

Ethiopia in the Image of the West in the 1980s

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Abstract: *The objective of this paper is to critically examine Ethiopia in the image of the west with special focus on the images behind the 1980s famine, civil war and refugee crisis. Ethiopia, being as one of the old countries in Africa, is known by its different features and developments in the global society. The image of Ethiopia in the west was not, however, uniform throughout its history; rather it has been characterized by varying images based on internal developments and the nature of its foreign policy. Behind the positive sides, the persistent drought, famine and war witnessed in the country left the negative image of Ethiopia in the west in the 1980s. As will be discussed in the below, the Ethiopian resounding victory over the Italian colonialists at Adwa in 1896 has received the global attention, which glorified the image of Ethiopia in the global society. Ethiopia has been the moving spirit behind the struggle against racism and colonialism. However, the famine complicated by the civil war and cold war politics of the east and west dramatically changed the image of Ethiopia in the west in 1980s. The source materials for this study are drawn from traveler accounts, newspapers, journal articles and other research works. In addition, archival sources from Däbrä Markos University Hadis Alämayehu Institute of Cultural Studies are consulted. Moreover, some elders who have personal experience on some issues of the discussion are interviewed. Their fascinating arguments and interpretations especially on the social and political implication of famine are objectively evaluated and discussed.*

Keywords: *Image, Ethiopia and West*

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Ethiopia, an old country in Africa is known by several age-old images. Irrespective of fluctuation in its territorial limits, Ethiopia is mentioned in some ancient literatures. To begin with, it is the only country mentioned in the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran among the Sub-Saharan countries.¹ Likewise, the ancient Greece writers such as Homer, Herodotus, and Diodorus Siculus mentioned Ethiopia in their literatures.² In this regard, Clapham stated that Ethiopia has special place in Europe since long years ago.³ During the medieval period, western European countries had broad-picture about Ethiopia with the view of searching the country of Prester John. Though the exact country of the Prester John lacks clarity, Europeans viewed Ethiopia as the powerful Christian country ruled by him and ambitious to support them in their war against the Islamic forces. It has been suggested that the presence of the Ethiopian pilgrims in the Holy Land of Jerusalem brought the picture of Ethiopia to the attention of the Western European Christian community.⁴

During the age of exploration, the European geographers and missionaries were interested to discover Ethiopia, aimed at establishing commercial relation with the country of Prester John. The Italian explorers, imbued with renaissance achievements were frequently coming to Christian highland kingdom searching for trade opportunities and commercial routes along the Red Sea and the Indian

¹ Ghaji Ismaila Bello, "The International Politics of Famine Relief Operations Ethiopia: A Case Study of the 1984-86 Famine Relief Operations" (PhD Dissertation in International Relations, London School of Economics, 1990), 5.

² Ayele Bekerie, "Ethiopia: Some Historical Reflections on the Origin of the Word Ethiopia" *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 1 No. 2 (2004), 114.

³ Christopher Clapham, "The European Mapping of Ethiopia, 1460-1856" *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 40, No. 1/2, (2007), 293.

⁴ Matteo Salvatore, "The Ethiopian Age of Exploration: Prester John's Discovery of Europe, 1306-1458" *Journal of World History*, 21 No. 4 (2010), 599.

Ocean in the second half of the thirteenth century.⁵ In 1460, the Venetian monk, Fra Mauro produced the first political map of Ethiopia, which provided the Europeans with its topographic features, location and administrative units.⁶ The map was said to have brought Ethiopia's strategic significance to the attention of the Portuguese and Ottoman Turks who were in competition over the control of the overseas trade along the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth century. In 1574, the Flemish mapmaker, Abraham Ortelius (1528-1598) produced better political map of Ethiopia entitled, "Presbiteri Iohannis Sive Abissinarium Imperii Descripto" (Description of the Empire of Prester John or the Abyssinians). The cartographer tried to depict the major urban centers, commercial centers and administrative units extending from the Red Sea to the course of the Blue Nile.⁷

The image of Ethiopia in the western society has not been uniform throughout its past history. It has been characterized by different features, where internal developments, the nature of foreign policy, leader's diplomatic relation with the western governments etc determined it. In this regard, the European missionaries and travelers who came to Ethiopia for different mission left their own memories and accounts about its physical landscape, political developments, cultural aspects, trade routes and items. Thus, the travelers account provided Europeans with some images of Ethiopia. In addition, the European missionaries and travellers documented the natural disasters like drought, famine and epidemic disease, which ravaged Ethiopia at different periods. It has been suggested that famine is as long as the history of the country itself. Crop failure is not an endemic experience in Ethiopia. Its earlier experience shows that drought, locust invasion, render pest, erratic rainfall, social unrest and political instability were the sources of crop failure.⁸ In the nineteenth and the twentieth century, the Ethiopian famine has got due coverage in the accounts of the European travellers and missionaries. To begin with, the British traveller, Charles Johnston described the effect of 1828-29 famine, which had perished several people and the cattle population in Šäwa. In his account, he explained that famine perished the society, caused the epidemic disease like Cholera and displacement of the local people.⁹ He reported that two-third of the population of Southern Šäwa was died because of famine and famine induced disease.¹⁰ Likewise, the British envoy, C. Harris and J.L Krapf reported the devastations caused by the famine of 1828-29 in Wollo and Šäwa with different tones of the expression.¹¹

Above all, the 1888-1892 famine, which was locally known as Qifu Qän (evil days) had relatively much spaces in the accounts of the European travellers and colonial motives. To begin with, the Swiss born, Alfred Ilg (Menelik's advisor), Conrad Teller (the German traveller), Mauric de Coppet (the French Envoy), and others reported the multifaceted crisis of humanity caused by the famine of evil days.¹² On contrary, the French physician, R. Wurtz who came to Ethiopia in 1897 reported that the Italians deliberately spread the cattle disease to weaken the Ethiopian resistance against their colonial aspiration.¹³ Antoneli, the architect of the treaty of Wuchale, 1889 reported that Tigre, Gondar, Begemidir, Šäwa and Gojjam were losing their economic basis due to the epidemic disease.¹⁴ His tone seemed intended to express the hope for colonial conquest, expecting that famine could create

⁵Hailu Kifle-Egzi "Western Relation with Ethiopia during the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period" (M.A Thesis in History, McGill University, 1962), 103.

⁶Clapham, 294.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 295-296.

⁸Richard Pankhurst, "The Great Ethiopian Famine of 1888-1892: A New Assessment" *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 21, No. 2 (1966), 96. Getachew Haile, "Rihabina Täsibo bä Ethiopia" (Famine and Epidemic in Ethiopia), *Sämina Worq (Wax and Gold)* special Issue, (1981 E.C.), 7; Giordano Sivini, "Famine and the Resettlement Program in Ethiopia" *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*, 41 No. 2 (1986), 213.

⁹Charles Johnston, *Travels In Southern Abyssinia* (London: Macintosh Printer, 1844), 158.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹W. Cornwallis Harris, *The Highlands of Ethiopia* (London: Gilbert and Rivington, Printers, 1846),166; Isenberg and Krapf, *Journals of Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society* (London: L. Seeley, Thames Ditton Surrey, 1843), 398 & 458.

