



The Role of Art in Promoting Human Rights & Democracy

Selam Ethiopia
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
January 2023

SELAM
Ethiopia



Published in 2023 by Selam Ethiopia
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
ISBN 978-91-988512-9-8

Researchers: Dr. Samuel Tefera
Proofreader: Sisay Mengiste
Graphic design: Senay Mekonnen

Supported by :  Sida

The Role of Art in Promoting Human Rights and Democracy

This publication is the product of Selam Ethiopia's effort, with independent contribution by Dr. Samuel Tefera, who is currently an Assistant Professor at Addis Ababa University; Coordinator for the Asian Desk at the university's Center for African and Asian Studies, which is part of the College of Social Sciences. The coordination duties for this project were expertly handled by Alehegn Moges Tessema.
January 2023

FOREWORD

The study sought to examine the challenges, opportunities and best practices of the arts and culture sector as regards its role in peacebuilding in Ethiopia. Data was generated from key informants from Addis Ababa as well as from seven regional cities, namely Semera, Gambella, Hawassa, Bahir Dar, Adama, Jijjiga and Dire Dawa. Qualitative data was generated through 17 individual interviews and two focus group discussions (FGDs) while a review of relevant documents was also made. Drawing on insights of artists, cultural experts, peace actors and institutions, the study identified findings that not only characterize the sector's status in terms of its role in peacebuilding in Ethiopia today but also suggest intervention areas toward transforming the sector to be truly an agent of peace in the country, if not beyond. By discussing the art/culture-peace nexus, the study expounded the distinctive roles the arts and culture sector can play before the outbreak of conflicts, during conflict and war, as well as in post-conflict contexts because how artists behave and what purpose their artworks serve significantly varies in these different settings. The study has also been underpinned by the understanding of the double-edged nature of art. That is, as much as one speaks of peaceful art, one may also be tempted to think of a bellicose art, which fans the flames of conflict by adding fire to the fuel in contested and precarious socio-political contexts. In both its positive or negative potentials, one only notes the might of art as a double-edged sword with which either one can do harm or reverse harm, can kill or save, can inflict pain or heal, etc.

The empirical study reveals that the sector has opportunities, potentials, good practices as well as challenges in terms of its relevance for peacebuilding in Ethiopia. Opportunity wise, there are artists who use their artworks to promote peace while peace agents or institutions such as the FDRE Ministry of Peace, at least in principle as stipulated in their official documents, believe in leveraging art for peacebuilding. Moreover, the study found that some individual artists, their professional associations, and cultural institutions are using "art for humanity, peace and nation building", "art and culture for regional integration", "art for intercultural dialogue", to mention but a few. The trend of peace/unity/virtuous theme in music albums, the availability, though limited, of artistic platforms that serve as a locus of creativity, diversity and sense of unity, on the one hand, and as a space of showcasing the rich and diverse socio-cultural capital of the country at large, on the other, are also worth mentioning.

As far challenges are concerned, the sector is facing an apparent disregard and undervaluation of its power while the overall culture of war dressed up in nationalism and patriotism appears to grip the sector to be more responsive to war calls and campaigns than to peacebuilding initiatives. When some initiatives for peace emerge, they are more often than not aborted due partly to the ethnicization and political instrumentalization of arts and culture. Furthermore, loose inter-institutional connection and lack of inter-sectoral synergy and the subsequent fragmented and unnecessarily duplicated efforts, weak intra-sectoral peace and harmony in the arts and culture community, uneven artistic and cultural opportunities in areas outside Addis Ababa and away from capitals of regional states appear to have hampered the sector's contribution to peacebuilding efforts in the country.

To be more precise, the study has identified the following findings: Art and culture nourishing the culture of war; art and culture overwhelmed by ethnic politics; artists trading off artistic freedom for economic gains; uneven distribution of artistic activities; art and culture not visible in healing and reconciliation in post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Last but not least, the study has come up as much with questions as it has with answers: Are we asking too much of the sector? How can the sector of art and culture perform for peace, stability and serenity while the artist and their works are themselves products of the absence of these virtues? Even if artists are not islands in a society, how can they escape nourishing the culture of war in a society that arguably glorifies war and heroism? Where there is little or no serious regard for and investment in the art and culture sector, can we expect too much to reap the benefits of arts and culture?

Finally, to enable the sector to be of relevance to peacebuilding, the study recommends that the sector should maintain a nuanced engagement with patriotism, war and politics while it is very important to bridge the sectors of peace and art such that artists should promote peace and peace agents should leverage art. Moreover, exercising the culture of dialogue in the arts and culture sector toward intra-sectoral peace and harmony; practicing pedagogy of art as pedagogy of peace for dovetailing art education and peace education; and doing research on the diverse potentials of art and culture across the country and assessing and supporting grassroots level artistic initiatives could make a difference in leveraging the power of art and culture in peacebuilding efforts of both the peace as well as the culture sectors in Ethiopia.

ABSTRACT

Human rights and the arts are interdependent and have a close connection. Promoting a culture that values human rights relies heavily on the arts. The paper strongly argues that art has the power to profoundly affect us and enable us to perceive the world in a way we have never seen it before. Artistic practice in different platforms can advance a genuine agenda that is beneficial to the community and imparts meaning to the audience. Since it enables the public to engage with ideas about what constitutes a human and decent life, investing in art is quite critical. It is because art can create conditions that enable the citizen to develop a sustained concern for and commitment to the fight against abuses and violations of human dignity. The findings indicated the importance art plays in promoting human rights and democratic values despite the various bottlenecks that impede the potential role of the sector to bring the anticipated results. Human rights, democracy and the arts are interdependent and have a close connection. Promoting a culture that values human rights and democracy relies heavily on the arts. While recognizing the need to revise our art education is important, more important is to make use of existing platforms in our artwork to exploit customary knowledge and bring out to public cultural practices that promote human rights and democratic values.

Keywords: Art, Democracy, Human Right Protection, Ethiopia

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

EPRDF	Ethiopian People’s Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IDP	Internally Displaced People
KII	Key Informant Interview
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TFD	Theatre for Development
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

CONTENTS

Foreword	4
Abstract	5
Acronyms and Abbreviations	6
1. Introduction	8
2. Art and Human Rights	8
3. Some Works on the Nexus Between Art and Human Rights	9
4. Application of Human Rights to Arts	9
4.1. Human Rights Issues in the Literary Works	10
4.2. Human Rights Issues in Music and Painting	11
4.3. Human Rights Issues in Picture, Painting, and Graffiti	11
4.4. Human Rights Issues in Festivals	12
5. Methods	12
6. Results and Discussions	12
6.1. Art in Promoting Democracy and Human Rights Issues	12
6.2. Theatres and Performances on the Stage	13
6.3. How Can Art be Used to Promote Human Rights?	15
6.4. Influence of Politics on Artworks	16
6.5. Absence of Professionalism	17
6.6. The Emerging New Social Media and Professionalism	18
7. Opportunities and Challenges of Art in Promoting HR and Democracy	19
8. The Past, Present and Future	20
9. Post-2018 Improvements	21
10. Reflections from Experience	21
11. Ongoing Institutional Initiatives between the Art and Human Right Bodies	21
12. The future and its challenges	22
13. Conclusion	23
14. Recommendations	23
REFERENCE	24

1. Introduction

A historically significant development is currently unfolding, as concern for the observance of human rights has become a key priority. Achieving universal respect for human rights has emerged as the most critical ethical task of our time. The world is undergoing a profound transformation in this era of rapid communication and constant cross-border movement of goods, ideas, and persons. Events within one country often have far-reaching implications for others. In today's global economy, scholars argue that human rights issues concern not only courts and law enforcement institutions, but also businesses, consumers, unions, and workers (Haas, 2013; Philips, 2022). This paper seeks to explore the nexus between arts and human rights, focusing on the role of art in promoting human rights issues in the international arena, and in improving human rights observance worldwide.

Although there is disagreement over the exact definition of "human rights," there is near-universal consensus that it refers to inalienable, inviolable, and essential rights needed for human existence. These rights exist independently of state power and are inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status (UDHR, 1980). The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a ground-breaking document in the history of human rights protection. Despite its affirmation that certain freedoms should be safeguarded worldwide, many countries still deviate from these principles.

Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, among others. These natural rights are not constrained by laws or the rights of other individuals. Everyone has equal access to these rights, without exception. However, they require governments to adhere to certain obligations and standards when dealing with individuals. As a result, human rights are powerful concepts in ethics and morality. Due to this nature, Haas argued that human rights should be perceived as a means, not an end (2013, p. 2). The ultimate goal is to enable humans to live a happy and fulfilling life.

Human rights are evolving in response to our changing world and global systems. They act as a criterion for life and represent reality. Yet, people often rely heavily on the law when interpreting human rights. Understanding human rights through a legal framework focusing on rights protection may fail to respond swiftly to social changes because social changes often drive changes in the law. Instead of actively responding to social changes, the introduction of laws regulating these changes can negatively impact people's perception of the law.

Human rights have evolved due to the tireless struggles of individuals throughout history (Philips, 2022). To understand human rights, various philosophical movements emerged that emphasized liberty and equality. Despite the efforts of prominent theorists to explain why humans are free and equal, artworks have significantly affected people's hearts. Scholars also agree that literature and art have been driving forces behind people's gradual transformation (Anderson, 2014; Delanty et al., 2011; Kelly, 2003; Oloruntoba, 2019; Turner & Webb, 2016). This phenomenon continues to the present day. Literature, film, music, and art all express human rights and significantly advance human rights awareness. Fundamental human rights have the potential to evolve when they encounter the arts. Human rights can amass social necessity and enthusiasm with the support of the arts, which can help protect and expand human rights in various artistic forms.

