organizing the *Ashenda* festivals. Besides, it has been making use of the culture to communicate its mission: working for gender equality. The role of *Ashenda*'s value of *dignity for the female* has been immense in such feminism centered advocacy. Even such a well organized and complete issue of development communication has not been adequately covered by the media; it was, from the perspective of feminism, covered only in a single program. The media, however, have a weekly program known as *Meskote Martha*, which exclusively works to bring about gender equality.

Our modern world, as Girard and Nijkamp (2009) posit, is moving towards a leisure economy, where an increasing amount of everyone's discretionary income is spent on culture, recreation and tourism. More specifically, cultural tourism is becoming a great source of income for those who have a great potential of it. “Cultural tourism is more

and more interested in knowing and learning the set of values, beliefs, customs, behaviors, practices, traditions, which are indigenous to a certain site and therefore connote its identity,”(Ib id, 224). Likewise, *Ashenda’s* potential to fulfill such requirements and to contribute to the expansion of cultural tourism, despite its limited duration (a week or so), seem to be promising. In this regard, some of the programs have attempted to communicate the culture’s, *Ashenda’s*, eco-tourism potential; whereas others did not. Totally seen, however, the media have not promoted *Ashenda* in such a way that attracts tourists. The efforts made so far are minimal.

By and large, the problem therefore emanates from the media’s failure to integrate culture with various development agendas.

## 5.5 Commentary Function of the Media

Media have at least, social responsibility to correct wrong doings that take place in the society that they work for. Having this fact in mind, it is good to ask how the media have been employing their commentary function to alleviate the negative values and potentially enduring erroneous trends. *Ashenda* in the towns of Tigray is claimed as being groundless. The television programs investigated also claim proving this fact.

For example in the 2000 E.C’s special *Ashenda* program the narrator accuses the town dwelling girls as primarily running for money and giving little attention to the rest and but worthy aspects of the culture. Yet this idea is sandwiched in Letay Mesfin’s *Ashenda* song which in its video clip shows the *Ashenda* girls receiving 100 Birr from a man for their demanding songs. The video clips so far released by individual artists on the *Ashenda* culture still need to be edited on their language and image use. This is because; their contents are criticized for triggering financial motive of the *Ashenda* girls and for misleading the behavior of the *Ashenda* girls.

A member of group discussants from group discussion three, in line of this thought, asserts:

ዓሚ ድዩ ዋላ... ንእሽቶይ ሓፍተይ [ናይ ለታይ መስፍን አሸንዳ ዝብል] ቪድዮ ክሊፕ ምስረአዮት “ወይለይ ኣነውን ሚኢቲ ቕርሻ ከምፅእ እየ።” ዝበለገሉ ጊዜ ይዝክር። ሽዑ

አነ ካብ ምስሓቕ ሓሊፈ ምንም አይበልኹዎን። አደዋይ ግና ብሓዘኔታ ርእሳ ነቕኒቃ ነታ ቴሌቪዥን አጥፊኣታ። ብድሕሪኡ ካብ ንገንዘብ ነቲ ትኽክለኛ አከባብራ እቲ ባህሊ ክነቐድም ከምዝግበኣና ንኹለና ክትመኽረና ጀግራ።

I remember last year or so that my youngest sister saying: “Yes I, too, will collect a hundred Birr!” after watching the video clip [Letay Mesfin’s]. By then I said to her nothing, but simply burst into laughter. But my mother shrugged her head in worry and turned the television set off. She then began advising us all to prioritize practicing the true culture over the money oriented festivity. (A member of FGD three, Feb. 10, 2011).

Selamawit Kahsay, Senior Reporter at the TMMA, admits that producers of the cultural program are not aware of such “technical problems.”

እቶም ካብ ደገ እንቕበሎም ቪዲዮ ክሊፓት ከብዕሕዎ ዝኸለሉ ሳብኔን ብትኽክል ንምዝራብ ስራሕና ኢልና ኣይንምርምርምን። ደፍታት ኤዲት ከይገበርና ኢና ኣብ አገር ነውዕሎም። ናይ ሓንቲ ሰሙን ዕድመ ስለዘለዎም እዚ ኣብ ደርፍታት ኣሸንዳ ብፍሉይ እዩ ዝሰርሕ። ይኹንምበር ባህሪ እቶም ተመልከቲ ቆልዑ ክፀልው ከምዝኸለሉ ኣይከሓድን።

We really do not critically examine the potential effects of the video clips we receive from outside sources. We simply air songs without editing or any other consideration. This is particularly true for the *Ashenda* songs as their relevance is limited only to the *Ashenda* week. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that they will influence the behavior of the viewing children. (Selamawit Kahsay, Personal interview, translation own)

As the proponents of media social learning theory posit, what is observed on the media, particularly television, serves as a model for the receiver’s behavior. As, for instance, Kellner (online) observes:

The media are profound and often misperceived sources of cultural pedagogy: they contribute to educating us how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire and what not .... They show us how to dress, look and consume; how to react to members of different social groups, how to be popular and successful and how to avoid failures, and how to conform to the dominant system of norms, values, practices and institutions.

Besides, in the 1994 E.C’s television program, a poem written and presented by a veteran radio journalist, Yikum Haile, now General Manager of 104.4 F.M Mekelle, motivates the girls to be business oriented. Yikum in his poem encourages the *Ashenda* girls to catch for a passerby and insist urging him until he gives them money. Meanwhile, the producer and presenter of this particular program, Hailu Gessesse, admits that “broadcasting such a misleading poem was a matter of negligence”.