¹² Pankhurst, *The Great Ethiopian Famine*, 100-101.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

conducive environment for colonial conquest. In the same manner, Capucci stated that ninety-nine percent of the cattle population in Ethiopia was died.¹⁵ His account seemed reliable because the other domestic and foreign sources reported the severity of the famine in different tones of expression. For instance, Menelik's chronicler, Gäbrä Sellasie noted that several cattle population throughout the country had died, which disrupted the agricultural practice.¹⁶ Similarly, Pankhurst stated that the Abyssinian cattle population including the buffalos and antelopes were died because of the epidemic disease.¹⁷

During the twentieth century, Ethiopia received greater attention both among the Eurocentric, and Afrocentric scholars. The Afro centric scholars viewed that Ethiopia has special history African, while the Eurocentric scholars denied its basic realities. It looks essential to examine some Eurocentric works on Ethiopia. Gibbon in his book, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* argued that Ethiopians have an "Arabic race".¹⁸ The fact is that Ethiopia has long years' diplomatic relation with Arabs, but no large scale of Arab migration and settlement witnessed in it. Indeed, the Eurocentric view was reflected on the state formation process of Emperor II (1889-1913), conducted in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the Ethiopian resounding victory over Italians at Adwa in 1896. Basically, the state formation process of the emperor was not unique from the nation building process witnessed in most European countries. In the first place, some European political and commercial agents who were in Ethiopia portrayed the state formation process of Emperor Menelik negatively, which caused the image crisis of the country in Europe. Regarding this, Raymond Jonas argued that the report of Vanderheyem¹⁹, the French commercial agent in Ethiopia was "disastrous in terms of Menelik's global reputation".²⁰ The Eurocentric scholars had developed different views and negative interpretations about the emperor's state formation process in Ethiopia. They argued that his state formation process in southern and western Ethiopia was part of the European scramble for Africa. To note few, Tidy and Leeming, argued that Menelik's state formation process in Ethiopia was "part of the African partition of Africa and continued as part of the European partition".²¹ Likewise, Gann and Duignan described that Menelik II actively took part in the scramble for Africa by "competing effectively with the French, Italians and British along Ethiopia's borders".²² Toynbee wrote that Menelik succeeded in creating the unified state of Ethiopia "by taking an active part in the scramble for Africa himself".²³ There are also ethno nationalist writers who are in favor of the position of Eurocentric scholars.

On contrary, Ethiopia secured good image in the global society because of its successful anti-colonial struggle against Italy in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The Ethiopian resounding victory over Italy at the battle of Adwa in 1896 brought its people and the country to the global attention. The western societies, media (newsletters), governments and the academic society had given greater coverage to the Ethiopian enlightened victory against the Italians at Adwa. To begin with, The Atlanta constitution, newsletter had given due coverage to the surprising news of Adwa. In its consecutive issue, it released the breaking news about the post Adwa image of Ethiopia. For instance, on its March 4 1896 issue, The Atlanta Constitution reported that Ethiopia succeeded in killing more than

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Gäbrä Sellasie *Tarikä zämän zä Dagimawi Menelik Nigusä Nägäst zä Ethiopia* (The Life and Times of Emperor Menelike II King of Kings of Ethiopia). (Addis Ababa: NP, 2008), 117.

¹⁷ Pankhurst, *The Great Ethiopian Famine*, 106.

¹⁸ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Methuen. 1929) Cited in John Sorenson, "Covering Famine and War in the Horn Of Africa" *Northeast African Studies*. 12, No. 2/3 (1990), 139.

¹⁹ Emperor Menelik invited him to join the campaign to incorporate Wälaita. However, as he was deliberately sent to Ethiopia to provide the Europeans with fresh news of the Red Sea region, (to consolidate the French occupation of Djibouti), Vanderheyem dispatched his reports to Europe without the knowledge of Ethiopia.

²⁰ Raymond Jonas, *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 51.

²¹ M. Tidy and D. Leeming, *A History of Africa, 1840-1914*, Vol. II (New York: Africana Publishing, 1981), 104.

²² H. Gann and P. Duignan, (Eds.), *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 16.

²³ J. Toynbee, *Between Niger and Nile* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 44; Peter Schwab, *Ethiopia: Politics, Economics, and Society* (London: Frances Pinter, 1985), 5.

three thousand Italian troops at Adwa, which the news was very shattering not only to the Italians but also to the European colonialists.²⁴

Along with the news of the Ethiopian victory at Adwa, The Atlanta Constitution was wrote the breaking news to the African American under heading, “back to Africa movement” advocators. It argued that Africans are on the verge of losing their country, national identity and citizenship as the white settlement and the colonial administration continued in the continent.²⁵ It warned African Americans to avoid their motive of back to Africa because it stated that the fate of the continent would be similar to the cases in racist Europe and America as the colonialists swiftly running for the colonization of Africa. It stated that as the European rule in Africa continued, Africans would lose their identity and the right of citizenship in their continent as like as the African Americans.

Moreover, the fruits of the Adwa victory sparked new discourse among the liberal minded European and Afrocentric scholars. They had different positions and interpretations on the Italian loss of the battle of Adwa and the Ethiopian cult in the world. To note some, Mockler stated that the Italian loss of the battle of Adwa is the “the greatest single disaster in the European colonial history”.²⁶ Similarly, Dugan and Lafore examined the shocking how the Europeans were shocked because of the Ethiopian victory at Adwa as follows.

The Ethiopian triumph in 1896 that had left fourteen thousand of a European army dead or prisoners had been the first success in a long campaign to break the planetary sovereignty of Europeans; the black emperor of a big and empty land lost in the high mountains, encircled by a confusion of deserts, jungles, and undrawn frontiers, sounded reveille for a sleeping world.²⁷

Raymond Jonas in his recently published book, *The Battle of Adwa: an African Victory in the Age of Empire* exhaustively explored the post Adwa image of Ethiopia in the global society. He described the situation as follows. “This is the story of a world turned upside down. ---, an African army won a spectacular victory over a European army---”²⁸

Several literatures show that the eco of the Adwa preserved the national image of Ethiopia in the global society besides other significances. Regarding this Teshale argued that “thanks to the Adwa victory, the popular image of pre-Adwa Ethiopia as the land of barbarism” reversed.²⁹ Likewise, Hodgkin described the wonderful achievement of the Ethiopians at Adwa as “the living exemplar of unconquered, historical African people”.³⁰ Indeed, Vestal argued that the success of its people at Adwa “put Ethiopia on the map of modern world.”³¹ The strength of the Ethiopian nationalism and their strong love for a country was stated by several newsletter reporters, editors scholars with different tones of the expression. An anonymous writer described the Ethiopian troops as “brave, fearless--- and efficient.”³²

As several Afrocentric scholars argued that Adwa was the symbol of the Black Nationalism. It is argued that Adwa reversed the Darwinian theory of the racism.³³ It was the theory, which reduced the

²⁴Jonas, 268.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ A. Mockler, . *Haile Selassie's War* (New York: Random House, 1984.), x1i.

²⁷J. Dugan, and L. Lafore, *Days of Emperor and Clown: The Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1936* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 3.

²⁸ Jonas, 1.

²⁹Teshale Tibebe, “Ethiopia: The Anomaly and Paradox of Africa” *Journal of Black Studies*, 26, No. 4 (1996), 418.

³⁰T. Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Africa* (New York: New York University Press, 1957), 181.

³¹ Theodore M. Vestal, “Reflections on the Battle of Adwa and Its Significance for Today,” In *the Battle of Adwa Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory against European Colonialism* (New York:Algora Publishing, 2005), 21.

³² Harold G. Marcus, “Racist Discourse about Ethiopia and Ethiopians before and after the Battle of Adwa” In *the Battle of Adwa Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory against European Colonialism* (New York:Algora Publishing, 2005), 231.