2. Art and Human Rights

The arts and human rights are interdependent and share a close relationship, with art serving a pivotal role in promoting a culture of human rights. Art, encompassing literature, music, film, and visual imagery, is a powerful tool used to raise awareness of human rights issues globally. Although we often use art primarily for self-expression, it can profoundly impact our perceptions, helping us see the world as never before. By visually representing social wrongs, such as injustice, conflict, inequality, and racism, art gives life to daily occurrences often overlooked or ignored. Scientific studies have shown that art has the power to provoke thought, engagement, and even action, by making the world feel more tangible (Kakungulu-Mayambala, 2019; Kelly, 2003; Oloruntoba, 2019). These studies also emphasize that art deepens our understanding of emotions, enhances self-awareness, and makes us more receptive to new ideas and experiences. Art brings these issues to the fore, making them impossible for viewers or listeners to ignore or forget.

Art is more than a medium for self-expression; it's a potent agent for change. Through this influential medium, we can shape minds and disseminate awareness throughout society. It can resonate with people on multiple levels, addressing issues both far-flung and close to home. By integrating humanistic principles into their work, artists can advance a community-benefiting agenda that instills meaningfulness in the audience. As Kelly argued, art, at its most effective, can convey knowledge and worldviews with sensitivity, compassion, and wisdom (2003, p. 11). Other studies affirm that art can expand knowledge, provide enjoyment, challenge assumptions, and also soothe, enlighten, and uplift the mind and spirit (Hodge, 2022). Art connects us to our thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and the realities and experiences of the outside world. Essentially, art can provide hope and offer inspiring resolutions by suggesting positive solutions to issues such as justice, equality, and protection.

Given these insights, this paper asserts that the arts play an instrumental role in cultivating a culture of human rights. They enable the general public to engage with ideas about what constitutes a decent human life and foster conditions that allow citizens to maintain an enduring commitment to combating abuses and violations of human dignity. Despite human rights being under threat, the universal language of the arts, which has the power to inspire and empower people globally more than any other form of communication, is the most effective medium for promoting human rights values. A landmark study in Uganda corroborated the crucial role of art in combating human rights abuses, raising awareness, promoting human rights, and influencing human rights scholarship (Kakungulu-Mayambala, 2019). Therefore, studying the nexus between art and human rights is of significant importance.

3. Some Works on the Nexus Between Art and Human Rights

The intertwining of art and human rights is profound. Throughout history, art has served as a medium for expressing human rights narratives, while human rights issues have, in turn, propelled artistic development. Art does not always explicitly depict human rights themes; it can subtly hint at relevant issues or bring overlooked injustices to light. Many artists illustrate the interconnectedness of art and human rights within our expansive world. For instance, a study by Naguib demonstrated how art played a pivotal role in the wave of uprisings known as the Arab Spring, which swept across the Middle East and North Africa from December 2010 to early 2013, leaving a lasting impact on the region's political and social life (Naguib, 2016). This seminal work discussed how street art, graffiti, and calligraffiti were utilized to convey dissent, civil disobedience, and resistance. It showcased the immense power of art to unite people across their differences, fostering change and advancing human rights. It not only inspired people to support human rights but also engaged new audiences in advocacy, enhancing awareness of crucial human rights issues.

In other contexts, such as the Black Lives Matter Movement, artworks portrayed scenes of vigil and addressed the violation of human rights endured by minority groups. Shonekan, in her influential work, explored the role of music in the Black Lives Matter movement and its contribution to raising public consciousness about societal, economic, political, and scientific injustices (Shonekan, 2018). Her research illustrated how art, particularly music, is a potent instrument in promoting the evolution of struggle, liberation, and identity within the Black Lives Matter movement. Shonekan asserts that black music is intrinsically linked to every black liberation movement in the United States, serving as a soundtrack for each wave of the movement (2018, p. 15).

Other studies have highlighted the transformative power of art in working with populations experiencing chronic stress (Hodge, 2022; Kakungulu-Mayambala, 2019; Nbsp, 2015). Thus, artistic pursuits serve as a powerful and effective means of social integration, connecting people despite their differences. Kelly's work on this topic suggests that 'arts can address historic/metaphoric truth, act in the crucial role as a witness, reference injustice, help raise awareness of human dignity, and create images that are moving and spiritual in the deepest sense' (2003, p. 116). This suggests that art can help people envision a new life and a brighter future.

4. Application of Human Rights to Arts

The effects of war, conflict, and displacement, along with the images of people dying in pain and suffering, or the visual portrayal of powerless and voiceless individuals being brutalized by those in power, can be conveyed in a novel, depicted in pictures, and expressed in music (Naguib, 2016; Shonekan, 2018). The actions of cultural artists can aid society in recognizing and deeply experiencing human rights. For instance, during the Ethiopian famine of the 1980s, a group of prominent artists highlighted the country's fundamental problems and presented unseen issues to the world. Music proved a powerful tool and a formidable weapon in the pursuit of equality across borders. It was pivotal in raising awareness about the famine, not only because it offered a creative visual representation, but also because art transcends cultures, connecting people regardless of the language they speak. Through comics, concerts, art and photo exhibitions, cultural artists reflect social pain, suffering, and introspection. Poetry, short stories, and public readings were additional mediums for sharing people's grief. Distanced from political interests, they unveiled the voiceless pain and made it visible to the world through their creative productions. These artists engage with the world and induce changes that often leave lasting impressions built upon solid foundations.

The modern understanding of human rights as a concept was developed and emerged from a specific historical era and cultural environment. Traditional approaches to human rights propose a singular ethicality and normativity as one of the potential solutions to the challenges facing human society. However, human rights and democracy are perpetually under threat. Consequently, as Sasi argued, in the current political climate, it is particularly relevant for artists to act as advocates for global human rights issues and to influence public opinion through contemporary art practices, contributing to community development in issues such as child safety, domestic violence, and racial bias (2007, p. 2). Therefore, the advancement of human rights occurred as awareness of violence was progressively eradicated throughout human history, with art playing an invaluable role.

The universality of the arts could be a powerful tool for understanding human rights. Art has the capacity to reach a large number of people and serve as a medium for meaningful dialogue, often resonating with individuals' hearts and minds in ways that logic and policy cannot. In this sense, human rights may depend on emotions as much as it does on reasoning. Art addresses many issues often overlooked or ignored by traditional media, offering a unique platform for generating awareness and understanding, stimulating civic engagement, and driving social change. Emotions and convictions undeniably enrich the content of human rights. Therefore, this paper strongly asserts that human rights and the arts can coexist in the same space.

4.1. Human Rights Issues in the Literary Works

Literary works and human rights have been bounded together for a long time. This work is progressive, and one way to ensure its social relevance is by addressing the human rights theme. Whether fictional or real, case studies and creative writing effectively empower individuals, foster reflection, and promote behavioural and attitude change. Such works serve as both a mirror for the oppressor and a guide and source of inspiration for the oppressed. A wide range of literary works influences humans. Stories, fictions, and novels are all good examples of this.

Storytelling is an essential platform, serving as an intermediary in discussing human rights and people's lived experiences. The simplicity of storytelling has the potential to transform how people perceive and interact with one another. As humans, we are surrounded by stories that evoke a range of emotions and are full of narratives whose actions and interactions interpret. Stories are demarcated as a protagonist and a predicament attempts to resolve the predicament, the outcomes of such attempts, the protagonists' reactions to the situation, and the causal relationships among each element in the story (Polkinghorne, 2010). The underlying power of stories lies in their power to link people in basic ways that transcend racial identity by revealing essential themes that enhance the shared bonds of humankind and by altering prevalent systems of oppression that perpetuate injustice. Small, local stories provide inspiration, hope, and energy to keep people working for justice, equality, and dignity without prejudice.

During a time of slavery in the United States, Douglass advocated for storytelling as a potent tool for social reform, arguing that the power of spoken and written language be used to effect positive transformation on individual and societal levels (Douglass, 1994). Douglass was recognized by Blight in his book, *Prophet of Freedom*, as one of the first human rights activists in the United States who fought tenaciously to abolish slavery before the Civil War (Blight, 2020). He was a brilliant orator and accomplished writer who published an antislavery paper called the *North Star*. In advising President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, he pushed to advocate for civil liberties. The most significant thing to take away from this is that he made an effort to explain his feelings on the violation of human rights using stories and how successful it was in the struggle.

The promotion of human rights can also be accomplished through the power of fiction. It can be used as a tool to investigate human rights and covers issues such as child abuse, freedom of opinion, discrimination, and racism. Their primary purpose is to emphasize the significance of speaking out against injustice and standing up for others. Scholars also agree that fiction can provide a healthy way to construct the themes of oppression and discrimination that underpin social action, human rights, and development work while also enduring the daily reality of oppression and prejudice in our own lives (Kelly, 2003; Stevenson, 2014; Turner & Webb, 2016).

Novel works are another essential resource that can be used to promote human rights. According to Tugume, writers can present the existing cultural violations; portray human rights practices, and racial discrimination using novels (Tugume, 2013). In his discussion, Tugume mentioned eminent African intellectuals and well-known writers, such as Ngugi and Achebe, who are noted for portraying African challenges in their works. Both authors discuss the existence of cultural rights violations throughout the colonial period in their works. For example, the white man violates the cultural rights of Africans through the church and mission schools by teaching against their culture. He also identified from their novels three significant points: racial discrimination, women in pre-colonial Africa, and child labour. Notably, according to Tugembe, these authors demonstrated how colonialists employ racial discrimination, how women are regarded as part of a man's property and their passive role, as well as how child rights are violated owing to cultural beliefs and child labour abuses. They explained the existing realities and the need for change through the potent novel work that they have written.

For instance, in Ethiopia, the works between 1960 and 1974 were a significant segment of contemporary Ethiopian history. It was an era teeming with social unrest among various social classes and strata of society. It was a very concentrated period full of accidents and coincidences that were melodramatic, absurd, and mostly ended tragically. This made it particularly suitable for Ethiopian literary art. The most esteemed works of art literature and source of resistance and incitement, even for the present academic, are products of this period. Feker eske meqabir, Oromayi, Adafres and other novels influenced the spirit of their times. They presented the spirit of their times unnoticed by their society and initiated resistance against injustice, inequality, and segregation. They fiercely criticized the regime, famously revealing its oppressive infrastructure through a series of characters narrated with vivid artistry.