On top of these money related problems, *Ashenda's* way of communication seems to be violent, especially that of the town dwelling girls. The violence oriented communication style of the *Ashenda* girls is considered customary and rarely criticized at the societal level. Even when criticized for their violent communication behaviors the *Ashenda* girls counterattack their communicator via their shield-like song: “አታዮ ጉደኛየ ንልዶ አለዎ ዳኛ” which literally means “*Oh you abnormal, do not you know that an Ashenda girl does not have a judge.*”

According to Meresa Hiluf the society’s communication behavior is very polite and well disciplined. Nevertheless, he observes:

እተን አንላት ገንዘብ ንዘይሃበን ሰብ ካብ ቅነ ኣሸንዳ ወፃኢ ብዘይተለመዱ ፀርፍታትን ዘይግቡእ ስላቻትን የንጎድጉደኦ። ዋላኳ መብዛሕትኡ ግዘ አቕሊልካ ዝረኣዩን ከም ንቡር ዝውስዱን እንተኾነ ሓደ ሓደ ግዘ ግና ናብ ምምንጫትን ምውርዋርን ዝከመሰሉ አካላዊ ጎንዕታት የምርሕ ዩ። እቲ ብጣዕሚ ዘሕዝን ግን ምንም ዓይነት ኣወንታዊ ኣሰተዋዕኦ ዘይብሉ እናሃለወ እዚ ተግባር እናተጠናኸረ ምምዕኡ እዩ።

Insulting and immoral jokes are customary during *Ashenda*. The girls bombard the individual who failed to give them money with insults and degrading jokes which are unusual in the non-*Ashenda* days. Even though often taken easy and customary, such insulting sometimes leads to physical conflicts- fighting or stoning. What is most saddening is that this is becoming an enduring virtue despite the fact that it has no positive contribution at all. (Meresha Hiluf, personal interview, translation own)

Many people, including the *Ashenda* girls, view these insulting and cursing as the spice for their colorful celebration of the festival, however. A member of focus group discussion two, for instance, considers these insulting and jokes as “energizers”. She believes that it is these insulting and “degrading” jokes that make fun and humor among the girls, the insulted, and the audience, if any. But, one should bear in mind that such “fun and humor” are surely being attained by offending others.

Such offence in return as Ato Mersa and other informants including the *Ashenda* girls observed leads to “dysfunctional feedbacks” such as cursing and rarely fighting. After all these insulting, as Lieke Likawint Yared Kassa asserts, do not have any cultural or religious base. Insulting, according to him, is “an expression of hatred and violence; hence, it deserves discouragement.”

Moreover, the violent communication approach and beggary-like money collecting system of the festival, according to Ato Fisehatsion Teka, are spotting a black point on the image-building process of the region and thereby the country, and are can affect the eco-tourism development by scaring tourists. A focus group discussant, from FGD one, on his part asserts that, these trends are viewed by some non-native people as “manifestations of poverty and ignorance.” Hence, he further contends, awareness creation activities on the impacts of such dysfunctional aspects of the culture should be made.

Media’s potential in curving and transforming such erroneous trends and a dysfunctional behavior is unquestionable. Inline of this argument, Watson (2003) contends that the media are prominent among the public arbiters of our behavior. ”They, as it were, ‘speak society’s lines,’ claiming for themselves the role of community’s conscience as well as performing as its ever vigilant guard dog. At this early stage we can view them as an agency of order.”

Nevertheless, none of the television programs that I have analyzed as subjects of the study criticizes this “enduring trend” in the *Ashenda* culture. It is never considered as an issue worth of commenting upon in any one of these programs either. They, the Tigrigna Television media, are not serving as “vigilant guard dog”; and thus could not be viewed as “agency of order”.

## 5.6 Interpretative Function of the Media

The target viewers of the television programs are obviously the town dwelling girls and society. This is true for the whole television programs, too. Meanwhile the town dwelling girls, as is understood from the focus group discussion, do not have adequate knowledge of the *Ashenda* culture.

ዝኾነ ሰብ ቆልዑ ኣሸንዳ [ናይ ከተማ] ኣሸንዳ ብኣግባቡ የኽብራ እየን ክብል ይኸውን። ብርግፅ እተን ደቁ ገጠር ከም ዝገብረኡ ኣምሲልና ንምፅዋትን ንምድራፍን ንፍትን ኢና። ትኽክለኛ ንቑደም ሰዓብ ደርፍታትን ሓዲ ደርፊ መዓዝን ንምንታይ ከም ዝደረፍ ግን ኣይንፈልጥን። ኣብ ኣጠቓቕማ ቁኖታት፣ ናይ እዝንን ክሳድን መጋየፅታት ኣሸንዳ ዘሎ ኣፈላለይ ‘ውን ኣይንፈልጠን። ሓቂ ንምዝራብ ከም ቆልዓ ኣሸንዳ ኮይነ ንዝብሉምን

ዝስርሖምን መብዛሕትኦም ነገራት መረዳኦታ ኣይብለይን። ካልኦት ስለዝገብራ ጥራሕ እየ ስቅ ኢሉ ዝደርፍን ከምኡ ዝገብርን።

One might say that *Ashenda* girls [of the town dwelling] celebrate *Ashenda* properly. Of course, we attempt to play and sing more or less as the villagers do. But we really do not know the right order of the songs or when and why we sing a particular song. We also do not know the very reason behind the variations in the use of hairstyles, earrings and necklaces made during *Ashenda*. To tell you the truth, I do not have any justification for most of what I say and what I do as an *Ashenda* girl. I just simply sing and behave because others do so. (A member of FGD two, Feb. 06, 2011).