³³ Jonas, 271.

blacks to the status of inferior race and subjected to serve the white superiors. For instance, in the immediate post Adwa period, the *Vanity Fair*, newsletter posted the picture of Menelik, appeared next to Charles Darwin, Czar Alexander and Napoleon III, who were seen as the enlightened and the compassionate leaders in the world.³⁴

Further more, the Ethiopian victory at Adwa had served as the source inspiration among African Americans. It is argued that the eco of Adwa victory inspired the black African American descendants to struggle the racism for equality. The literature shows that Ethiopia has been considered as the symbol of rallying cry for African Americans who were subjected to racist exploitation. The black descendants in America seemed aware of Ethiopia by the Biblical statement, "Ethiopia shall stretch-out her hands towards God". Some African American scholars noted Ethiopia in their works referring it as land of freedom. For instance, Phillis Wheatley in his poet was said to have the first to note "Ethio", referring that Ethiopia is the representative of the black people in the world.³⁵ Moreover, the renowned Pan-African activist Du Bois quoted Ethiopia in his first historic speech in 1890. Emotionally, in front of white audience at Harvard he stated that "you [whites] owe debt of humanity for this Ethiopia of the outstretched arm, who has made her beauty patience and her grandeur."³⁶ His speech shows that Ethiopia has special place among the African Americans in the age of the negative image of Africa in Europe. Some scholars argued that Ethiopia was "the major spokesman for Africa" during the anti-colonial struggle.³⁷ The place of Ethiopia among the black society, galvanized them against the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, 1936-41. Because of their positive image to Ethiopia, African American activists engaged in supporting Ethiopia's diplomatic efforts. When Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935/36, the leading Pan-African activists like G. Padmore, C.L.R. James, W. Jonson, S. Manning and others supported the Ethiopian diplomatic movement abroad, initiated by Wokineh Eshete, Melaku Beyan etc.³⁸ In addition, the Pan-African activists established "International African Friends of Abyssinians" to condemn unjust Italian occupation of Ethiopia.³⁹

2. THE 1984-1985 ETHIOPIAN FAMINE

This section examined the scope and the nature of the 1984-85 famine and the humanitarian crisis exacerbated by unending civil war in the northern part of Ethiopia. The foreign and domestic reports about the overall effects of the famine are consulted to critically examine how far famine and civil war complicated the image crisis of Ethiopia in the west.

Drought may not necessarily cause famine. It is possible to manage drought not to born famine, however it depends on different factors like democratic governance and economic capability. In undemocratic and under developed states, drought and famine causes multifaceted domestic and international crisis. In the first place, famine and the resultant need for humanitarian aid may subject states for external influence besides internal human sufferings. In this regard, famine in Ethiopia was followed by multifaceted domestic and the global repercussions. To begin with, the devastating famine, which hardly hit the northern parts of the country in the early 1970s, caused human sufferings, image crisis and political implication. Gabriel reported that more than 200,000 people were said to have died only in the province of Wollo due to the 1973-1974 famine.⁴⁰ The human sufferings caused the image crisis of the imperial regime abroad. Moreover, famine accelerated the collapse of the imperial regime. The new military regime of Ethiopia used famine as a political instrument to bring the weak image of the imperial government to the national agenda. It condemned the old imperial regime by the following tone.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ James Quirin, "W.E.B. Du Bois, Ethiopianism and Ethiopia, 1890-1955," *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 5, No. 2 (2010/11), 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁷ Robert Hess, *Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 214.

³⁸ Fikru Gebrekidan, "From Adwa to OAU: Ethiopia and the Politics of Pan-Africanism, 1896-1963" *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 6, No. 1/2 (2012), 81.

³⁹ Teshale, 426.

⁴⁰ Gabriel Daniel, *Rihab, Diriqina Mänsiawočaçäw* (Drought, Famine and Causes), *Sämina Worq (Wax and Gold)* special Issue (1981 E.C.), 46.

የፌዴራል ቡርገዘዊ ሥራዓት በተፈጥሮ አዳጋ ምክንያት ብዙ ሕዝብ እንደ ቅጠል ሲረገፍ በግደዩ ለሽነት ሲሞላ ከተው ማቆየቱ ግልፅ ነው።⁴¹

It was clear that the feudo bourgeois regime was carelessly looking at while many people were dying because of the natural disaster.

In this regard, the new military government brought some ex-imperial officials to the court because of their deliberate silence and hiding famine from the domestic and international communities. *Dājač* Solomon Abraha⁴², the Governorate General of Wollo, the most famine stricken province was arrested by the new military government.



Figure1. The carton picture, shown by the new military government to portray the bad governance of the imperial regime in exposing people for famine

Source: *Addis Zāmān*, newspaper March 10 1967 E.C

However, history repeated itself. When the devastating famine affected Ethiopia a decade later, the military government had given very little attention and cloaked the famine from the international community. In 1981 and 1982 crop failure occurred in Eritrea, Tigray and Wollo provinces because of the absence of the *bālg* and *māhir* rainfall. Although the rainfall restored in Eritrea, drought and famine became out of the control in Wollo and Tigray in the coming years. Erratic rainfall happened from March to June, *bālg* season. In the coming three months, the country experienced heavy rainfall.⁴³ In northern and north central Ethiopia, the two seasons (*bālg* and *māhir*) are the major and the minor farming seasons respectively. Eight five to ninety five percent of the country's food crop supply depends on the *māhir* season agricultural activities, while the *bālg* season farming practice supplements five to fifteen percent of the food supply.⁴⁴ Thus, the environmental change, which affected regular rainfall, caused immediate crop failure and epidemic disease. For instance, in 1984,

⁴¹Dābrā Markos University, Haddis Addis Alāmayehu Institute of Cultural Studies, Archival center148/አ.181/231/1971.

⁴²Solomon Abraha, Isayas Afeworq's uncle was killed together with the other 60 ex-imperial officials by the new military officials.

⁴³Bello,29; "Ethiopia Drought/Famine, 1985-1986," (USAID Disaster Report, Addis Ababa, May 1987), 2. ;Informants: Māngistu Abābā and Ahmad Sāid.

⁴⁴Bello, 29.

eighty percent of the crop failure was experienced only in the province of Wollo.⁴⁵ One of the typical features of the 1984-85 famine was that it affected almost the entire provinces, of which Wollo and Tigray were severely affected. Both the agrarian and the pastoralist society were affected by famine. Gojjam, which is considered as the granary of the food crops, was affected by the famine. As identified by the local authorities, the people of Gojjam settled along the Blue Nile water shade were hardly hit by the famine.⁴⁶ Local authorities reported the severity of the famine as follows.

ዝናብ ወቅቱን ጠበቆ ባለመጣጣቱ በጎጃም በተለይ በአበይ ተፋሰስ አከባቢ የሠፈሩ ቀበሌዎች በድርቅ ተጋልጠዋል፡፡ የሚከተሉት ቀበሌዎችም ተጠቅጠዋል፡፡ በሞገ አውራጃ በእነሱ ሣር ምድር ወረዳ 32648 በሚቆይው 27 ቀበሌ ገበሬ ማህበራት በድርቅ ምክንያት የእንስሳት ሞት አደጋ ደርሷል፡፡⁴⁷

Due to the failure of the rain fall on seasons, in Gojjam particularly people who settled along the Abay River water shade are exposed to the drought. The following qebales (localities) are affected. In Motta Awuraja, Inebisie Sar Midir district, 32642 incorporated under 27 peasant associations, cattle death had occurred because of drought.