4.2. Human Rights Issues in Music and Painting

Unlike novels and fiction, music and visual arts have historically faced formal limitations in expressing human rights, with instances of censorship, especially in regions like Africa. However, as a visual medium, images transcend both linguistic and cultural boundaries. Even viewers without expert knowledge on the subject can experience an emotional response through the use of color, shape, and symbolism, allowing them to identify with situations or causes of which they might otherwise be unaware. Many artists have utilized images to present human rights violations to the world. The most well-known, according to Soken-Huberty, is the 1937 depiction of the Guernica bombing by Pablo Picasso, which portrays human and animal suffering, their faces and bodies contorted in pain and grief (Soken-Huberty, 2020). The artwork provokes a profound emotional response from all who see it. Other significant works, like Salvador Dali's painting featuring a disembodied head, emphasize the recurring cycle of grief and pain caused by war. Doris Zinkeisen's 1945 painting "Human Laundry" illustrates the aftermath of liberation, with captured nurses and doctors washing and delousing the recently freed camp prisoners. As such, visual art, through pictures or paintings, effectively expresses feelings, emotions, and violence directly.

As for music, numerous musicians and songs have been inspired by injustice or human rights and tackle a wide array of related issues. Music is one of the most potent forms of communication, and accomplished musicians do more than merely express their pain and struggle. They narrate human rights stories through their songs. Examples include Tracy Chapman's "Talking 'bout a Revolution," inspired by injustices such as high unemployment, corruption, and food inflation during the Tunisia revolution (Soken-Huberty, 2019), Bob Marley's "Redemption Song," which outlines a story of persecution and balances a tragic history with a hopeful future, and Michael Jackson's "They Don't Care About Us," which communicates the indifference of oppressors towards the oppressed.

In Ethiopia, music has long been a medium for expressing popular anger and resistance against the government, transforming public spaces into platforms for open, fearless rhetoric. During difficult times when traditional forms of assembly are unavailable due to conditions or governmental intervention, creative musical works within the arts serve as a beacon for citizens. These works demonstrate the courage required to advocate for freedoms and strive towards justice on behalf of all humanity. Furthermore, many songs resonate with people, prompting them to understand their circumstances, take action, and voice real issues. These elements serve as a foundation for advancing human rights. Therefore, these artistic creations should be regarded as valuable resources for humanity.

4.3. Human Rights Issues in Picture, Painting, and Graffiti

Art and design have continuously evolved and expanded throughout history, influencing societal occurrences while also being influenced by these events. The use of imagery has influenced societies by raising awareness of social and political issues. In the expansive realm of social and political arts, the Arab Spring erupted across the Middle East and North Africa between December 2010 and early 2013, significantly affecting the political and social climates of those countries. According to Naguib, this ephemeral moment marked a shift in various forms of artistic expression (Naguib, 2016). The most striking artistic expressions, including street art, graffiti, and calligraffiti, combined images and scripts to convey their messages. They expressed dissent, civil disobedience, and resistance, drawing on the cultural memory of their people. These artistic expressions investigated how slogans were visualized, drawn, and inscribed on the walls of urban spaces in Cairo and then disseminated on the internet and social media.

"Bahia Shehab's 'The Blue Bra', located in Cairo, Egypt, is an excellent example of a protest against oppression. This graffiti is part of an installation called 'Thousand Times No,' which, as Shehab explains, "represents a rejection of both the conformity and the repression that often stifle the Arabic-speaking region and Islamic cultures." The text above 'The Blue Bra' says, "no stripping the people," and the sole of the military boot reads, "long live a peaceful revolution", referring to the incident of a veiled girl who was stripped and beaten by police on December 18, 2011, and happened to be wearing a blue bra. In another location, Shehab installed calligraphic graffiti, an Arabic translation of Pablo Neruda's quote, "you may crush the flowers, but you cannot delay the spring". These examples demonstrate how visual art can impact human rights and foster solidarity, awareness, and protest among the people.

"The Black Panther Party, an African-American group, was established on October 15, 1966, in Oakland, California. One of their most notable achievements was using imagery to spread awareness of their movement worldwide. However, according to The New York Times, despite being associated with armed resistance, the Black Panther Party's most effective tool was reaching out to African-American communities through art. Through dramatic comic-book-style retellings and illustrated profiles of key figures, they captured the party's significant events, people, actions, and their cultural and political influence, as well as their enduring significance (Jones & Jones, 1998; Walker, 2021). In their struggle, they produced artwork illustrating the mistreatment of communities of color in the United States.

“Other informative and largely interactive art forms bring worldwide awareness through photography and social media using simple yet powerful gestures. Individuals use art to express their imagination or communicate their ideas. It has been utilized throughout history to convey social and political messages to the public. Human rights and the arts complement each other due to their expressive nature. We can assert our rights through voice as people. Artists and designers play a crucial role in society by advocating for human rights because of their ability to generate visual curiosity and promote solidarity, awareness, and dissent. By integrating humanist ideals into their art practice, artists can drive an authentic agenda that benefits the community and creates meaning for the audience.

4.4. Human Rights Issues in Festivals

The arts and Film Festival is another venue for promoting human rights. Festivals provide a springboard for discussions about human rights and a venue for imagining shared concepts of human rights and human dignity. Unlike museums that invite contemplation, as Monica Sassatelli puts it, arts festivals are a site for contestation and democratic debate (Sassatelli, 2011). Accordingly, festivals create informal spaces for sociability, debate, and criticism that reflect Jürgen Habermas’ (1991) earlier conception of the public sphere as a culture-debating public characterized by collegial discussion among individuals and committed group activities.

Arts and Film Festival promotes active participation, inclusivity, and a sense of community when much of the public discourse on human rights issues has shifted to online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The festival brings people together and features poetry, music, film, panel discussions, and dialogue on domestic and international human rights issues. In addition to providing a forum for people to engage with human rights issues, some festivals also bring attention to Human Rights Day and include refugee and displacement issues on their agenda. Consequently, the festival actively fosters a culture of human rights by encouraging audiences and participants to share critical ideas, potential solutions, and examples of good practice derived from personal experience or their respective professional fields. In 2017, for instance, at the Leicester festival, Broken Chords Can Sing A Little by Silver Mt. Zion was played their song, which addressed the plight of asylum seekers and refugees in Middlesbrough by examining their experiences with homelessness and relocation. By creating cultural dialogue around human rights and the arts, festivals contribute to developing a culture of human rights that enables the imagining of better, fairer, and equal collective futures.

5. Methods

This study employed grounded theory, utilizing qualitative methods for data collection. Primary data was gathered through Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions involving professionals from Theatrical Art, Law, Human Rights, Authorship, Visual Arts, and Education fields. The list of participants included experts from the Ethiopia Human Rights Commission, professionals from Addis Ababa, Arba Minch, and Wachemo Universities, experts from the Ministry of Peace, as well as contributors from private Art and Media productions.

Insights were also drawn from a validation workshop on ‘the Role of Art in Peace Building’ held on 22nd November 2022, as well as a consultative workshop hosted by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission on 2nd December 2022. These workshops provided valuable reflections and insights from panel members and participants. In addition to these sources, a literature review was conducted to provide a deeper understanding of the study’s background.

The focus of the Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions was the examination of the association between art, human rights protection, and democracy. Data collection was facilitated virtually through internet-based applications, mobile telephones, and direct engagements with informants. To further enrich the study, the researcher’s observations and experiences were also included.

6. Results and Discussions

6.1. Art in Promoting Democracy and Human Rights Issues

Art is an essential tool when it comes to promoting human rights. It offers people voices they normally would not be able to express using traditional language and a normative way alone. Great works become translatable symbols understood by many regardless of cultures or backgrounds, linking individuals’ efforts across borders. Thus, it creates synergy amongst the world population in the search for justice. Throughout history up until, artworks inspired people to stand firm even under tense conditions during challenging struggles against oppression. Arts can unify parts into whole movements where respect for fundamental principles is respected; allowing individuals to become part of this more powerful message. Thus, freedom can ring out loud; reminding people are interdependent despite the divides element. It means that Art, by its very nature, requires the practitioners to have the freedom to present their perspectives, resistance, and opposition. According to the interviewee, it is not difficult for artists to comprehend the concepts of democracy and freedom as Art is a democratic construct, which needs to be practised and performed freely. In order to be creative and demonstrate to the audience that there are alternative worldviews, artists require liberty and democracy. [KI Art II, Woman, Age 33, 02/10/2022].

Her assertion is of a view that art and democracy are, therefore, inseparable. This is why continued support for using art remains critical in keeping democratic ideals alive. Guaranteeing freedom for the realization that all persons are entitled to entitle the same access, dignity, liberty, and protection of law can reinforce a collective sense of ownership. Moreover, countries' social structures, which are vital for maintaining democratic orders, can be free from violations of Human rights, at least reduced, as long arts stay integral in expressing people's plight towards obtaining better livings.

In Ethiopia, many artistic expressions have been proving an invaluable asset in the initiative for justice and human rights protection, including women's rights. Artistic creativity has been presented as political protest, depicting socio-political realities and raising awareness around injustices. Art has a powerful capacity to inform, advocate, and agitate in the fight against human rights abuses. [KI Art V, Women. Theatrical art instructor, Age 35, 29/09/2022]

As one of the interviews further explained it,

In Ethiopia, we can list a lot of socially conscious dramas. Yegna (የእኛ) drama was an illustration of what is being done practically in promoting democracy and human rights. Yegna is one of the works that focus on women's capabilities as well as the protection of women's rights. The drama has provided many social issues with a vehicle for exposure to uninformed people and broader constituencies, inspiring dialogue on pressing issues that might otherwise remain unaddressed. [KI Art V, Woman. Age 35, Theatrical art instructor, 29/09/2022] Such works based on the discussion reflect that Art, democracy, and human rights all positively influence human development when they are brought together. They have similar goals of creating a better future and fostering an environment conducive to human well-being. Art has the potential to reflect and shape the values of a democratic society, as it can be used to express ideas and opinion, challenges the status quo, and promote dialogue and debate. The close link between art and democracy often makes the terms two sides of a coin in that the ideals of the latter are best manifested in the former. Art is the other version of democracy. It can educate citizens about their rights and responsibilities and foster a sense of community and shared values. One of the interviewees claimed that: True democracy is not hierarchical but something that promotes listening to one another and seeking the truth. Ultimately, art can be an important tool for promoting democracy and social justice. [KI Art IV-Woman, Age 32, 06/10/2022].