As many media scholars such as McQuail (2008) for example, recommend the media should play their interpretative function particularly when dealing with cultural matters. However, despite the fact that multifaceted problems are prevailing on the *Ashenda* of the town dwellers such lack of knowledge of the meaning and context of songs, hairstyles, dressing styles, use of costumes, practices or rituals, etc., the television programs do not offer any interpretation.

For instance, in one of the analyzed programs, i.e. BRT-107A, a girl is displayed handing a gourd (“*Hamham*”) which its purpose is unknown for many of the town dwelling girls, at least the ones I encountered in focus group discussions. Yet, the narrator says nothing about this gourd and/ or its function. Right in the same shot of this particular program, a girl with a unique hairstyle (from her group); known as *Sadula*, is shown in a special focus- zoomed in. Similarly no attempt is made to interpret the meaning of this typical hairstyle in the culture. It says nothing whether this hairstyle communicates the marital status of the girl or not; nor was it linked to the maturity level of the girl.

Admitting that the interpretative function of media is not in use yet, Hailu Gessesse, the producer of one of the analyzed programs, on this regard says:

ንኣብነት ናተይ ሓሳብ ኡቶም ምስልታት ብባዕሎም እቲ መልእኽቲ ከመሓላልፉ ይኸእሉ እዮም ዝብል እዩ ነይሩ። ሕድሕዶም ትንተና ዘድልዮም ከምዝነበረ ግና ሓዚ ተረዲኦ ኣለኹ ። ክንዲ ዝተኸኣለ መጠን ነቶም ተግባራትን ደርፍታትን ብምትንታን ንተመልከትና ብፍላይ ድማ ንቆልዑ ግልፃ ዝኾነ መልእኽቲ ክነቕርብሎም ነይሩና። ከምኡ ተንገብር ነተን ኣዋልድ’ውን እቲ ባህሊ ብኣግባቡ ክርድእኦን ክዕቅብኦን መኸኣልናየን ነይርና።

My assumption for example, was the images by themselves would tell the message. But I am now learned that they were worth of interpretation. We

had to provide the viewers, particularly children, with a clear message of the behaviors and songs by interpreting them as much as possible. Doing so would have enabled the girls understand and preserve the culture properly. (Hailu Gessesse, personal interview, translation own).

Selamawit Kahsay, another producer, on her part points out other two main reasons for failing in playing interpretative function as media professionals. The one and major reason, according to her, is the “limited air time” that the Tigrigna television has: only an hour a day. She believes that no producer can interpret each and every thing of the cultural festival within such a limited airtime. The other reason that Selamawit raises is “the journalists’ limited knowledge and understanding of the culture”.

ንዓርሰይ ሓዊሱ መብላሕትኦም ጋዜጠኛታት ኣብ ከተማ ተወሊድና ዝግበና ኢና። ናይ ከተማ ሂወት’ውን ናይቲ ገጠር ባህሊ ኣብ ምርካብን ብተግባር ኣብ ምርኣይን ናይ ባዕሉ ዝኾነ ድሩትነት ኣለዎ። ስለክኾነ ናይ ኣሸንዳ ይኹን ካልኦት ባህልታት እኹል ዝኾነ ፍልጠትን ኣረዳድኣን የብልናን። እዚ ድማ ኣብቶም ባህሊ ተኮር ኘርግራማትና ተተንቲኖም ንክይቐርቡ ዝገበረ ካልእ ምክንያት’ዩ።

Many of the journalists, including myself, are from the urban background. And, obviously urban life does have its own limitation in accessing and experiencing indigenous cultures. As a result we do not have enough knowledge and understanding of *Ashenda* and other cultures. This also, is another reason for our failure to play the interpretative function of media in our cultural portrayals. (Selamawit Kahsay, personal interview, translation own).

As to me, Selemawit’s second reason, journalists’ lack of knowledge and understanding of the culture, seems to be the most accurate reason for failing to play the medium’s interpretative function. To justify this argument we can for example, see the representation of the *Ashenda* values on the examined programs. Beauty and entertainment, which can be easily depicted, are the two values that each producer noticed and emphasized in his/her respective programs. The culture’s value of *dignity for the female* (Please see background information in chapter 4) is raised only in a single program (LRR-11,135). The rest fourteen (may be more) are not raised by all of the producers. This is so; I believe that, because of journalists’ lack of knowledge of the culture and its values.

According to Shewit Abraham, Anthropologist, values to be understood, for instance, need good familiarity with and a thorough analysis of behaviors, attitudes and practices

of the beholding society. Hence, most values are not covered; perhaps, due to journalists' lack of knowledge and understanding of the *Ashenda* culture, and their limited attempt to interpret the behaviors, attitudes and practices of the *Ashenda* girls.

## 5.7 Entertaining Co-cultural Diversity

The co-cultural diversity of *Ashenda* in different parts of the region indeed, needs further investigation which is particularly accompanied by participatory observation. As a culture it takes place from the southern tip of the region up to the northern one. However, I have come to understand, via this research, that *Ashenda* varies at least in some of its aspects from place to place within the region- Tigray.

This is chiefly due to the co-cultural diversity that exists among the different zonal and woreda level areas of the region. For example, *Ashenda* girls of Raya, Southern part of Tigray, differ from the rest at least in their dress (“Boufie”), their shoes (“Shifay Saeni”) and the accent/dialect of their Tigrigna language. The Tembyen girls of *Ashenda* on their part are unique for their typical dancing style (“Awris”) and melody. The *Ashenda* girls in Agame, say around Saese’e Tsa-eda Emba, celebrate their *Ashenda* at night temporarily residing in a given house of their community, whereas *Ashenda* takes place at day time in the other areas of the region.