Moreover, drought and famine severely affected some districts in Mätäkäl (Gojjam), awuraja chosen for the resettlement purpose. The reports of the local authorities show that most qäbäls in Guba and Dangur districts were severely starved because of the drought.⁴⁸ By 1984, about one thousand Gumuz communities settled in five qäbäls along the borderland of Omdella, Guba district were at critical conditions. As it was done in other famine affected areas, the government established the relief center in Alimahäl Town⁴⁹, located at 235 kilometers distance from the seat of Awuraja Town, Čagni.⁵⁰

Consequently, drought, famine and famine induced disease continued suffering the local people from year to year. Peasants have sold their animals, farm tools, home utensils, weapons, wood products and other personal belongingness during the early stages of the famine.⁵¹ When famine became out of the control and other survival strategies ended, peasants started to consume taboo foods such as animal carcass, grass seeds, leaves, roots, which in turn worsened health aspects. As a result, it caused the largest scale of the human and animal deaths, humanitarian crisis, and dislocation of the local people.⁵² In addition, it was the most sever famine in terms of the mortality rate, agricultural disruption and other famine induced repercussions. Regarding its multifaceted repercussions, Gabriel stated that “--- በኢትዮጵያ የተከሰተው የድርቅና የርሀብ ሁኔታ በዓለም ከታየው ሁሉ ታላቁና አስቃቂ ነው”⁵³(The drought and famine, which occurred in Ethiopia is greatest and the most severe than other famines witnessed in the world).

Several researchers have different positions regarding the humanitarian crisis caused by the famine. To begin with, Gabel reported that more than one million people were migrated to the neighboring countries such as Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti.⁵⁴ He also reported that two hundred thousand children left without parents and more than three hundred thousand children dead. Moreover, he argued that in 1984 six million people, in 1985 ten million people, in 1986 seven million people and

⁴⁵ Ethiopia Drought/Famine, 1985-1986, 2; Bello, 30.
⁴⁶Däbrä Markos University, Haddis Addis Alämayehu Institute of Cultural Studies, Archival center 148/አ.181/231/1977.
⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
⁴⁸Däbrä Markos University, Haddis Addis Alämayehu Institute of Cultural Studies, Archival center 148/አ.181/አ0267/1083/1977;148/አ.181/አ0267/9927/1976;148/አ.181/አ0267/5388/1976.
⁴⁹Alimahäl Town, located along the borderland was one of the major contraband trade center and firearms smuggling site between the frontier people of Ethiopia and Sudan. In addition, it has been frequently threatened by the Sudanese borderland people and security forces. This town, very strategic place has several developments, but unstudied so far.
⁵⁰Däbrä Markos University, Haddis Addis Alämayehu Institute of Cultural Studies, Archival center 148/አ.181/አ0267/5308/1976; 148/አ.181/አ0267/9927-ማ1976.
⁵¹Adhana Haile, “Peasant Response to Famine in Ethiopia, 1975-1985,” *Ambio, Environmental Security*, 20, No. 5 (1991), 186-187; Alex de Waal. “Famine and Human Right.” *Development in Practice*, 1, No. 2 (1991), 79.
⁵² Gabriel Daniel, 46; Ethiopia Drought/Famine, 2.
⁵³ Gabriel, 46.
⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

in 1987, three million were dependent on the western aid.⁵⁵ Bello reported that five million people were starved in Ethiopia in 1984, of which 1.7 million people were severely perished only in the province of Wollo.⁵⁶ He also noted that in Tigray, 1.3 million people were at risk of starvation, while in Eritrea about one million peasants needed immediate food supply in 1984. By the next year, the number of the peasants at the risk of survival was growing in alarming rate because famine spread throughout the country. Tobias J. Lanz argued that more than 1.8 million peasants were at risk of starvation only in the provinces of Wollo and Tigray because of the irregular rainfall of the bälḡ and mähir seasons.⁵⁷ He further noted that by 1985, about ten million people were at very critical point, where the rate of the people affected by famine was said to have one-fourth of the country's total population, five times greater than the victims of the 1973-74 famine.⁵⁸ Edmond Keller stated that more than one million people were died, of which under five age took the largest share.⁵⁹ Moreover, western media sources reported that more than three hundred thousand Ethiopian refugees camped in Sudan between 1984-1985, while one hundred thousand left for Somalia and Djibouti.⁶⁰ Others engaged in street begging along the urban areas. The largest scale of death and famine-induced repercussions recorded in Wollo, where both the pastoralist and agrarian society were severely affected. The second largest famine crisis was witnessed in the province of Tigray, next to Wollo



Figure2. *The pastoralist society, waiting for aid in Bati (Wollo) relief camps in (Wollo)*
Source. *Addis Zämän April 2/1977*



Figure3. *People waiting for aid in Mäqäle, Tigray*
Source. *Addis Zämän April 2/1977*

As discussed earlier, famine is natural and not endemic to Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the 1984-85 famine was complicated because of civil war, state economic ideology and the global cold war politics. The Därg conducted the major military operations in Tigray, Eritrea and Wollo against Tigrean Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF), Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF) and Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (EPDM) respectively. Civil war disrupted the agricultural practice and posed security threats upon the agrarian society. Food crops, farmlands, cattle population, villages and market areas were damaged by the bombings of the government forces and the insurgent attacks.⁶¹ Local sources argued that the bombings in Tigray and Eritrea were carried out with the mission to

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Bello, 30.

⁵⁷ Tobias J. Lanz, "Environmental Degradation and Social Conflict in the Northern Highlands of Ethiopia: The Case of Tigray and Wollo Provinces," *Africa Today*, 43, No. 2, (1996), 169.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Keller, Edmond, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 224.

⁶⁰ Ethiopia Drought/Famine, 3.

⁶¹ John Young, *Peasants and Revolution in Ethiopia, Tigray, 1975-1989* (PhD Dissertation in Political Science, Simon Fraser University, 1994) 189; Gabriel, 56.

terrorize the local people, not to provide the TPLF and EPLF insurgents with food supply and intelligence services.⁶² In addition, grazing lands, forest resources and water bodies were said to have adversely affected by bombings and its smoking, which actually causes ecological crisis. When the restless war caused social unrest, the youth, working age groups joined the guerilla fighters. Others were forced to give military service to the government. In addition, war restricted the movement of the people for trading purpose and agricultural practice. Such practices left its own impact on production and productivity, which exposed the provinces for famine.

Moreover, the government was blamed for its giving priority to consolidate military hardware than resolving famine. For instance, in 1983/84 fiscal year, the government allocated one billion birr (forty-six percent of the budget) for defense purpose and on contrary only five percent was allocated for agricultural program.⁶³ In line with this, the government had given much focus on buying firearms and feeding troops than addressing response to the famine victims. It is argued that Ethiopia cost two billion dollars in buying firearms from 1979-1983.⁶⁴ Because of its giving much focus on building militarism, Ethiopia became the first sub-Saharan country in terms of the size of the military force and the quality of the weapons during the Därg period.⁶⁵ By the mid-1980s, the government allocated fifty percent of the annual budget for military purpose.⁶⁶

Furthermore, war closed the access and the intervention of the international humanitarian aid. The government strictly controlled the flow of the western food aid and medical supplies to the rebel held famine stricken territories in Wollo⁶⁷, Tigray and Eritrea.⁶⁸ This was because the government used famine as political instrument to weaken the separatist movement. Regarding the commitment of the government in controlling western aid to the insurgent occupied territories, my informants who were in Asmara during the last years of the Därg period remembered it as follows.