In fact, for centuries, art has been used to promote social justice. It has raised awareness, challenged perceptions, and created conversations around critical social issues. To start with, we can raise a lot of artistic activism in Ethiopia employed during government oppression, social injustice, and displacement, such as Teddy Afro's music that addresses the issues of injustice and inequality. His lyrics are often seen as a form of resistance against the oppressive regime. Teddy's music has also been used to spread awareness of current political and social injustices in Ethiopia and encourage people to stand up for their rights. His musical creativity confirmed how art could be used to create a sense of community and solidarity among those fighting for social justice. Besides protest songs that exist explicitly as a form of activism, other subtler explorations through creative expression like theatres and other stage performances can also profoundly affect perceptions around oppression.

6.2. Theatres and Performances on the Stage

Theatre has shown its decisive role in promoting human rights and democracy. It has been used as a platform to raise awareness and educate audiences about human rights and democratic values. It can also challenge existing power structures and raise awareness about injustice and oppression. Through dialogue, characters, and plot, theatre can provide a platform for exploring complex topics, raising questions, and inspiring actions. One informant also confirmed how theatre serves the purpose of building democratic values beyond being a monologue. According to the informant:

This is done by creating a character that converses with other people in an engaging dialogue. For example, individuals convey only their interests and perspectives during storytelling, resembling a dictatorship or one-person rule. When the idea of dialogue emerges, such as in a democratic debate, it helps people see things from a more balanced perspective. This allowed the audience to see things from different perspectives by putting themselves in the shoes of others. [FGD Art III, Woman. Age 34. Theatrical art expert, 29/09/2022].

Through artistic expression, theatre can create an engaging and thought-provoking experience that can help to change attitudes and beliefs. Through the medium of the theatre, various points of view, ideologies, and opinions can be communicated effectively. It allows us to see and choose the more valuable perspective among the many choices discussed on the stage. It explores complex topics such as oppression, discrimination, and violence. The audience then can experience the struggle of others and gain insight into the experiences of the marginalized or oppressed.

Furthermore, theatre can also promote dialogue and understanding between different groups, helping bridge divides and foster tolerance. Since human rights are more evident that go beyond rational elements, theatrical or artistic productions are essential to deal with emotions. As one of the participants confirmed:

Human right is not a concept that can be rationally justified; instead, it is emotional. Take war as an example; if we try to solve the problem of people by being rational, we will not be successful. Emotions include forgiving someone, gaining their trust, and mending a broken relationship. Therefore, Art is essential for addressing these emotional issues and efficiently resolving contested issues. [KI Art I, Woman. Age 34. 29/09/2022].

At the same time, theatre is another possible tool for raising awareness and pushing against oppression in both overt and covert ways. Beyond the government's efforts to solve human rights abuses and problems, grassroots theatres can play a significant role in embodiment of human experience by translating polarized views from recipients into agents who push back against oppressive forces through self-expression. For example, we can take the Rwanda genocide and the intervention of theatre in healing victims of genocide. This was made possible through applied theatre, where the theatre professions/artists travel out into the community to discuss and address the topic in a participatory theatre. It showed how theatre could potentially serve a larger purpose than just entertainment value alone. Theatre for Development (TFD) has been utilized in numerous African nations to address social issues. In South Africa, it was used to alleviate the agony of apartheid, aiming to bridge limited dialogue between parties by developing mutual understanding.

In Ethiopia, Theatre for development (TFD) was also used to address other social, educational, gender equality, and health issues, although it is not directly employed to influence politics. Through staging realistic performances that reflect the realities of people's lives, theatre help to encourage meaningful conversations about these issues. The play about leprosy and tuberculosis (TB) entitled "Lej Wendeme" is one to mention. In addition, "Yeken Kegnet" produced by Population Media Center, despite the agenda-setting issues behind the funding (US government funded), played a significant role in enlightening the community about birth control, gender equality, and the promotion of the culture of tolerance in a multi-ethnic context. According to our informants working in the institutes of higher education, there is a good experience of performing theatre for development.

TDF raises many issues in addition to economic development, brings up any social issues, and discusses them in collaboration with the community. The experience of Rwanda and South Africa in terms of effectively utilizing theatre for development is repeatedly mentioned. [FGD Art I, Woman. Age 35. 29/09/2022].

Another key informant, KI ArtVI, who runs a theatre production and teaches theatre students part-time, explained how applied theatre helped reconcile differences between Internally Displaced People (IDP) and Refugee-Host Community relations in various parts of Ethiopia. Applied theatre, in general, according to one of the informants,

contributed to promoting a culture of respect and a spirit of togetherness in situations where ethnic and identity-based differences were severe and violent and rights abuse was pervasive. [KI Art VI, Woman. Age 36. 08/10/2022].

Adding on the importance and effective role TDF plays in the promotion of democratic values and protection of human rights, KI Art IV stated the Ethiopia TDF experience as follows:

The promotion of TDF by the Union of African Performing Artists and African Theatre Exchange during the presidency of Debebe Eshetu, a popular theatre professional in Ethiopia. The union utilized TFD to engage people to participate in community dialogue actively. [KI Art IV, Age 32. Woman, 06/10/2022].

Based on her explanation, theatre inspires individuals and the community to aspire for more positive changes and contribute towards their cultural identity. Theatre provides a safe way for communities to come together and enjoy themselves in public spaces when other forms of reaction may be limited or even unavailable. Healthy relationships between various social groups can be facilitated by creating space for dialogue between people from varied backgrounds. It can also promote trust and collaboration among people.

Furthermore, according to KI Art II and KI Art IV, although few, there were stage performances, theatres and media productions that enlightened the public and the arts community providing special attention to human dignity and the respect of rights. Among the good examples are Yekene Kegnet's (የቀን ቅኝት) radio plays and Yegana's (የእኛ) drama on both radio and television. Besides that, the university-based theatre production Hager Mallet Sew New (አገር ማለት ሰው ነው) was a stage performance that dealt with human dignity and the need to respect people and their right. Hager Mallet Sew New was an iconic Amharic performance that captivated audiences. It was one of Ethiopia's universities based and most beloved theatrical productions. It tells the story of respecting human dignity, tolerance, equality and more. The play was filled with high-energy performances from its talented actors and dancers. Audiences were charmed by the performer's bright costumes, intricate music and choreography, and heartfelt storytelling.

Despite the contribution of art to promoting human rights and democracy, the relationship between art and politics in Ethiopia is quite complex. Politics have shaped art. Political images have been used in art for decades, giving us an insight into the feelings of different societies on political issues. One of the informants sees the strong relationship between politics and Art. According to her discussion:

Those in the art attempt to criticize politics, while on the other hand, politicians attempt to control and influence Art and the voices that emerge out of it through the art community. She also added that starting from the birth of playwriting, establishing autonomy has been a struggle in the history of theatre. Since then, there has been a confrontation between politics and the arts, and at some point, political pressure helped to make theatre what it is today. [FGD Art III, Woman. Age 34. 29/09/2022].

The artworks strive to emancipate themselves from the political realm by exploring alternate concepts and worldviews that break away from mainstream ideologies. By experimenting with new forms, techniques and subjects; contemporary art pieces strive to create a bridge over conventional boundaries set by politics. Furthermore, art allows for different views to be expressed, providing a way for those in marginalized positions to be heard within the broader discussion. Through their use of symbolism, allegory and metaphor, contemporary art has become a powerful tool for communicating ideas around social justice, human rights and identity. In this way, In Ethiopia, despite its drawbacks, artists reject any kind of dogma or conformism imposed by politics or other structures of power while constructing alternative landscapes that explore issues beyond the scope of traditional political debates. As one of the informants mentioned that:

“Kemegareja bestejerba” (ክመገገራጃ በስተጀርባ) is currently being performed at Hager feker theatre and other dramas that have been produced are trying to show many social issues and attempts to put democracy on the right path. Given that, theatre is the product of a free mind, its link to and contribution to democracy is undoubtedly significant. [KI Art V, Age 35. Woman, 29/09/2022].

In addition, Poetic jazz in Ethiopia emerged as a site for public spaces for collective expression. It is marked by constantly evolving improvisational elements that reflect personal and shared experiences. It has brought together individuals from diverse backgrounds through lyricism, instrumental dialogue, creative arrangements, and spiritual exploration and encourages spontaneous communication. In Ethiopia, poetic jazz has significantly contributed by publicising social problems. It often serves as an essential forum for reflecting on thorny issues such as ethnic conflict and violence, providing a platform for people of all cultures to explore these intersectional topics constructively. One of the Key informants mentioned a few individual performances in poetic jazz and their roles:

“Frash Adash” (ፍራሽ አዳሽ) and “Maru Balegu’s” (ማሩ ባላገሩ) works have been expressing lessons to respect people’s rights while highlighting existing concerns. Furthermore, Maru Balageru made a comment claiming that enlightened elites had destroyed a country founded by descent illiterate people.[KI Art V, Age 35. Woman, 29/09/2022].

In this sense, poetic jazz is both a forum for political dialogue and an educational tool, contributing to the broader understanding of our world and its intersections. Ultimately, poetic jazz is a gathering place that fosters individual elevation and shared transformation, a public space through which we can unite in our shared humanity.

In Ethiopia, television dramas have also been popular since their introduction in the 1990s. They have a long history of being used to critique governments and shape democracy. Drama often presents a compelling story that can act as a powerful reflection of current events and historical themes. Through this lens, these stories can provide a platform for social discourse on essential matters such as economic inequality, political corruption, gender inequality, and human right violation. As one of our informants mentioned, there is an incredibly impactful drama that powerfully critiques government institutions and exposes structural inequalities. According to her discussion:

The television series “Men letazez” (ሞን ለታዘዘ) uses art to discuss social issues and throws criticisms against the government and other political parties. This is owing to the fact that freedom of expression is the hallmark of a democratic society. [KI Art V, Woman. Age 35. 29/09/2022].