In Axum and its surrounding areas, *Ashenda* is known as *Marya* or *Ayni-wari*. The girls who celebrate *Ayni-wari* do not tie the *Ashenda* leave on their waist. The festivity of *Ayni-wari* also is different, from the rest in that it starts on August 24 E.C., the time by which *Ashenda* comes to an end in the rest parts of Tigray. Besides its duration exceeds from the rest lasting for about a month- up to September 17 E.C (Mesquel) and is celebrated only in off days and weekends.

Acknowledging to these and other variations within in the *Ashenda* cultures, CAT and TCTA, have been calling representative groups of girls from different parts of Tigray to the capital city of the region Mekelle, to participate in cultural contest and perform their

respective cultures. The media also have been covering these co-cultural contests and performances. Apart from this, particular special programs are produced on the *Ashenda* of Tembyen, an area where Awris is employed in the festivity of *Ashenda*, too.

Nevertheless, in spite of its richly variety, the *Ashenda* of the Raya co-culture is never reported by the medium from its natural setting: from the Raya place and society. Since the recent past, however, the organizers of the *Ashenda* festival have been bringing representatives of the Raya co-culture to Mekelle for staged *Ashenda* performance, as they do from the other areas as well. Those organizers', chiefly CAT and TCTA, understanding of co-cultural diversity is encouraging. Their efforts in giving recognition to and promoting co- cultural diversity are really promising.

Coming to the media however a gray area seems to appear in the very understanding of co-cultural diversity. On the one hand, the media have been covering *Ashenda* with the intention of promoting co-cultural diversities. A typical example for this case can be programs produced on the Tembyen's *Ashenda*. The 1992 E.C special *Ashenda* program, BRT-81, for instance is exclusively devoted to show case or reflect how *Ashenda* is celebrated and intertwined with the *Awris* dancing style which is unique to Tembyen. This really is a good beginning as it opens opportunity for promoting the co-culture and for giving the program itself a sense of variety and appeal as some of my informants feel that the televised *Ashenda* programs are “monotonous in their approach and image use”.

Yet, on the other hand, the media people themselves tend to view co-cultural diversity as a potential threat for the unity and solidarity among the peoples with such diversity. Selamawit Kahsay, Senior Reporter, for example worries that the society's level of understanding on co-cultural diversity is not dependable.

እቲ ማሕበረሰብ ዘዕግብ ናይ ኣተሓሳስባ ለውጢ ኣምጊኡሉ እዩ ኢሉ ስለዝኣምን ከም ጋዜጠኛ ኣብ ሞንጎ ብሄር፣ ብሄረሰባትን ህዝብታትን ሃገርና ዘሎ ባህላዊ ብዙሕነት ንምፅብዓብ ምንም ሰግኣት የብለይን። ነገር ግን ኣብ ከባቢያዊ ባህልታት ደረጃ መዊእኻ ግን ከምዚ ዓይነት ዘተኣማምን ንቕሓተ ሕሊና ተፈጠሩ እዩ ኢሉ ኣይኣምንን። ስለዚ ከም ናተይ እምነት ነዞም ከባቢያዊ ባህልታት ሽፋን ምሃብ ናይቲ ህዝቢ ሓድነትን ፅኑ-ፅ ርክብን ክጎድእ ይኽእል እዩ እየ ዝብል።

As a journalist I do not have any worry about reporting cultural diversity among nations, nationalities and peoples of the country as I believe that

the society has already brought about a remarkable attitudinal change at this level. But, I really don't believe that such reliable awareness is created at the co-cultural level. Hence, I personally feel that promoting these co-cultural diversities would disadvantage the unity and solidarity of the society. (Selamawit Kahsay, personal interview, translation own)

Instead of becoming themselves victims of such erroneous perception, the media could have created reliable societal awareness on the reality of co-cultural diversity. Generally, as part of their *correlation* function, the mass media join together different elements of society that are not directly connected or are not familiar to one another. Likewise, Dominick (1999:38) notes, "... it is entirely possible that the media can create totally new social groups by linking members of society who have not previously recognized that others have similar interest." In such a linkage role, the media can also serve as agents of socialization: provide individuals with portrayals of a society that can help them adopt the behaviors and values of others.

## 5.8 Media Impacts on the Culture

The media's portrayal of the culture, *Ashenda*, has obviously been impacting it both in positive and negative ways, according to some informants. Hailu Gessesse, Senior Reporter, for instance firmly believes that the media coverage is the main reason for such positive development and promotion of the culture.

ብደርጊ ጊዜ ብጣዕሚ እናተመናመነ እዩ ነይሩ። ኢህወደግ ናብ ስልጣን ምስ መፀን ብሕገመንግስቲ ባህልኻ ናይ ምምዕባል መሰል ምስተረጋገፀን ግና ብቋንቋ ትግርኛ ዝሰርሑ ሚድያታት እቲ ኣብ ኣፈ-ሞት ዝነበረ ባህሊ ኣሸንዳ ከንሳእርር ገይረምዎ እዩም። ስለዚ እዞም መራኽብቲ ሓፋሽ እቲ ባህሊ ንክላለን ንክዓብን ናይ ባዕሎም ዓብዩ እጃም ተገደቶም እዮም።

*Ashenda* had been highly degrading during the Derg regime.... With the coming of EPRDF's regime into power and the constitutional grant to develop one's own culture, the Tigrigna media have managed to revive the then on death's door culture: *Ashenda*. The media, thus, have played their vital role in promoting and developing the culture. (Hailu Gessesse, Personal interview, Translation own.)