የወጭሀገር ስንደ፤ ብስኩት፤ ማድኃኒትና ለሎች የሰብአዊ ዕርዳታዎች በምጽዋ በከል ወደ ሀገር ወስጥ ይገቡ ነበር፡፡ ነገር ግን አሜሪካዎች ወደ ተቆጣጥሮቻቸው አካባቢዎች እንዳይሰጡ ማግስት ጥብቅ ቁጥጥር ያደርግ ነበር፡፡ ይህም የተደረገው ማህበረሰቡ አሜሪካንን ስለማድግፍ የእነሱን ልቦና ለመግዛት ነው፡፡ ሁለተኛው ምክንያት ደግሞ አሜሪካ ከእርዳታ ተጠቃሚ እንደይሆኑ ነው፡፡⁶⁹

Foreign aid such wheat, biscuit, drugs and others made to enter into the country through Massawa. However, the government was strictly controlling them so as to prevent from moving into rebel-controlled areas. This was done to buy the heart of society as they were supporting the insurgents. The second reason was to prevent the aid from being benefited by the rebels.

The socialist economic policy of the government of the Därg such as restrictions on trade and capital and state farm agriculture exacerbated the famine. Because of the restrictions on trade and capital, peasants were unable to accumulate surplus products to be consumed during the times of emergency. Similarly, the government imposed trade blockade and high tax on the import-export trade. Because of the travel and trade restrictions, traders were unable to supply food grains from less famine affected market areas to extremely affected areas. As a result, the price of the food crops in extremely impoverished northern markets dramatically increased; on the contrary, the marketing value of the livestock was declined.⁷⁰ The agricultural policy of the Därg encouraged state farm and conversely discouraged the private producers. The government had given much focus on the expansion of state farms like coffee, cotton, tobacco, etc, which used to maximize foreign currency exchange. To this end, the government owned fertile lands by alienating peasant producers.

⁶² Informants, Wondimu Seyoum and Bäwukātu Yismaw.,
⁶³Theodore Vestal, “Ethiopia’s Famine: A Many-Dimensioned Crisis.” *The World Today*, 41 No. 7 (1985), 127; Gabriel, 61.
⁶⁴Gabriel, 61.
⁶⁵ Bello, 9.
⁶⁶ Lanz, 171.
⁶⁷ Lasta, Wag and Koräm, which were formerly under the province of Wollo were severely affected by the combined effects of war and famine.
⁶⁸ Gabriel, 61; John Young, 189.
⁶⁹ Informants: Wondimu, Bäwukātu Yismaw
⁷⁰ Informants: Mängistu Abäbä; Ahmad Säid and Gašaw Mohamad.

The state farm agricultural policy of the Därg among other things brought Ethiopia to the critics of the westerners. In the view of western capitalists, it encouraged the dependency of the peasants on the state farm rather than promoting self-efficiency. Because of the less attention of the government to private producers, peasants preferred to work on the state farm by minimum wages.⁷¹ It was argued that it discouraged peasants to produce surplus products for marketing. Internal authorities criticized the effect of the state farm over the private peasant producers. For instance, Dawit Wolde Giyorgis, Head Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) stated the implication of the state farm practice over the private agrarian society states:

Even though the number of collectivized farms is small, their effect on nation-wide production has been catastrophic. These farms are given more fertilizer per hectare than peasant farms; they are given more land per household, they are given tractors and more draft animals than the rest of the peasants. But for all the attention they get, productivity is extremely low and almost no surplus is produced for market.⁷²

In addition, the westerners criticized the socialist style trade restriction and fixed pricing policy of the Därg. Moreover, the imposition of the quota system exposed the peasants for famine. Basically, the quota system, which was run by Agricultural Marketing Board Corporation since 1976 was established to collect food items for military purpose.⁷³ Under this condition, peasants were forced to offer the government with food grains by least cost. The quota system became serious problem when crop failure experienced in the country due to erosion, pests and other natural factors. This was because peasants were forced to sell their livestock or other personal belongings to fulfill the imposed quota.⁷⁴ The cumulative effect caused famine and social crisis.

Less attention of the government also accelerated famine intensity. Though the government was aware of the possibilities of famine occurrence when early warning experienced in 1982 and 1983, less preparation was made to manage the natural disaster. On the contrary, the government had given much attention to the celebration of the tenth year anniversary of the Ethiopian revolution and the inauguration of the Workers' Party. No foreign and domestic journalists were allowed to broadcast the famine news before September 2 1984.⁷⁵ Instead of the famine news, the domestic and the international media were encouraged to broadcast the success of the ten years progress of the Därg. The government mentioned nothing about the effects of famine on the reports of the tenth year anniversary of the Ethiopian revolution.⁷⁶

The government took swift measures only after the September anniversary. Measures were unplanned and ill prepared, followed by confusions and human sufferings. To begin with, it was decided to relocate 1.5 million people from famine affected areas of north to less affected parts of southern and western Ethiopia. In its first phase of the resettlement program (1984-1986), about six hundred thousand peasants were relocated to Wälläga, Käffa, Illubabor, Mätäkäl (Gojjam).⁷⁷ In addition, the government introduced new projects such as "drought sale tax" and "drought tax" imposed on the merchants and government employee respectively.⁷⁸ Moreover, the government attempted to manage the famine by establishing relief camps along the famine stricken areas. In the late 1984, the emergency relief camps were established in Wollo, Tigray, Gondar and Šäwa. In Wollo, feeding and

⁷¹ Gabriel, 62; Bello, 22; Theodore M. Vestal, "Famine in Ethiopia: Crisis of Many Dimensions," *Africa Today*, 32, No. 4 (1985), 10.

⁷² Dawit Wolde Giyorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, 1989), 272.

⁷³ Gizachew Andargie, "Military Rule Responses to the Ethiopian Agony: Famine of 1984-1985," *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education*, 1 No.8 (2014), 186.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Gopalakrishna Kumar, "Ethiopian Famine 1973-85: A Case Study (World Institute for Development Economic Research of the United Nations University, Oxford, 1987), 29

⁷⁶ Hailu Lemma, "The Politics of Famine in Ethiopia," *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 33 (1985), 47.

⁷⁷ Lanz, 172; Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 225-226; Africa Watch. *Evil Days: Thirty Years War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), 14.

⁷⁸ Addis Zämän, newspaper March 4/1977 E.C.

distribution centers were established at Koräm, Alamata, Batti and Lalebäla. In Tigray, the major relief camp was set up in Mäqälle, while in Ibinat, Gondar was the main relief center.⁷⁹

3. FAMINE AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN THE EYES OF THE WEST

In the early 1980s, famine affected about thirty four countries in Africa, of which twenty were severely affected.⁸⁰ Most sub-Saharan African countries located along the Sahel belt such as Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, Mozambique, Angola and Chad were threatened by famine disaster. The UN reported that the drought and desertification along the Sahel belt may continue for the next fifteen years, which could affect six million hectares of land per year.⁸¹ Famine disaster was one of the major agenda in the twentieth OAU meeting in Addis Ababa in 1984. In the OAU meeting, Mängistu Hailämariam the chairperson of the Därg, announced the happening of horrifying famine in the Horn and demanded the African solution to the African famine and sustainable environmental rehabilitation.⁸² Similarly, Julius Nyrere, the newly appointed chairperson of the OAU and president of Tanzania stated that famine was one of the most disasters in Africa besides the political instability.⁸³



Figure4. Julius Nyrere, the newly appointed chairperson of OAU and president of Tanzania addressing the need for saving famine affected people in Africa by Africans in Addis Ababa, the headquarter of the OAU.