The drama sends an important message that everyone should know their responsibility to speak out against injustice when they see it. In addition, it was an effective tool for criticising government policies and shaping democracy by sparking conversations about social justice, amplifying minority voices, and offering an accessible platform for community dialogue around vital issues facing our country today.

6.3. How Can Art be Used to Promote Human Rights?

The potential of art to promote the protection of human rights and democracy is immense, and this is an area where art has already made some substantial contributions. The history of contemporary art has hundreds of examples of works which have addressed issues related to human rights and democracy, often serving as a powerful catalyst for social change. For example, affan Oromo artist Hachallu Hundessa used his works to document aspects of human right violation under the TPLF rule, while recently merged social media movement as a part of artwork has been credited with helping raise awareness about various social issues through entertainment.

Art can promote the protection of human rights and democracy in several ways. Firstly, it can act as a platform for expression, enabling people to articulate their concerns and issues in public spaces or online networks. This allows members of the community to get involved in spreading ideas that they believe in or agree with, thereby amplifying their opinions on all topics, such as inequality or human security. For instance, social media campaigns by various YouTubers in Ethiopian ethnic conflicts, particularly violence against the Amhara community in Oromia, are known for widely disseminating messages promoting protection, freedom and human dignity. Secondly, by creating visual representations of oppressed individuals or communities, art can provide a moving insight into their struggles that otherwise would not easily be understood.

Through its impactful imagery, it can unsettle and inform audiences in ways that words cannot. Thirdly, art can help support specific political movements for increased civil liberties or individual acts, which violate human rights. This has been most evidenced by street protests around the world today; activists often use music and visuals such as banners to convey their cause's message more strongly than any words could do when they march through city streets or record videos to share online. Such works help to strengthen activist movements aiming for justice within oppressive societies. By presenting a tangible representation of violence that exists away from public view until brought out into open awareness, without resorting to sensationalized rhetoric often found elsewhere on traditional news outlets.

Overall, it is evident that art is an invaluable tool for democratic societies struggling with protecting human rights from movement violators—such as unfettered governments or international powers—for its ability to capture otherwise untold stories. However, while supporting those fighting against oppression to continue their fight through creative avenues, unconstrained expression cannot offer alone.

The result of using Art to promote the protection of human rights and democracy is complex and varied. On the one hand, it can act as a form of protest against injustices or discriminatory policies; for example, in the past, artwork such as theatre, paintings, songs, sculptures and graffiti have been used to publicise anti-war or pro-peace sentiments. Additionally, art has been used to highlight issues regarding rape and FGM. On the other hand, however, arts' physiological effects as a form of exposure therapy encourage viewers to experience a new way of thinking about injustice and human rights violations which can be both educational and thought-provoking. Through work on creativity, emotion, and the unconscious human mind, according to our key informants:

Art can effectively change people's thoughts. Using the aesthetic nature of Art, one can convey the intended message to put art in people's hearts by artistically portraying the intended construct. Due to the deterioration of aesthetic quality, however, Art in general, and theatre in particular, would be in a difficult position to achieve the anticipated changes. Theatres intended to promote change, for instance, will have more propaganda-like content and a lower aesthetic appeal. [KI Art I, Woman, Age 34. Theatrical Art expert, 29/09/2022].

This indicates that the deterioration of aesthetic values in art will have a lesser role in influencing people and presenting the desired message. Furthermore, it implies that how it is built up and how the story is told lacks expertise. The solution to this problem would depend on the goals of the theatre and its intended audience. If the goal is to create a theatre that entertains and promotes change, the focus should be on creating meaningful content that will inform and engage viewers. Theatre owners and programmers should strive to create pieces that challenge preconceived notions, promote critical thought, and draw out emotion while remaining aesthetically pleasing. However, according to our informants, the aesthetic quality of the art is decreasing gradually. She further explained that:

Tegaye's "Hahu besedest wer" was fascinating in its discussion of mass education. However, compared to contemporary works, the aesthetic part of contemporary theatres has faded, which reflects the writers' lack of artistic competence. [KI Art II, Woman. Age 33. 02/10/2022].

According to the explanation, there appears to be an issue with either the theme or the content. In addition, many have problems with historical authenticity. The question though remains on how Art can be used to promote democracy and human rights. For KI Art II, it is possible to convey a message that stays in people's hearts by using the aesthetic quality inherent to the essence of Art itself. Through Art, it is possible to transmit ideas and create shared experiences. The very act of experiencing Art together creates a culture that becomes a form of cultural expression.

6.4. Influence of Politics on Artworks

Throughout Ethiopia's rich history, politics has always played an innate role in its artwork. Historically, Ethiopian political powers had immense control over what topics were depicted, who could produce them, and which messages were communicated. Whether it was the Imperial regime of Haile Selassie in the 1930s or the Derg/ People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) in the 1970s, political influence in Ethiopian art was, and still is, pervasive. This influence provides insight into government leaders' values at different points in time. Political intervention in the arts sector mainly comes through censorship of artistic works in all fields of art, limiting the role of the sector or artists to exhibit the required level of professionalism. One of the Informants shared this concern about Artists' experiences of imposed censorship as follows:

Censorship to her restricts the right to freedom of expression where artists cannot speak their minds through their artwork of different kinds. But, she also added, 'When you write, you will worry about what other people will say, what somebody will suggest, whether or not your story will air on TV, and whether or not you will find a sponsor. Self-censorship, therefore, becomes the first phase in the process, which initially limits your ability to think creatively. [KI Art IV, Woman, 32. 06/10/2022].

The works of art created during Haile Selassie's and Derg's regimes give evidence of their commitment. Their presence was common in every artistic work depicting and witnessing their advancements. Their political message, as well as their mission for national rebirth, can be seen. This same trend continues into the present day, even though under the Derg period (1974-1991), there were sweeping changes in production methods with socialist colours. The current government operating since 1991, is often referred to as "FDRE" despite striving for democracy, various forms of censorship has been observed where artistic works exhibiting traits associated with attempts at reform appear censored or otherwise silenced through legal weasel words or other means. Therefore, ultimately infringing upon freedom of expression.

When it comes down to delivering alternative perspectives surrounding societal issues, among other arguments, bound criticism aimed at both state actors' authoritarian tendencies perpetuated it. One of our informants raised her concerns regarding the problem of censorship by claiming it must be lifted. According to her explanation:

'What do we consider when we evaluate a theatre, for instance, she mentions "Beherawi theatre" establishing a normative standard including sensitivity to religion, ethnicity, and other factors. It is not the aesthetic value that is being considered, nor the kind of theatrical form that has been developed, nor the circumstances in which it has been designed and produced; instead, they are looking at whether or not these things affect the normative standards. In such a circumstance, it becomes highly subjective, and the normative value supersedes the aesthetic value. [KI Art IV, Woman. Age 32, 06/10/2022].

She further provided another example that happened in Hager Fiker Theatre and stated that:

Hager fiker theatre produced a magnificent "Amateru" theatre that was not even seen for two weeks. After that, it left the stage due to its novel presentation and criticality of the topics stressed. [KI Art IV, Woman. Age 32, 06/10/2022].

According to the explanation, freedom of art, expression, and thinking are fundamental to artistic expression. According to KI Art II claims, that Art and democracy share the characteristics that they are both the product of a free mind and discuss freedom. However, the issue of culture and norms arises concerning how we exercise our freedom. There is an area where the artist is informed about such an interrelation. The problem, however, remains on how the artists can view the situation and act freely. One of the informants, a theatre lecturer, a Rotarian and a performing artist, gets perplexed by his lived experience on censorship of artwork during curfews. Among the art sector, according to his point of discussion, he underlines that:

theatre is the one that primarily faces censorship. 'I ask myself 'why are they afraid of a theatre when movies are being watched?' Asking himself, he believes that it is due to the soft power it has and the impact it will create to mobilize people to stand against the breach of human and democratic rights. [KI Art III, Man. Age 39.10/10/2022].

Art can encompass a wide range of subject matter, ranging from the serious to the light, or controversial to simply entertaining. Individuals should be free to create what they please with minimal government intervention. Governments should refrain from trying to control the themes or content of artwork either by setting restrictions on such art or endorsing particular works over others. This allows artists to use their imagination and creativity in producing their work without fear of censorship or facing official disapproval for presenting unorthodox ideas. While allowing maximal freedom in the production and consumption of artistic expression, it is crucial for protecting creative expression.

Governments need specific regulations in place in order to protect individuals from potential harm stemming from extreme ideological positions held by certain groups. Freedom of thought and artistic expression are both essential components within any healthy society; however, it might be necessary for a government to intervene to ensure this right is enjoyed by everybody equally and safely.

6.5. Absence of Professionalism

The absence of professionalism in artistic work can profoundly impact the development of art and its critical role in promoting human rights and democracy. Professionalism refers to exhibit characteristics such as skill, dedication, and self-regulation that are integral to advancing an artistic career. Without maintaining standards of professional conduct, one's artwork would likely lack the necessary policy and attention to detail necessary for success. However, due to deteriorated professionalism and a complex political system, it is difficult for people from different cultures to interact appropriately in an artistic setting, leading to potential conflict. In addition, some artists may be more likely to repeatedly draw inspiration from the same few cultures, resulting in a lack of diversity among creative art works. Regarding this problem, one of our informants mentioned:

My culture, education level, gender, and other things that make me who I am affect how I think. However, this is where my freedom works. So, my identity has some limits, but if the artist cannot think of ways to be free within those limits, it will be hard for the artist. Added also: looking at the experts, especially writers like Mengistu Lema, Tsagaye Gebremedhin, and Tesfaye Gesesse's plays, one can see that the points they make, specifically about nationalism, are shared concepts and sensitive to society. [KI Art II, Woman. Age 33. 02/10/2022].