In line with this thought, focus group discussants from different parts of the region also assert that the media have positively influenced the culture at least by directing the society's attention to it. According to them, the television programs so far made on *Ashenda* have immensely contributed to the popularity and colorful celebration of the

festival in various towns, even in places where it had been receiving minimal attention previously. A group discussant from FGD one believes that it is the media portrayals that are causing such unprecedented, relatively, colorful festivity in many places such as Adwa and Shire.

However, another discussant from the same FGD is of the view that the media are influencing the culture negatively, as well. He argues:

አሸንዳ ብውሒድ ወይ ምንም ናብ ዘይፍለጠሎም ቦታታት ብምግዋሕ ሚድያታት ናይ ባዕሎም ዓብዩ እጃም ምዕዋቶም ወድዓዊ ሓቂ ኮይኑ፣ ከም ገንዘብ ተኮርነትን ዝተበታተነ ኣጎጃጅላን ዝኣመሰሉ ዘየድልዩ ተግባራት እቲ ባህሊ ከዓ ክስፋሕፍሑ እናገበሩዮም። ንዓይ ከም ዝመስለኒ ናይተን ኣጎላት ባህሪ ብፍላይ ከዓ ምስ ገንዘብ ዝተተሓሓዘ ኣብ ሚድያት ብዝኸርቡ መደባት እቲ ባህሊ ብዓብዩ እናተፀለወ እዩ። እዚ ዝኸነሉ ምክንያት'ውን ናይተን ቆልዑ ኣሸንዳ ዋሕዲ ፍልጠት እቲ ባህልን ባህጊ ገንዘብንዮ።

Whereas it is undeniable truth that the media are playing a great role in promoting the culture to areas where it is little known or unknown at all, they are also pronouncing the negative aspects, too, like the money oriented festivity and disintegrated group formation. As to me, the girls' behavior particularly in relation to money is highly influenced by the media representation of the culture. This is so because of the girls' limited knowledge of the culture and their financial desire. (A member of FGD one, Translation own, Feb. 02, 2011)

Similarly, studies of content also drew attention to the systematic presentation of images of social life which could strongly shape children's expectations and aspirations (McQuail, 2008; Baran and Davis, 2009; Thwaites, 2002).

What is more, the media also seem to mislead the children on the use of language, particularly in the use of an appropriate word. For example, in a recently released *Ashenda's* video clip, which is also repeatedly incorporated as part of the television programs, an artist uses incorrect and irrelevant word. Instead of using a word equivalent to a playing ground, or *dida*; she uses contextually unfit term, *dino*, which is equivalent to the skin of a sheep. A group discussant from FGD two states that, many town dwelling *Ashenda* girls sing as: “ዲኖይዶ ዲኖኺ ትዕምብርየ ዲኖይ ደኣ ንለይ ትዕምብር” to sing as: “ዲዳይዶ ዲዳኺ ትዕምብርየ ዲዳይ ደኣ ንለይ ትዕምብር”. This according to the discussant is “due to the influence of the wrong media portrayal of the culture.”

Such failures in the use of languages, as anthropologist Miller (2007) asserts, have a great potential to influence the culture. This is because, "... language and culture are interactive: language shapes culture and culture shapes language" (P:327).

Media scholars agree that mass media can impact a culture by causing to transform and/or preserve it. As is mentioned in one way or another in this chapter, the analyzed television cultural programs, albeit some attempts, played limited role in transforming the negative aspects; and in preserving the positive ones.

Discussing the case of cultural transformation, for instance, *Ashenda* has some dysfunctional aspects, such as the beggary-like money collecting practice and the violent communication system, which are worth of transforming. These, according to Ato Fisehatsion Teka, are affecting the eco-tourism development and image building of the region and thereby the country. These practices are claimed to scare foreign tourists and are perceived as extension of the country's poverty and another way of beggary. Discussing about the role that media should play in cultural transformation, Krekovic (2003) contends that the mass media should serve as agents of change for the social betterment by raising public awareness. However, as is observed in the analyzed television programs of *Ashenda*, the media do not make efforts in this line; they tend to be conformist to the conventional practices, rather.

Miller (2007: 320-321) posits: "Media can help people preserve and learn their ancestral languages, record traditional agricultural and medical knowledge, and otherwise protect their culture and improve their lives." This too, however, is not properly applied in the investigated cultural programs. This is because, for one thing, the cultural programs are not properly interpreted and detailed; and for the other, the so far produced programs are poorly documented.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 SUMMARY

Whereas the culture is developing negative trends, especially in the towns, such as violet communication, money oriented festivity, disintegrated group formation, and the like, the media rarely criticize or comment on these problems. Even when they comment, they themselves do not show commitment to practically alleviate the tribulations. In many of the programs the narrators criticize some behaviors; whereas the images they use encourage so. For example, in one program, the narrator claims that *Ashenda* girls are becoming highly business oriented in their festivities. Yet, in that program girls are shown urging a man for money and are given a 100 Birr thereof. Plus, a poem incorporated as part of one of the analyzed programs encourages/urges *Ashenda* girls to be committed at their money collecting activity. These and other media's own problems are said to be adding fuel to the fire serving as role models for the girls' behavior.

The *Ashenda* culture is utilized for development communication purposes such as anti-HIV/AIDS campaigns and women's equality by various governmental and non-governmental organizations. The media also have reported these theme laden festivities. Nonetheless, even though they aggressively communicate development issues, the media have not developed a proper understanding of the potentials of culture for national development, yet. The researcher could not find any development issue communicated using the potentials of the *Ashenda* culture from the media's own initiative. In congruent with such a claim, the editorial policy of the TMMA says nothing on the use of culture for development; whereas the issue of development is at the heart of the policy. The problem is that culture is not linked to the issue of development at the media level.