Source: Addis Zämän, newspaper November 6/ 1977

However, the African famine initially received insignificant attention in the western media coverage. Because of the less attention of the media coverage, the western media agencies discouraged journalists who were working on the African famine. Different reasons were suggested why western media was less concerned with famine news in Africa. In the first place, the western media had given much coverage to the military coup de'tate or change of the government in Africa, part of the cold war politics.⁸⁴ In the western media, Africa was represented as weak continent, self-insufficient and dependent on the European aid.⁸⁵ Under this conclusion, famine was not viewed as endemic phenomena in Africa. On the other hand, the western media agencies were said to have pre-occupied with the task of business advertisement, sponsored by the wealthy capitalists. Accordingly, the media agencies had given much focus and coverage to business entertainment to enhance the marketing promotion of the industrial outputs. As a result, the famine news of Africa was neglected in the scene of the western media.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Informants: Mängistu Abäbä, Ahmad Säid and Gashaw Mohammed.

⁸⁰ Ethiopia, Newspaper June 2 1977 E.C.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Addis Zämän, newspaper November 10/ 1977; Ethiopia, newspaper July14/1977.

⁸³ Addis Zämän, newspaper November 6/ 1977.

⁸⁴ John Sorenson, "Mass media and discourse on famine in the Horn of Africa," *Discourse & Society*, 2, No. 2 (1991), 224; John Sorenson, "Covering Famine and War in the Horn Of Africa," *Northeast African Studies*, 12, No. 2/3 (1990), 134.

⁸⁵ John Sorenson, *Mass Media and Discourse*, 133.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 134.

In this regard, the western media sources were less interested to broadcast the famine and civil war news of Ethiopia. For instance, the Eritrean diaspora were frequently asking the western media agencies to get the media coverage to internationalize the Eritrean famine of 1981-82. However, the media agencies rejected their request.⁸⁷ Although the war in northern Ethiopia was prolonged for thirty years, the effect of the war on famine was said to have received insignificant attention of the western media coverage. The western governments and their media agencies neglected the implication of the civil war on the famine because neither government nor rebels were ready to go along with western political ideology⁸⁸. Rather, the western governments were in favor of using famine as the political instrument.

In such ideological battling periods, some foreign journalists who attempted to bring the voice of the famine affected people of Ethiopia to the global attention through radio, magazines and newspaper were unsuccessful. In the first place, the famine broadcast through radio, audio and hardy copy materials could not attract the public attention. This was because, the largest portion of the western societies particularly in USA, Latin American and European countries were said to have dependent on the television news in the meantime.⁸⁹ As a result, the Ethiopian famine news dispatched through radio and hard copy received insignificant audience. Likewise, in September 1983, the western journalist's team reported to the major US and the British media agencies about the occurrence of the severe famine in Ethiopia. However, the report was rejected by their media agencies because of the ground that the documentary film did not depict the actual image of the people affected by the famine.⁹⁰ For instance, David Kelin produced the documentary film on the Ethiopian famine. However, it was rejected by the major US media organizations because the film was not powerful to capture the public image, weak to reflect the real images of the people affected by famine. Similarly the documentary film produced by the British cameraman, David Cairn was rejected by the editor of "The Daily Express."⁹¹

Finally, Mohammed Amin's documentary film dramatically changed the westerners on the Ethiopian famine. He had carefully undertaken the horrifying picture of the famine victims from Koräm, Wollo relief camp. On 23 October 1984, the BBC released Mohammed Amin's film at mid-day. The BBC news was land mark in in the history of the Ethiopian famine. In the first place, the shocking images of the film brought the Ethiopian famine to the international attention.⁹² Amin was said to have focused his film image on the children and breastfeeding mothers to get the global attention. Amin's film narrated by Michael Burek as "hell on the earth" galvanized the global community. On the immediate day of the BBC news, 24 October 1984, about 425 global media organizations broadcasted the Ethiopian famine, where it was attended by more than 470 million audiences.⁹³ Shortly after the BBC news, the British fashion photographer, David Baily displayed the photographic collections of the Ethiopian famine victims for public exhibition at London Art Gallery.⁹⁴ The photographic collections focused on the starved Ethiopian children and breast feeding mothers presented for public exhibition made Ethiopia to be represented by the famine.

The BBC news was followed by the global public outcry to raise funds for the Ethiopian famine victims. It prompted the call for global humanitarian intervention to save the lives of the innocent Ethiopians. The western media, charitable organizations, internationally renowned artists and even

⁸⁷ Hailu, 47; Sorenson, *Covering Famine and War*, 134.

⁸⁸ Robert Kaplan, "The Loneliest War," *The Atlantic Monthly*. 262 No.1 (1988), 58-65; Asmaku Asrat, "Modernity and Change in Ethiopia: 1941-1991: From Feudalism to Ethnic Federalism" (PhD Dissertation in Science and Technology Studies, Rensselaer Poly Technique Institute, 2003), 253; Young, 185

⁸⁹ Bello, 43

⁹⁰ Bello, 44; Sorenson, *Imagining Ethiopia: Struggle for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa* (USA: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 77.

⁹¹ Sorenson, *Imagining Ethiopia*, 77.

⁹² Sorenson, *Mass Media and the Discourse*, 223; Bello, 45; Sorenson, *Imagining Ethiopia*, 77; Andrew Jones, "British Humanitarian Ngos and the Disaster Relief Industry, 1942-1985" (PhD Dissertation in History, The University of Birmingham, 2014), 241.

⁹³ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, 181; Sorenson, *Imagining Ethiopia*, 77-78; Jones, 241.

⁹⁴ Sorenson, *Mass Media and Discourse*, 225.

private individuals publicized the need for immediate intervention to save Ethiopians from the famine disaster.

The shocking images of the BBC prompted the western artists to raise fund to the famine victims and publicize the human sufferings. The Irish Pop Rock musician, Bob Geldof was always remembered for his humanitarian concern to the Ethiopian famine victims. To this end, he produced the music album entitled “Do they know Its Christmas?” His music disk was largely sold in the global market, of which not less than four million copies were sold only in Britain.⁹⁵ It was described as the most successful sale in the history of the pop music. In addition, his team organized the “Band Aid” concert in USA and Britain in July 1985 with the double objective, raise funds and create the global consciousness about the Ethiopian famine. In London, the concert was held at Wembley stadium, attended by seventy thousand audiences, where one hundred and fifty million dollar was collected from entrance ticket sale.⁹⁶ In USA, the same concert was held in Philadelphia at John F. Kennedy Stadium, where ninety two thousand people attended it and very good amount of the fund was raised through entrance ticket sale. It was known as the greatest show on the earth in terms of creating public awareness and the number of the audience.⁹⁷

The fund raising program was said to have committed to the humanitarian concern and bring the voice of the innocent Ethiopian famine victims to the attention of the global community. Geldof’s commitment was said to have emanated from the humanitarian concern. For instance, The Toronto Star, on its 2 December 1985 issue released his voice as “Fight Famine, not People ---.”⁹⁸ He urged the west and the east to narrow their political positions towards Ethiopia to save the lives of the impoverished people. It was argued that Geldof had no any plan to associate famine with ideological difference. He was encouraging the western governments to promptly respond to the Ethiopian famine, leaving their ideological difference with the regime of the Därg a side.⁹⁹

The BBC news had significant impacts. It inspired the other sections of the society to do the same. In Britain, the schoolchildren started fund raising programs by organizing, sport festivals and other activities. In addition, the success of Geldof led-team inspired American artists to do the same. In USA, artists organized the humanitarian movement under the theme “USA for Africa.” Under this initiative, artists produced the music entitled “We are the World”, where more than 7.5 million copies of music disks were sold in the world¹⁰⁰ and fifty million dollar was collected.¹⁰¹

The BBC news inspired several western NGO’s and charitable organizations like Red Cross, CAFOD, Oxfam, SCF etc to extend their support to Ethiopia. In addition, the specialized agencies of the UN like FAO, UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO, WFP provided medical supplies and other aspects of the aid. However, USA was the single largest donor country. By 1985 and 1986, USA provided 787, 000 metric tons of food aid.¹⁰² In addition, the UN office of secretariat established the special task force to coordinate the overall global humanitarian aid to Ethiopia. To this end, the Finish diplomat, Kurt Janson was appointed.¹⁰³

The shocking news of the BBC also inspired several western journalists to turn their face towards Ethiopia. Several European journalists visited the relief camps and released their own accounts about the human sufferings caused by the famine. Some European commentators reported that about 175,000 people were died because of famine in the mid-1984.¹⁰⁴ In addition, the European journalists

⁹⁵Dale Jamieson, “Duties to the Distant: Aid, Assistance and Intervention in the Developing World.” *Journal of Ethics*. 9, No.1 (2005). 153-154.