Moreover, KI Art II shares Tolstoy's definition of Art as "an expression of a feeling or experience in such a way that the audience to whom the art is directed can share that feeling or experience". The absence of professionalism can limit the types of topics represented artistically and therefore limit creativity overall. Art needs to be seen as a form of communication and an essential tool to express any experience or facet of the human condition.

The other problem in professionalism is the lack of information (background information about the topic written) and the absence of a sense of emotion towards the topic discussed. Knowledge of an issue provides the necessary context for viewers to connect with works of art. Through the artist's interpretation of a given topic, they can create works that demonstrate compassion and understanding to those with differing perspectives. By representing pertinent information, artistic works can serve as a source of education and awareness-raising. Knowing a particular issue allows the viewer to gain greater insight into its complexity while promoting discussion around it. For example, if we look at the conflict in Tigray, the war in capital cities does not exist physically, but you have to feel the actual conflict of Tigray to write about it.

The writer, however, must encourage and educate himself or herself to write ethically. It is because the artist does not produce artwork for himself but imparts or communicates his/her feelings to the audience. The artist's understanding of an issue helps them make informed decisions on how they present their work, which can invoke emotion or lead to change in viewers.

In Ethiopia, for instance, we share similar values as Ethiopians, but growing up in a different culture has shaped our values differently. For instance, polygamy and wearing no clothes are viewed differently in Ethiopia, resulting in divergent concepts. These divergent concepts are sometimes reflected in artworks and the local practice misinterpreted by the director. One of the informants concerning this problem mentioned a case performed by individuals from Hamer where the director was from the center. According to her:

The director obliged the actors from Hammer to wear outfits—considering that, it was immoral for him to present them on stage while they were naked. [KI Art I, Woman, Age 34. 29/09/2022].

This raises the question of why, if we are required to regard something as authentic, its meaning will be altered if solely the person it represents appraises it. Writing alone does not make people complete referring the need to understand the group for which we are writing. When that happens, the spirit of liberating the self and being able to add your artistic perspective to what the community is reflecting on. One of the key informants claimed that:

If a playwright wants to write about Hamer culture, he/she must first understand Hamer culture and way of life. Further reflected on this saying: 'It does not imply that the traditional marker should be changed, rather something that impacts these people, such as not doing to someone what you would not want to be done to you. [KI Art II. Woman. Age 33. 02/10/2022].

Therefore, for her, even if morality is a relative concept, it must be maintained. The other problem in the art works is the absence of professional critics and critics impacting the development of artworks. Professional critics provide needed perspective from an outside source that can help keep the artist on a productive path, provide further inspiration and ideas to pursue, and give creative feedback tailored to each artist's specific goals and visions. Regarding who should take responsibility for taking the critic's role, KI Art II and KI Art VII, a philosophy scholar and social critic, think that criticism is an analysis to make an informed judgement to make a decision. To both KI Art II and KI Art VII, criticism is the work of a professional and needs to be free from any bias, as criticism differs from a simple observation. For example, a critique might assess how well or poorly works are executed and offer objective or subjective observations on the aesthetic quality of the piece, its intention, and reception. One of our informants stated:

A critic is a person who evaluates an artwork and guides the writer with detail questions that enable the write to evaluate his piece from different angles. To her Asfaw Damte, a well-known author, fulfils this role. [KI Art II, Woman. Age 33. 02/10/2022].

In our country, however, those who offer opinions are problematically considered critics. Following up on this, the other informants' also mentioned the problem concerning in a critique:

People in theatre perceive themselves as critics, even though they are not. When providing feedback, he/she should not consider what he/she wants but what the play is trying to say, what its content is, what sort of method is employed, how successfully conveyed the central theme is, and what is portrayed in the play. [KI Art I, Woman. Age 34, 29/09/2022].

In Ethiopia, 'critics' often express personal desires. The dearth of competent critics makes obtaining the necessary professional evaluation impossible. Stressing the need for a professional critique, KI Art IV underscores that if critics are not there, people will be unable to adjust to new genres because they are the ones who lead and practice how and what to view. For KI Art II, critics have extensive knowledge of the history and nature of Art. They realize the styles of several genres and how to operate independently with free minds. Critiques may also point out shifts in an artist's style over time, as well as predict how successful an artwork might be critically and commercially.

6.6. The Emerging New Social Media and Professionalism

The emergence of social media has made it much easier for people to make art and share it with others quickly and easily. However, this increased accessibility to art creation has also led to some negative consequences. One is the lack of professionalism in many art works. People are often not held to any standards when self-publishing art pieces, leading to a variety of poorly designed or executed creations that may not be up to professional standards. This can lead to confusion or misperceptions among viewers, as well as frustration when it appears that amateur artists compete with professionals in the same space. There may also be increased pressure on working professionals who now find that they must constantly strive to distinguish themselves from the amateurs taking advantage of the low bar set by non-professional social media artworks.

The access to social media, digital dramas, films, and other artworks is being produced by professional artists and amateurs, where the latter outnumbers the former. In addition, this does not account for aesthetic value or historical and cultural knowledge of producing art works. People can naturally write poetry, dance, and sing without formal training, and one should not worry about doing so. He/she may easily follow his instincts.

In fact, concerning this issue, one of the informant's responses was quoted as saying:

We cannot eliminate absolutely amateurish artistic endeavours. Since ancient times, “qererto [ቀረርቶ]”, “fukera [ፋኩራ]”, and others have played a significant role in mobilizing people, fostering a sense of nationalism, and motivating individuals to fight for their rights. Art is biological, yet it has evolved, nurtured and reached a professional level over time. [KI Art II, Woman. Age 33. 02/10/2022].

Regarding controlling, however, KI Art II understands the difficulty of regulating art productions as various media platforms have emerged, requiring various regulatory mechanisms. Therefore, supporting and rewarding their efforts is the only thing needed to manage and regulate aspiring artists or amateurs to align with the desired trajectory.

7. Opportunities and Challenges of Art in Promoting HR and Democracy

Artwork is an invaluable form of creative expression used by people from all cultures and periods to convey various messages and emotions. While it can bring immense joy to viewers, creating artwork also comes with opportunities and challenges. By understanding these, artists can further develop their craft and become more successful in their work.

One of the great opportunities for artistic works is the potential for creativity. Rather than simply replicating existing pieces, artists can create something entirely new and unique to express themselves or share a particular message with others. In addition, artwork provides the chance for exploration and experimentation with colours, shapes, composition, materials and concepts, allowing an artist to push the boundaries of what they believe possible in terms of creativity.

The second opportunity is the development of artworks written in various local languages like Tigrinya, Oromifa, and other languages, which is an excellent achievement in Ethiopia's history. In addition, people from Hammer have recently begun working in the theatre, which is quite interesting. Currently, theatre and drama can be produced in various languages thanks to the construction of universities in many regions. For instance, Mekele University translated and played Othello on stage for the public. With the increasing number of educated people, especially with the opening of universities in each region, the art sector grows even more. In addition, the opening of cultural centres in each town provides an excellent opportunity for the growth of Art. Fortunately, the issue of accessibility has been resolved by the development of various media platforms.

The third opportunity is the emergence of various technologies and platforms. Previously, there were only one television, one or two theatres in central cities, and a radio station, but now there are other platforms as an alternative. Even at the level of television, various possibilities have emerged. Therefore, one of the great opportunities this period has given us is the technology that has been developed.

The fourth is the “blessing in disguise,” which is when human rights are violated, democracy is destroyed, and atrocities have been increasing; the need for Art to educate the community has been growing. The artwork has provided many artists with a much-needed financial gain during difficult times or helped them establish a career as professional creative individuals. This has been influencing the country's cinematic, theatrical, and musical trends positively or negatively. Encouragement is required, especially for those who risk themselves to uncover public problems. However, the artist must work responsibly.

Though some significant potential benefits are associated with artwork, some notable challenges must be addressed for artwork to succeed in achieving its objectives. The first challenge is the possible difficulty of differentiating artworks from politics. Despite inventing original works generating positive attention in competitive markets, the government politicize artworks and suppresses dissident voices critical for democratization. For example, one of the informants mentioned:

Government bodies tend to politicize immediately upon publicising or advertising theatre or artwork. The tendency to try to influence Art and artists in the direction the government desires and political philosophy is challenging. [KI Art II, Woman. Age 33. 02/10/2022].

The history of Ethiopia in the successive regime also makes evident how much the government's ideology has influenced artworks. For instance, plays like “lidet [ልደት]”, which was written for the king's birthday, and “Erbet Tehaye,” produced during the Imperial era, were about a daughter who died during childbirth. During the Derg regime, women and youth associations significantly impacted the development of Art, specifically theatre. In addition, establishing Kinet and satellite cultural groups and using them to preach unity, culture, and nation-building was a Derg regime strength.

The other challenge is the country's current ethno-political orientation. Ethnic boundaries are established, making physical movement difficult, and they interpret the ideas you carry with an ethnic perspective. And because of this, it has become challenging for artists to express themselves creatively and freely. Ethnic politics has been limiting the types of topics that are represented artistically, limiting creativity overall. One of the informants mentioned a case stating that:

‘I remember a movie that is rejected just because it has a political touch to it. This movie is called “diplomat.” The movie shows how government espionage tries to stop the country's historical enemies. In the story, the antagonists are Arabs. This specific movie is banned two or three days after its premiere. The reason given was the “biased portrayal of Arabs as terrorists.” Moreover, at that time, religious-affiliated tensions were on the rise. Hence, the prohibition was automatic. [KI Art V, Woman. Age 35, 29/09/2022].

Such kinds of themes, thus, are bad business for a producer – they will hardly give them a shot. So currently, YouTube is changing the game. One of the informants explained that a few years ago, all the bureaucratic and censorship power resided under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism [KI Art III 10/10/2022]. These days, despite the lack of reference, many responded that censorship and banning seem to have been removed. However, the system is still not challenged by many films and theatre production due to the restriction set by COVID. In addition, the pandemic limited the sector's output. However, the authorities say that they only check for quality assurance and the content's stance on the federal Constitution.