The urban *Ashenda* is not only developing negative trends but also missing its originality and some of its positive values. On the other hand, *Ashenda* at the rural areas is much freer from external influences than the urban ones. However, the media almost never

covered the rural festivities despite their multi-faceted potential for preserving and developing the culture. Almost all of the programs are produced at the hub of Mekelle city, while many people, including the focus group discussant girls and journalists, accuse the town dwelling girls of prioritizing their financial interests over reflecting the culture properly. Indeed, *Ashenda* in many towns is being used more of as a mask for the girls' hidden personal and group interests, chiefly money. The money related development of *Ashenda* is that it only was a mere reward, and later changed into demand, which in turn is becoming almost looting these days in the towns. Songs that have no link to money are put aside by the town dwelling girls to the disadvantage of the oral literature.

Despite their enduring interest and appreciable attendance to celebrate *Ashenda*, the town dwelling girls lack a proper knowledge of the culture. The Tigrigna television programs, albeit produced to the town dwellers as target viewers, could not bridge such a gap, however. They lack interpretation and detailing; they are too shallow to communicate the *Ashenda* culture. The programs make almost no attempt to tell the meaning of the cultural hairstyles, the ornaments used by *Ashenda* girls, the performances, the practices, materials used, etc. In other words, the interpretations media function in this cultural portrayal is put aside.

The medium attempts to entertain co-cultural diversity while portraying the *Ashenda* culture. *Ashenda* that takes place at Mekelle and its surrounding, Enderta, is taken as a “mainstream” culture and is covered every year. *Ashenda* of Temben which is unique at least for its dancing style, Awris, is given a relatively due attention. *Ashenda* that takes place at and around Axum, Ayni-wari, is for the first time covered this year. Even the production is made by a privately owned promotion agency, Asfeda promotion, and thus all the medium did was just offer the airtime. Raya's and Agame's *Ashenda* are never covered, from their natural settings, in spite of their rich potential of creating variety to the culture and to the programming. In addition to the often claimed resource limitations, there seems to be misperception of co-cultural diversity as a “treat for social unity” at least in some of the media people. The organizations working on the cultural sector, CAT

and TCTA, are practically trying to develop these co-cultural diversities, however. They for instance invite representatives of co- cultures to showcase their unique and common features at the capital of the region: Mekelle. Instead of going to their respective natural settings, all the media do is report the space and time limited co-cultural performances. As a result, such miniature co-cultural portrayals of the media could not represent and set the real context of the co-cultures.

Whereas *Ashenda* has many positive values (at least 17 as identified by this research), the media reported only on three of them: entertainment, beauty and dignity for the women. Other values which have immense social, political and economic importance are untouched, yet. These include, but not limited to, socialization, innocence /cleanness, forgiveness, leadership, team working, indigenous product consumption/ indigenouness, unity, charity/ supporting social institution, expressing best wishes, virginity, fairness, thanks giving, child care, and democracy. Again what is missing on the media is taking one or more values from the *Ashenda* culture and spraying it to the rest of the society's life. *Ashenda* lasts only for a few days, thus its values are forced to be forgotten for almost the whole year. Hence, the media are potentially capable to pick some values when found relevant while communicating social, political and economic matters in the non-*Ashenda* times and affairs.

The medium claims resource and skill limitations for such inadequate or shallow cultural portrayals. Yet, it makes limited efforts to strengthen its relationship with stakeholders that can help them solve their limitations. Even the stakeholders working on the cultural sector complain that the media lack interest to work on the area of culture.

## 6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The media should closely work with stakeholders, particularly with those exclusively working on the cultural sector. Universities and individual researchers dealing on the area of culture could also be vital sources for producing matured cultural programs. Besides, the media in cooperation with stakeholders should offer in house trainings to journalists so as to equip them with appropriate knowledge and skills that enable them to produce qualified cultural programs.

The cultural programs of the media should be well researched and properly planned. The medium should not rush into production before reasonably deciding as to what to leave and to incorporate in the cultural program. The media people, in their cultural dealings, should bear in mind that a mere coverage of cultural matters does not grant appropriate preservation and/ or transformation of a culture.

As the rural festivities of *Ashenda* are much better in originality and appropriateness of songs, practices, language use, materials, performances or behaviors, setting/ context, group formation and function, values, etc. the media should give due attention to these. Doing so would enable preserve the culture rightly. It also can help the town dwelling *Ashenda* girls solve their problems pertaining to lack of knowledge of the culture, and thereby protect the dysfunctional trends of the town festivities.

So as to equip the town dwelling young generation with apt knowledge of the culture, the media should interpret the behaviors, values and songs they represent. And it would be worthwhile to produce a full-fledge documentary program that can demonstrate the *Ashenda* culture step-by-step so as to represent it in its entirety.

For *Ashenda* in the towns is missing most of its positive aspects and developing negative trends, the media must work hard to curve such problems. Special attention should be paid to the beggary-like money oriented festivity, violent communication behaviors and negligence of the non-money related oral literature. The media using their commentary

function should counterattack to these and other destructive trends, while striving to preserve the constructive side.

The media should develop a new mindset on the use of culture for their development communications. It undoubtedly would be much easier to mobilize the society via its indigenous culture for the multifaceted development process than via other mechanisms as using own culture for development purposes creates a higher sense of belonging. Hence, the media could exploit the potentials of *Ashenda* for various development matters such as election, freedom of speech, gender equality, social unity, indigenous product consumption, charity/ social responsibility, respecting the child rights, eco-tourism, national image building, team working, leadership, fair-mindedness, etc.