⁹⁶Jones, 237; Louis Davis, “Feeding the World a Line?: Celebrity Activism and Ethical Consumer Practices From Live Aid to Product Red” (http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNABI218.pdf accessed on 24/05/2017), 95.

⁹⁷*The Scottish Daily Express*, July 12 1985 cited in Davis, 96.

⁹⁸ Qorecho Feyisa *e tal*, *Ye Ethiopia Rihabna Yä Mirabayewian Gazetägoč Astäyayet* (The Ethiopian Famine and Western Journalists Suggestion), *Sämina Worq (Wax and Gold)*, special Issue (1981 E.C.), 90.

⁹⁹ Jones, 240.

¹⁰⁰ Jamieson, 153-154; Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 224; Bello, 158.

¹⁰¹Vestal, *Famine in Ethiopia*, 7.

¹⁰² Ethiopia Drought/Famine, 2

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 10.

¹⁰⁴ Kumar, *Ethiopian Famine, 1973-1985*, -- 25

took the risks and reporting daily developments in the relief camps. For instance, the situation at Koräm relief camp was reported:

Today 35 people died, here 12 adults, 23 children. Yesterday was 19, the day before was 16, the day before that 29, the day before that 41.¹⁰⁵

Koräm, one of the biggest relief centers in northern Ethiopia seemed received much media coverage because of its high rate of sufferings and deaths per day. By March 1984, it was reported that Koräm had about thirty thousand inhabitants, however, this number was said to have declined to ten thousand due to migration, death, forced resettlement and other factors.¹⁰⁶ There was also high rate of migration from rural areas to the relief camps hoping to get food supply. According to Bello's account, in October 1984, about one thousand people were flocking to the Koräm relief camp per day.¹⁰⁷ As a result, the size of the population at relief camp was increasing at alarming rate. This in turn precipitated the health conditions at relief camp. Overcrowding, suffocation and poor sanitation practices caused dysentery, pneumonia, bronchitis, typhus and typhoid. By March 1985, the rate of the deaths reached one hundred per day, of which children took the largest number.¹⁰⁸

The situation at Mäqälle relief camp was more or less similar to Koräm. It was the second largest relief camp next to Koräm. It hosted more than eighty thousand starved people in March 1985, (peak season of the famine crisis), where ninety to one hundred people were said to have died on per day.¹⁰⁹ The fate of the famine victims at Batti, Wollo relief camp was similar to other sites. More than six hundred and thirty tents were erected, where each tent hosted about forty individuals.¹¹⁰ This in turn worsened the health aspects.

However, western governments were not in a position to provide Ethiopia with immediate humanitarian support. Because of their ideological difference with the Därg, they wanted to use famine as political instrument to press the Ethiopian government to re-direct foreign policy from east to west. Although USA and its western allies were said to have informed with the Ethiopian famine in the early 1980s, they wanted to use famine disaster as the political weapon. It was argued that Regan's administration had two views upon the Ethiopian famine. In the first place, it was expected that the starved people of Ethiopia might went to street for uprising refusing the position of the Därg towards controlling famine victims and its state ideology. The expectation was that the Ethiopian government, Därg would be forced to shift its ideology from east to west when the mass uprising put into effect. The second expectation was that the Därg itself might redirect the foreign policy to get food aid from the west.¹¹¹ In USA, the Regan administration was in favor of using famine as an immediate instrument to back Ethiopia into its old ideology. In USA, there was argument that Ethiopia "received food from the west and weapon from the east."¹¹² To reverse the ideology of the state in the Horn of Africa, USA had officially enacted the law known as L.480, which empowered the president to use famine as instrument to influence the famine affected countries in Africa to change their foreign policy.¹¹³ Regarding the role of foreign aid in re-directing foreign policy, the US secretary of the department of agriculture, John Block stated that "food aid will prove to be the most powerful weapon of the US."¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁵ Bello, 33.

¹⁰⁶ Bello, 33

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 33-34.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 34

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Edward Kissi, "Beneath International Famine Relief in Ethiopia: The United States, Ethiopia, and the Debate over Relief Aid, Development Assistance, and Human Rights," *African Studies Review*, 48 No. 2 (2005), 122.

¹¹² Jason Clay, "Western Assistance and the Ethiopian Famine: Implications for Humanitarian Assistance." In Downs, Donna O. Kerner and Stephen P. Reyna (eds). *The Political Economy of African Famine* (Pennsylvania: Gordon and Breach Publisher, 1991), 149.

¹¹³ Edward, Kissi, "The Politics of Famine in United States' Relations with Ethiopia: 1950-1970." *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33 No.1 (2000), 114.

¹¹⁴ Gayle Smith, "Ethiopia and the Politics of Famine Relief," *MERIP Middle East Report*, No. 145 (1987), 32.

On the other hand, the position of Regan administration in Ethiopia's famine, caused critics from opposition parties, charitable organizations and the media agencies. There was public outcry in America against the Reagan administration with the best saying "a hungry child knows no politics."¹¹⁵ Similarly, the Democrats (opposition party) opposed the Regan administration for its associating humanitarian aid with state ideology in Ethiopia. Similarly, Charles Elliot, the ex-director of Christian Aid criticized the British and American governments because of associating humanitarian aid with their political interest.¹¹⁶ Observing the western political interest on Ethiopia, Shimelis Adugna, commissioner of RRC suggested that "Western governments would have respond more generously if Ethiopia was not socialist country."¹¹⁷

Hoping to influence the state ideology of the Därg, the western governments started open propaganda campaign against Ethiopia. To note some, they attacked the rural economic policy of the Därg, which they argued that the socialist based economic policy exposed the Ethiopian people for famine. They criticized the failure of the Soviet style agricultural policy of Ethiopia in insuring food security.¹¹⁸ They condemned the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) for its imposing the quota system, which forced peasant producers to offer food grains with minimum cost.¹¹⁹ In line with this, they criticized the state control pricing policy. The western capitalists viewed the imposition of the quota system and trade restriction as a violation of the economic freedom of the peasant producers and traders.

Moreover, the western governments accused Därg for its violation of the human rights during the resettlement program. This was because the resettlement program was coercively carried out without the interest of masses, motivated by political factors. Because of the violation of the human rights during the resettlement program, the western civil societies were trying to bring the issue to the global attention. For instance, in USA, Cultural Survival Groups were advocating the violation of the human rights witnessed during the resettlement program.¹²⁰ Similarly, in France and Britain, civil societies condemned the human sufferings from the resettlement program. One of the advocator of the Cultural Survival Group, Jaso Clay stated that "Is the government of Ethiopia engaged in a policy of deliberate starvation of its own policy---?"¹²¹

The other issues, which brought Ethiopia to the focus of the global community, were the access of aid food and refugee crisis, complicated by the civil war. The western governments and their humanitarian organizations were complaining about the difficulties created in the access of the aid to the rebel held famine stricken territories, which was complicated because of the civil war, poor road and transportation services. The government refused the access of the western humanitarian aid to the rebel held territories. Moreover, the Lorries and trucks, which were transporting the western aid, were victims of the attacks. The government was bombing those western humanitarian organizations, which were providing their aid through the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) and Eritrean Relief Association (ERA).¹²² Some western humanitarian aids like USAID, which was operating along the Ethio-Sudanese borderlands, were victims of the government attacks. Rebels did the same thing upon the western donors working with RRC. When the access of western aid to rebel held territories complicated because of civil war, the international institutions like Red Cross and Independent Brandy Commission tried to convince the government of the Därg to allow free access of the western aid to rebel held territories. They tried to convince the Ethiopian government to have common stand

¹¹⁵Sorenson, John. *Imagining Ethiopia*, 88.