Despite this progress, government cadres are reportedly monitoring theatres and confronting professionals on many trivial matters. Two themes do not agree with them. One, they are very pressing if plays criticize or put the government in satirical content. The other is that they are uncomfortable with the content that raises public consciousness, as most informants discussed. One of the informants brought an example referring to a film called “yeadam gemena,” produced by Mekdus Tsgaye, which portrays the story of boys whom adults raped. When working on those boys, there were more than thirty pending rape cases in court. Despite the problem, however, she faced a great deal of criticism, with some claiming that she was referring to something that did not exist. The fact is that the artist, in advance, should speak up and inform the public about social issues. The artist needs to be a leader; to do this, they need to work freely to educate or awaken the masses. Concisely, the two things are serious challenges despite a temporary halt of censorship and banning. The first is the government monopoly on theatre spaces. The other is the professionals' limitation in fathoming the core values of democracy and human rights.

8. The Past, Present and Future

Many of the key informants of this research indicated that the work that has been done in the past is not enough and is no match for the country's demand. There is also an observable underperformance that is explained as a tendency to interpret all democratic and human rights issues as political affairs. This state of mind perceives these issues as a non-art topic. Nevertheless, there were noticeable efforts during all regimes. For instance, the poems of “Bahil Meakel [ባህል ማዕከል]” and plays that were made by the likes of Tesfaye Gessese have contributed to the downfall of the emperor as much as other factors, KI Art III explained.

During the Derg regime, Art was essentially used to communicate these realities. The generation has used it to advocate for what they believe is their cause. Moreover, they used it to speak for what they considered a socialist ideal. We can take examples as the play of Ayalneh Mulat entitled “Esat Sined [እናት ሲነድ].” The gist of the play is that ‘a blazing fire scorches and burns everything’

Moreover, it recommends eliminating reactionary forces to halt this fire's progress and champion the revolution. The other play is “Keyy Machid [ቀይ ማጭድ].” During this time, both the government and its opponents used Art to spread their ideological values.

‘Post-Derg EPRDF came with the notion of Developmental Art (“Kinet le limat” [ክነት ለልማት]). I would not say that no people have tried to promote human rights and democracy through their work. However, the system was repressive. The argument made for the repression was that there is no connection between Art and democracy or Art and human rights. In line with this attitude, Artworks that are charged with these themes were banned directly or indirectly through different mechanisms. Despite these challenges, there were worth mentioning works. For instance, there was a television drama by the name “Derso Melss” (ደርሶ ሙልሱ). It was the work of Meaza Worku. At face value, it is just a normal drama; a critical examination of the drama speaks differently about the theme. Deep in its heart, the drama teaches people to revere these ideals, i.e. human rights and democracy. In addition, it urges people to adhere to these ideals.

KI Art III and his colleagues agree that the repression, coupled with self-censorship, limited the development of the works in Ethiopia. A case in point that they remember is Tilahun Gugsas's “Ye Bahir Ber” which was a movie that was banned from the screen. It was banned because the film was seen as a politically motivated artwork to mobilise people to raise the issue of accessing the sea. However, due to the pressure from the sanctioned government, no one could confront the system. Reflecting on the enabling political changes of this time, our key informants believe that there is a better political context but requires the need for quality assuring checks, not censorship.

According to them, the artworks are going through this screening in order for the authorities to check if productions contain elements that potentially incite ethnic conflicts. If work is suspected of such themes, the decision to screen them out is justifiable. KI Art III has a personal experience that could illustrate this:

‘I have a movie that went through this screening process. Its title is “Lelaw Menged (ሌላው መንገድ).” The core message behind it is not to use shortcuts to satisfy our life goals. It argues that when we use shortcuts, we will miss our goals. The team that examined the work did not engage me in profound issues. For example, I have one character that works as a welder. They complimented me for this character because they believed such characters could represent the TVET program and encourage people to perceive it positively. I am not utterly sure but I reckon these people have no expertise in the genre (Art). In fact, I believe they are there to do a cadre's work. At the end of the day, however, my work was not banned. [KI Art III, Man, Age 39, 10/10/2022].

9. Post-2018 Improvements

Good progress stated is the improvement of elimination of Appraisals (ግምገማ). This, however, does not mean the system is now a fertile ground for Artistic outputs. However, the artists involved in this research have yet to taste the system. The art community is still coming out from the impact of Covid 19 and multiple curfews. These happenings severely incapacitated the sector's production process. Theatres opened their doors very recently. The challenges cinemas encountered were serious. Some stated that more than 50 functioning cinemas existed before Covid 19 in Addis Ababa. It is nine of them that are currently working. The others are either repurposed or rented.

Despite these circumstances, there are places where we can have a glimpse of what the improvements would look like. Performance and poetry nights in the city suggest that the public sphere is relatively liberalized. In these programs, both the government and society are explicitly criticized. A good representation of these programs is "Tobiya." The program is meant for poetry and formal discourses. However, the platform that is radically liberalized is social media, where regulations seem to have not managed to control content and individual broadcasters.

'It is worthy of note what the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission did last year' said KI Art III complementing the organization of a film festival with a theme "Human Rights and our films." This per se is a contribution. One of the issues that were raised during the festival is, according to him, is perception and understanding of human rights requiring us to ask if we understand human rights concepts. Moreover, papers were presented that critically examined the evolution of films in relation to the proposed theme also the researcher confirmed this in his interviews with the EHRC partnership Director, which is included in this report. KI Art III believes such efforts play a critical role in raising the artist's awareness.

10. Reflections from Experience

One of the core values of democracy is to abide by the law. Despite this reality, what is portrayed in our movies often contradicts this value. In many of our movies, the characters can breach different laws without facing the necessary consequences. These characters oftentimes do the transgression to save a family. This portrayal will affect the socialization of society, especially kids. This attitude will encourage people to hide guilty persons because of familial ties.

The portrayal of human rights in pop culture is another critical area – the Ads, Music Videos, etc. Our movies consciously or unconsciously represent distinguishable storylines. KI Art III speaks, 'For instance, songs that are tuned with the northern culture frequently incorporate the appearance of guns. These appearances are even present in slow romantic songs. The story is different for southern-themed songs. In these songs, the landscape outshines other features of the song. It is even hard to find the singer because the landscape overshadows it. In Tigrigna songs, the viewer can find the best products of shiromeda weavers. These clips are home to glamour. In some other songs, consciously or unconsciously, the music portrays the "uncivilized" façade of the culture and shanty homes. The current songs, however, struggle to change these representations. The objectification of women in our music videos is also an important issue, according to him and KI Art III, whose PhD research looks into the portrayal of women in films.

11. Ongoing Institutional Initiatives between the Art and Human Right Bodies

The explanations in this session discuss our experiences with the art community, CSOs and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the activities achieved so far. It resulted from interviews I made with Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Partnership Director Hanna Andargachew, her colleagues and Artists.

The EHRC has established a collaborative platform where the CSOHRO co-chairs the coalition. This was established in 2019 and started engagement in 2020. The coalition's objectives include information sharing, monitoring and evaluation, and organizing consultative workshops. It organized discussions on systemic human rights challenges and gap identification. Moreover, it aims to engage in advocacy and observe Ethiopia's international human rights day. The coalition mobilizes following activities of a human right organization that deliver services on the ground involving the art community.

In order to sustain the interaction between the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the Art community a number of practically engaging activities have been conducted since 2020. The initial meeting in 20202 was made with a few artists from different art backgrounds and sectors. Musicians, painters, fashion designers, and all art professional associations participated in the meeting. Individual artists were targeted to avoid the problem of making direct contact with professionals than reaching them via Associations.

The collaborative exercise resulted in the establishment of the Art Advisory Group; a voluntary gathering formed through the open nomination of individuals through various methods. Of the twenty people nominated, fifteen were selected. Ethiopian Human Rights Commission suggested five of them; the remaining came through individual nominations. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission proposal was intended to ensure the inclusion of disability, diversity, gender and marginal sectors such as the circus. The Advisory Group developed terms of reference to guide its activities.

This led to organising a panel on Art and Human Rights in November 2020. The panel dealt with issues such as how we can use art to improve human right protection, and issue related to censorship of artwork content where participating artists raised the challenges the community has. It was discussed that quality checks served as a pretext along with self-censorship from the side of the artists themselves in fear of imagined sanctions from government bodies.

Additional activities included organising a film festival at the international Human Rights Day (December 10, 2021) where films produced on human rights issues were screened with support from legal professionals. There were also other commissioned films screened for participants, along with already-produced ones. The film screening work was outsourced to professionals. This included film critique on films which display abusive content on children, women and people with disabilities. Preparations are also underway for the second annual film festival to be held on December 10, 2022. The advisory group proposed to observe the day under arts, and human rights and plans to invite all those interested. They also propose organising a workshop on women and arts, including a poetry night. The workshop is expected to have theatre, film and music that focus on the role of women in these themes. An art exhibition is planned to be held on victims of torture, and with support from the Green Art Initiative, films on the same were screened, inspiring follow-up discussions on the topic.

The Director indicated that there are gaps in awareness among the art community regarding the role women play in human right protection, under-representation of women in arts, and little participation of women in theatre, music and other artworks in directing positions and leadership roles in the art industry in general. So far, a one-week-long training on general issues in human rights was given to TikTokers to help promote human rights issues in their public media engagement.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, in close collaboration with the Arts advisory group, is conducting a need assessment work to understand the knowledge gaps that exist among the arts community in areas of human rights issues and design a gap-filling and capacity-building training. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission education department is responsible for this task, which includes preparing and developing a training manual to accomplish the task. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission plans to organize a film festival, performing arts and visual art exhibition, a training session on human rights, and a panel on arts and human rights commemorating international Human Rights Day in December.

The commission is also working towards establishing a permanent art gallery and book review panel on Human Rights issues. In order to better coordinate such activities, the commission has hired Human Rights and Arts Coordinator.