The media when producing such cultural programs should avoid negligence and must take due care on the use of language and images. This particularly should take the principles of media effects into consideration. Incoming video clips should be seriously examined as they are misleading the acculturating generation on the money related matters and use of language, for instance. They should take the principle of media effects into account.

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**Appendix I**  
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**(GUIDELINES EMPLOYED FOR DATA GATHERING)**

**1. GUIDELINE FOR INDIVIDUAL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWEES**

*1.1 For Tigray Television Officials and Journalists*

In my contact with the media managers and practitioners of the TMMA, questions were raised and detailed by follow ups on the major areas such as the:

- ❖ Beliefs they hold with regard to the influence of mass media on society and culture
- ❖ Objectives of the portrayals of the culture
- ❖ Areas distribution (especially on the coverage of rural and town festivities)
- ❖ Co-cultural diversity
- ❖ Editorial policy of the medium regarding cultural reports
- ❖ Value priorities that the medium gave in portraying the *Ashenda* culture
- ❖ Use of cultural festival for development oriented communications
- ❖ Efforts they made to research on their cultural reports (from pre-production to post portrayal)
- ❖ Etc.

*1.2 For Religious Leader(s)*

Religious leaders were interviewed on:

- Background history of the cultural festival: *Ashenda*
- Symbolic representations of materials and behaviors manifested on the cultural practices
- Impression they hold on the current status of the culture
- Stance about the religiosity/secularity of the cultural festival
- Background and current practices of collecting money, praising, cursing or insulting
- Age and sex of actors and attendants of the festivity

### *1.3 For Cultural Experts from Tigray Culture and Tourism Agency and Cultural Association of Tigray*

Cultural experts, particularly those who are working on the cultural sector, are interviewed on the:

- Historical background of *Ashenda*
- Variation of *Ashenda* in different areas of Tigray (in terms of duration, performances, dialects, participants, etc.)
- Values of the festival (both positive and negative)
- Changes shown on the cultural elements and practices (in time, places and situations)
- Potentials of the culture for development
- Understanding and use of mass media as strategy for cultural communication (on behalf of their respective organizations)
- Their attitude on collecting money, insulting, stoning, (and should these be altered?)
- Opinion/observation they have on the distinction between rural and urban festivities
- Efforts they have been making to develop culture, (particularly *Ashenda*)
- Their impression and observation on the quality and quantity of the culture's portrayals by the mass media

### *1.4 For Elderly People*

Elderly people, who are selected for their rich knowledge of the cultural festival also are interviewed on:

- ✓ The changes they observed in the culture (what is missing or added) and their appropriateness
- ✓ their role in transmitting the culture to the young generation
- ✓ their impression regarding to the young generation's interest in relying on one's own culture
- ✓ the specific practices, values, norms, behaviors etc. of the culture
- ✓ the age and sex of the main actors and attendants of the cultural festival
- ✓ the places where the *Ashenda* girls purposively go to

- ✓ the songs and dances of *Ashenda*
- ✓ *Etc.*

### *1.5. Guideline for Cultural/ Social Anthropologist*

A Cultural/Social Anthropologist is interviewed on:

- ✚ her attitude towards the influence of the media on cultures such as *Ashenda*
- ✚ the potential of culture for national development
- ✚ the positive and negative values of *Ashenda*
- ✚ her observation on the media portrayals of the cultural festival
- ✚ her opinion on the capability of cultures in image building (with particular reference to the cultural festival of *Ashenda*)
- ✚ *Etc.*

## **2. GUIDELINE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSANTS**

Focus group discussants are let to discuss on:

- ✓ their viewer-ship of the cultural (*Ashenda*) programs on Tigray Television
- ✓ their motive for viewing the special programs of *Ashenda*
- ✓ their opinion on the importance of culture
- ✓ their attitudes towards the potential of the media as agents of enculturation (and their own respective experiences)
- ✓ the values they like and/or dislike from the *Ashenda* culture
- ✓ their perceptions of co-cultural variations (in terms of rural urban festivities and geographic distinctions)
- ✓ their attitudes and motives in the practices of collecting money, praising and insulting or cursing
- ✓ their stance on the continuity of such practices or behaviors
- ✓ their interest of the medium/media's portrayal of co-cultural diversity
- ✓ their aspiration and commitment to preserve indigenous cultures
- ✓ their reasons behind attending/participating in the festivity of the culture
- ✓ their level of understanding of the *Ashenda* culture (its practices, rituals, songs and their lyrics, dancing styles, values, norms, etc.)

### **3. GUIDELINE FOR TEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

The television programs made on the cultural festival, the texts, were thoroughly analyzed in terms of their:

- ❖ Urban and rural coverage
- ❖ Co-cultural diversity
- ❖ Interpretative role of the medium
- ❖ Commentary function
- ❖ Related development oriented communications
- ❖ Values emphasized

## Appendix II

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#### (LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS)

The following 14 key informants or individual in-depth interviewees were thoroughly interviewed on the cultural festival and/ or its media portrayals as well as other related matters from different perspectives.

Full name	Age	Sex	Interviewed on	Short description of interviewees
Shewit Abraham	27	F	Feb. 17, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former Journalist at ETV,</li> <li>• M.A degree in Social Anthropology and B.A degree in History from AAU</li> <li>• Currently, Lecturer at the Department of History and Cultural Studies of Mekelle University</li> </ul>
Kassahun Woldegiorgis	59	M	Feb. 26, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA degree in Management,</li> <li>• Worked as Producer of Amharic and Tigrigna programs for Ethiopian Radio and ETV</li> <li>• Diploma in Teaching and served as a teacher for 8 years</li> <li>• Former cultural singer (released three albums)</li> <li>• Published a book entitled <i>Mestyat</i> in Tigrigna</li> <li>• Freelance Journalist for local and national media and published more than hundred short stories and articles in various Amharic and Tigrigna newspapers and magazines</li> </ul>
Mesele Zeleke	56	M	Feb.14, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.A degree in Sociology from AAU,</li> <li>• Worked for 30 years on the cultural sector</li> <li>• Former Head of Culture and Tourism Bureau of Tigray Region</li> <li>• Former Chairperson of CAT</li> </ul>
Hailu Gessesse	54	M	Feb. 11, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA degree in Journalism and Communication from the Ethiopian Mass Media Training Institute</li> <li>• 17 years work experience of broadcast media</li> <li>• Produced cultural and ethnographic documentary television programs at ETV and TMMA</li> </ul>

Solomon G/medhin	41	M	Feb.09, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA degree in Ethiopian Languages and Literature from AAU</li> <li>• Former Journalist at Mekalih Tigray newspaper</li> <li>• Former Head of Culture and Information Bureau of Mekelle zone</li> <li>• Currently, Public Relations Officer at CAT</li> <li>• Offered various trainings pertaining to culture.</li> </ul>
Abraha G/aregawi	55	M	April 04, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• M.B.A and in Business Administration</li> <li>• 25 years work experience of the broadcast media</li> <li>• Formerly Producer, Editor and Head of the Department of Educational and Entertainment Programs of Demtsi Woyane Tigray</li> <li>• Currently, Media Process Owner at the TMMA</li> </ul>
Selamawit Kahsay	31	F	Feb. 18, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LLB degree in Law from Mekelle University and Diploma in Theatrical Arts from Mekelle Arts School</li> <li>• Participated in various Tigrigna television and radio dramas, and movies as an actor</li> <li>• Form Reporter and Producer at Demtsi Woyana Tigray</li> <li>• Currently, Senior Reporter at the TMMA</li> <li>• Produced various cultural program including Ashenda</li> </ul>
Elias Abera	36	M	Feb. 01, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing a book entitled <b>ዘይተቐለዑ ሓቅታት አሸንዳ/</b> “The Unrevealed Sides of Ashenda”</li> <li>• B. Sc. in Environmental Health</li> <li>• Project Supervisor at the Ethiopia Orthodox Development Agency, local NGO, Mekelle branch</li> </ul>
Meresa Hiluf	49	M	Feb. 07, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diploma in Theatrical Arts from Mekelle Arts School</li> <li>• Participated in various staged and televised dramas, including theater for development</li> <li>• Formerly worked as Theater Expert at the Culture and Information Bureau of Mekelle zone, and trained many youths in the field</li> <li>• Currently, Coordinator of Indigenous Cultural Knowledge at the Culture and Tourism Office of Mekelle zone</li> </ul>

Lieke Likawint Yared Kassa	71	M	Feb. 08, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theologian at Abba Kassate Berhan Fireminatos Theology College</li> <li>• Distinguished preacher in the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches of Mekelle city</li> </ul>
Fisehatsion Teka	50	M	Feb. 25, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA in Ethiopian Languages and Literature from AAU</li> <li>• Formerly worked for the Ministry Culture and Tourism of Ethiopia as a member of its publications section</li> <li>• Currently, Working as Language and Literature Expert at the TCTA</li> </ul>
W/ro Meaza Girmay	61	F	Feb. 03,2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elderly mother with apt knowledge and experience of the <i>Ashenda</i> culture</li> </ul>
W/ro Tsilamuz Baraki	49	F	Feb. 05,2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former leader, <i>Haleka</i>, of the <i>Ashenda</i> girls</li> <li>• Locally distinguished for her cultural knowledge and interest</li> </ul>
W/ro Kiros Tesfay	82	F	Feb. 12,2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elderly mother who had been elected as a leader, <i>Haleka</i>, of the <i>Ashenda</i> girls and with rich knowledge of the culture.</li> </ul>

### Appendix III

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**AN ARTICLE FROM THE EDITORIAL POLICY OF THE *TMMA***  
**(TRANSLATED VERSION)**

#### **2.5 Respecting Peoples Languages, Culture and History; and Supporting the Prevention Traditional Harmful Practices**

For the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia are constitutionally guaranteed to exercise their right to develop their language, culture and history, the programs of our media agency should encourage and strengthen this right; and they should be produced in a way that enables them develop good understanding of each other and consolidate their unity. Understanding the fact that peace, development and democracy are unthinkable without recognizing and exercising unity in diversity, the FDRE constitution by building national unity based on people's equality, mutual respect and benefit, has created a fertile environment for the cultures of the country to be a common asset. Thus, TMMA strives to strengthen the unity that is based on people's interest. It endeavors to avoid backward beliefs that propagate ethnic discrimination among the nations, nationalities and peoples of the country.

Our agency makes continuous efforts to eradicate harmful practices with the help of people's participation. It works to eliminate customs or practices that hinder the development process of the nation. Moreover, it strives to avoid the attitudes and behaviors that limit the female's multifaceted participation. It contributes its role in eradicating harmful practices that endanger the wellbeing of children. It endeavors to get rid of the attitudinal and behavioral challenges facing to the disabled people.

## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and all the sources of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Mebrahten Gebremariam

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of submission: June 24, 2011.

Place of submission: Addis Ababa University, Graduate School of Journalism and Communication.