Based on the researcher's observation and discussions with artists, including artists Ezra, known for his button artworks, the different other government Ministries, since the coming into power of Prime Minister Dr Abiy Ahmed, have brought a trending culture of including artworks as part of their office architectural reforms. The Ministry of Peace and the Ministry of Labour and Skills is one such example pioneered by the PM and notably with his current Minister Muferihat Kamil; the place given for art in the public and political environs is growing bigger by the day. This has motivated young artists such as Ezra, whose work has been promoted in such avenues. In addition, the PM's greening and beautification project in Addis and elsewhere can be considered as platforms encouraging artworks and artists to provide space for the urbanities and others to enjoy such spaces and promote peace, thereby manifesting the power of art to healing and promote human rights.

12. The future and its challenges

KI Art III is unsure about the fate of the current vivification, i.e., both within the mainstream media and social media. He believes it is not here to stay. Moreover, he fears professional artists might bite more than they can chew. The spaces are relatively democratized, but artists might have limitations in working within the proper legal frameworks. Although it is in the artists' right to speak for human rights and democracy, they are not entitled to undermine other values of the country. KI Art III observes a trending pattern in the direction of bringing the sector back into a state of complete censorship.

The authorities' tradition when such problems happen is to close all the spaces. A good symbolism is the closure of Addis Ababa University's second gate and St. Mark's gate, where students at different periods used these gates to escape what they perceived as danger. Now the gates have been closed since then. Hence, the first fear is the professionals' capacity to work within the proper frameworks and laws. His second fear is government related. He is afraid that government might not have a broad shoulder that can bear the inevitable criticisms.

Moreover, the government might not also want to support the sector. Emphasizing this note, he remembers the words of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. The Prime Minister addressed the art community meeting in which KI Art III was representing the sector. The PM referred to the sector as 'a very naïve sector' but protecting it from external intervention is the challenge the government faced.

The message conveyed put the doubts the government has on the sector's potential to stand on its own, while it is essential to ensure anti-state establishments do not use it to use it as a platform to convey their interests and propaganda. The government, by then, understands the problem that might emanate from this sector.

However, it was utterly misinformed in the ability of the artists and their platforms to advance human rights causes and democracy best. It should also be noted that singers like Hachalu Hundessa, as explained by KI Art III, used the music industry to promote their philosophy at a level to which political parties would not even reach.

Despite the requests demanded by the art community for support from the government, many are not for a complete involvement of the state in the sector. On the contrary, they believe the state must do what is suitable within its court. The utter involvement, however, is detrimental to the sector. 'Art's marriage with politics is an abuse' says KI Art III. The Derg came with a motto, "Art for the revolution," EPRDF pushed "Art for development." He says that if prosperity preaches "Art for prosperity," we are doomed.

13. Conclusion

Human rights, democracy and the arts are interdependent and have a close connection. Promoting a culture that values human rights and democracy relies heavily on the arts. As humans, we utilize art primarily as a means of self-expression without fully appreciating its power. However, art can profoundly affect us and enable us to perceive the world in a way we have never seen before.

Integrating humanist principles and human rights values, such as the right to freedom of expression, gender equality, access to social security benefits, the right to freely move, justice, equality, responsibility, and respect, into artistic practice advances a genuine agenda that is beneficial to the community and imparts meaning to the audience. It enables the general public to engage with ideas about what constitutes a human and decent life, and they create conditions that enable the citizen to develop a sustained concern for and commitment to the fight against abuses and violations of human dignity. It is also imperative for the artist and productions that come out of the art sector to responsibly deal with sensitive content with due respect to universal human rights and democratic values. Hence, the need for putting in place a quality assurance system becomes mandatory.

The role of art in promoting human rights and democracy and guiding the artist to be more sensitive to contents that violate and fail to adhere to the respect of universal human rights values should be guided through methodological interventions that are protective of the rights of the oppressed and the marginalized communities and sectors. For example, in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paolo Freire (2000) developed a theory of education fitted to the needs of the disenfranchised and marginalized members of capitalist societies, which I think can be used to liberate the art sector in our case.

Despite Freire's belief that traditional education serves to support the dominance of the powerful within society, providing this social group and the status quo with social, political, and economic opportunities, it should equally be necessary also to recognize the presence of customary systems in Ethiopia and elsewhere that accord due attention to vulnerable social groups. While recognizing the need to revise our art education is essential, more important is to use existing platforms in our artwork to exploit customary knowl-

edge and bring out to public cultural practices that promote human rights and democratic values. In this research, what did not come out is how the rights of vulnerable social groups such as children with special needs/skills, marginalized communities, and destitute women will be reflected in artworks.

14. Recommendations

The following points are thoughts forwarded by participants of this research and the researcher to improve the role art plays in promoting human rights protection and democratic values.

Designing an Art critique-training project encourages social critique of artworks on both mainstream and social media.

Initiate and lead an art for national/public/private dialogue project that will create opportunities for the art community to raise awareness of the public to engage in the national dialogue process.

Mainstream and support the idea of establishing an association of art communities/support systems to bring artists together to promote human rights and democratic values.

Encourage participatory applied theatre through which art is used as an instrument to heal social wounds and convey constructive lessons on the importance of human right protection and building a culture of democracy.

Create a network of artists/art associations, human rights activists/institutions and governmental organizations that collaboratively work on innovating and designing practical lessons to promote human rights and democratic lessons through creative and entertaining means.

Ongoing recreational and beautification projects, including galleries and zoos, provided employment and opportunities to experiment and demonstrate their creative skills for the art community. Such platforms can be considered spaces to promote human rights and democratic values through artwork.

Create a platform among tiktokers and bloggers to promote human rights causes, non-violence struggles and peace/nation-building to Ethiopia's youth-dominated population in a digital world.

A need for a designing generic quality assurance mechanism to evaluate artworks against a set of criteria to guide a rights-sensitive and democratic approach to art production.

Noteworthy is also considered to look in-depth and inward to our indigenous/customary art/cultural knowledge systems (music, dance, dialogue etc) to benefit from how those forms of knowledge address, express and reflect upon resistance, human rights and democratic values are expressed and reflected [peaceful demonstration of love, resistance.

Building upon the visual and performing arts courses in our education, the art community needs to beef up contents that demonstrate the power of art (visual and performing) to teach to our children [children with special needs/skills, marginalized communities, and destitute women] the promotion of human rights, democracy and inclusive participation.

REFERENCE

- Anderson, G. (2014). *Human Rights and the Arts in Global Asia: An Anthology* (T. W. Goossen & A. Hazra, Eds.). Lexington Books.
- Blight, D. W. (2020). *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*. Simon and Schuster.
- Delanty, G., Giorgi, L., & Sassatelli, M. (2011). *Festivals and the Cultural Public Sphere*. Taylor & Francis.
- Douglass, F. (1994). *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies (LOA #68): Narrative of the Life / My Bondage and My Freedom / Life and Times*. Library of America.
- Paulo F. (2000eds). *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Bloomsbury Academic
- Haas, M. (2013). *International Human Rights: A Comprehensive Introduction*. Routledge.
- Habermas, J. (1991). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. MIT Press.
- Hodge, S. (2022). *How Art Can Change Your Life*. Thames & Hudson.
- Jones, C. E., & Jones, C. E. (1998). *The Black Panther Party (reconsidered)*. Black Classic Press.
- Kakungulu-Mayambala, R. (2019). Music and Human Rights in Africa: The Role of Music in the Promotion of Human Rights in Uganda. In R. Adeola, M. G. Nyarko, A. Okeowo, & F. Viljoen (Eds.), *The Art of Human Rights: Commingling Art, Human Rights and the Law in Africa* (pp. 143–152). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-30102-6_10
- Kelly, W. (2003). *Art and Humanist Ideals: Contemporary Perspectives*. Macmillan Education AU.
- Naguib, S. A. (2016). Engaged Ephemeral Art: Street Art and the Egyptian Arab Spring. *The Journal of Transcultural Studies*, 7(2), 53–88. <https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.ts.2016.2.23590>
- Nbsp, S. Y. H. and L. H. K. (2015). The Interrelationship of the Arts and Human Rights. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*, 8(26), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.17485/ijst/2015/v8i26/80469>
- Oloruntoba, A. O. (2019). Theatre and Human Rights in Africa: Historical and Literary Representations in South Africa. In R. Adeola, M. G. Nyarko, A. Okeowo, & F. Viljoen (Eds.), *The Art of Human Rights: Commingling Art, Human Rights and the Law in Africa* (pp. 131–141). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-30102-6_9
- Philips, J. (2022). *Actualizing Human Rights: Global Inequality, Future People, and Motivation*. Taylor & Francis Limited.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2010). *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. State University of New York Press.
- Sasi, V. (2007). *Visual Echoes: Using art practice to argue Human Rights issues*. Proceedings of the Experiential Knowledge Conference 2007.
- Sassatelli, M. (Ed.). (2011). *Urban festivals and the cultural public sphere: Cosmopolitanism between ethics and aesthetics*. In *Festivals and the Cultural Public Sphere*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203818787>
- Shonekan, S. (2018). *Black Mizzou: Music and stories one year later*. In *Black Lives Matter and Music: Protest, Intervention, Reflection*. Indiana University Press.
- Soken-Huberty, E. (2019, September 22). 7 Inspiring Songs Dealing With Human Rights Issues. *Human Rights Careers*. <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/7-inspiring-songs-dealing-with-human-rights-issues/>
- Soken-Huberty, E. (2020, July 24). 6 Powerful Human Rights Paintings to Learn More about Human Rights. *Human Rights Careers*. <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/human-rights-paintings/>
- Stevenson, N. (2014). Human(e) Rights and the Cosmopolitan Imagination: Questions of Human Dignity and Cultural Identity. *Cultural Sociology*, 8(2), 180–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975513494879>
- Tugume, B. G. (2013). *A comparative study of human rights issues in the novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Alex la Guma and Chinua Achebe*. [Thesis, Makerere University]. <http://makir.mak.ac.ug/handle/10570/3638>
- Turner, C., & Webb, J. (2016). *Art and Human Rights: Contemporary Asian Contexts*. Manchester University Press.
- UDHR, U. N. G. (1980). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Final Authorized Text*. United Nations, Office of Public Information.
- Walker, D. F. (2021). *The Black Panther Party: A Graphic Novel History*. Ten Speed Press.



©2022 Selam. All rights reserved.