¹¹⁶ Hailu, 45.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸In line with this, western governments blamed Soviet Union for its less involvement in the Ethiopian famine. In fact, Soviet response to the Ethiopia famine was very little as compare to the US aid. Its involvement was largely witnessed on the areas of militarism.

¹¹⁹ Asmaku Asrat, 253.

¹²⁰Giordano Sivini, "Famine and the Resettlement Program in Ethiopia," *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*, 41 No. 2 (1986), 219.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²²Smith, 33; *Africa Watch*, 176.

with rebels at least on the issue of addressing western aid to the impoverished people. Although insurgents accepted the recommendation, the government rejected it.¹²³

As a result, the western media directed its critics against the position of the RRC. When the Ethiopian government refused the operation of the western aid along the rebel held territories, US decided to channel its aid through REST and ERA. To this end, in the early 1985, USAID officials went to Sudan to convince the government to allow its borderlands to transport the humanitarian aid.¹²⁴ In the meantime, USAID officials encouraged the REST and ERA to build roads to facilitate aid to rebel held territories in Tigray and Eritrea. In fact, the involvement of the western aid in the rebel held territories complicated the relation between western humanitarian organizations and the Ethiopian government. Mistrust and suspicion was developing from time to time. Därg warned some of the NGO's to leave Ethiopia. For instance, Därg attempted to close Ibinat Relief Camp, Gondar and ordered the camp settlers (who were waiting for food and medical supplies) to go back to their respective local bases.¹²⁵

Moreover, the relation between western charitable organizations and the government of Därg declined when the later started to divert western aid for military purpose.¹²⁶ The western governments check that the Ethiopian government was using their aid to buy weapons. The western media was blaming that "the starving babies' food sold to buy Soviet arms."¹²⁷ The issue has got media coverage when Därg diverted the western aid to feed its troops. For instance, on 6 July 1985, The Gazzete, issued that "Aids Flood Ethiopia, But It is not Feeding Its Hungry."¹²⁸ William Shawcross, the author of the article stated that the Socialist regime of Ethiopia cares nothing for its famine victims; rather the foreign aid was diverted for military purpose. He reported that several western sponsored vehicles were assigned to transport firearms and troops, while others were taken for resettlement purpose.

The issue of the refuge crisis magnified the image of Ethiopia in the west. Because of the combined effects of the civil war and the famine, peasants left their local bases in Tigray and Eritrea to the neighboring Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti. As a result, the number of Ethiopian refugee in Sudan was growing at its alarming rate. For instance, more than two hundred thousand Ethiopian refugees were said to have hosted in Sudan from 1984-1986. ¹²⁹ The refugee crisis, complicated by war and famine decolorized the image of Ethiopia in the global communities. Ethiopia was represented by war and famine and categorized under the least developing countries.

4. THE ETHIOPIAN FAMINE IN THE IMAGE OF WESTERN MEDIA

So far, the nature of famine in Ethiopia, the process of western humanitarian involvement and the western political interest on Ethiopia are discussed in detail. This section examined the position of the western journalists and their media outputs in complicating the image of Ethiopia in the west.

It is evident that media has a big power to influence the government, policy makers, civil societies etc to set priorities for certain issue or even change/re direct policy and plan. It has a power to publicize hidden agendas and brings it to the public attention to get immediate response from concerned body. Media plays the pivotal role in enhancing the democratization process. In its true sense, media plays its own role in updating people with the contemporary issues. On the other hand, media has the power to divert the public attention, aggravate the tensions and provoke mass anger. For instance, media had aggravated the genocidal process in Rwanda in 1994. Similarly, the social media like face-book caused the change of government in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt during the Arab spring of 2011-2012.

In this regard, the western media had played key role in disseminating the Ethiopian famine, but characterized by different features. To begin with the positive role of western media, media had lion share in internationalizing the hidden famine of Ethiopia during the two regimes, the imperial and Därg. In addition, it put pressure on the western countries to support Ethiopia during the famine crisis.

¹²³Smith 33.

¹²⁴ Smith, 34.

¹²⁵ Informants: Mängistu Abäbä, Ahamed Säid and Gashaw Mohamäd.

¹²⁶ Vestal, Famine in Ethiopia, 19; Africa Watch, 187.

¹²⁷ Africa Watch, 187.

¹²⁸Qorecho *e tal*, 86-87.

¹²⁹Girma Kebede and Mary J. Jacob, "Drought, famine and the political economy of environmental degradation in Ethiopia," *Geography*, 73 No. 1 (1988), 69; Young, 187.

Moreover, it succeeded in bringing the horrible famine to the international attention. It mobilized the western governments, charitable organizations, private donors, artists and other sections of the society to support the famine victims. For instance, in UK, media and artist team persuaded the government to allow two Royal Aircrafts, Hercules to transport food and medical aid to Ethiopia.¹³⁰ Some of the newspapers particularly, the socialist sympathizers were committed to create the sense of humanitarian awareness rather than focusing on fault finding to meet their hidden political agendas. As Qorecho and his research team identified, *The Socialist Worker*, on its February 1988 issue under the heading “Ethiopia: They do not have to Starve” released balanced and objective news about the Ethiopian famine.¹³¹ As one can understand that the title of the article itself seemed reflect the humanitarian feeling. Susan Shaw, the reporter of this article condemned the position of Super powers, USA and Soviet Union towards the Ethiopian famine. She criticized the Regan administration because of its plan to use famine as political instrument, while her critics towards Soviet Union was due to its much involvement on the militarization of the Därg and less involvement to save the lives of famine victims. Qorecho’s team argued that she recommended both USA and Soviet Union to focus on the immediate humanitarian involvement in Ethiopia rather than searching for their respective political interests.¹³²

Likewise, *The Canadian Tribune* on its March 21 1988 issue under the heading “Ethiopian Journey” released the same message. Moreover, *The Guardian*, 6 April 1988 under the article “Ethiopia: Famine Menace Returns” warned the possibilities of famine return, observing the early warnings. Catherine Watson, the reporter of this newspaper reported the possibilities of famine return in Eritrea and Tigray.¹³³ In addition, she reported the survival strategies of peasants during the times of famine crisis. It is argued that her report considers an account of the International Red Cross Society and local sources. As Qorecho’s research team examined her Work, she has consulted the report of the International Red Cross Society, and interviewed the famine victims in Eritrea and Tigray.¹³⁴ Unlike other journalists, her Work focused on the real causes of the drought and famine in Ethiopia. She reported that age-old agricultural practices of agrarian society caused drought, which in turn born immediate famine in Ethiopia.¹³⁵ Moreover, she was said to have criticized politically obsessed western journalists.

However, on its opposite side, most western media agencies and journalists focused their activism on horrifying the nature of famine using heartbreaking words, which lead to the image crisis in the global community. Leaving other positive achievements and aspects of history, the western journalists argued that Ethiopia has had a history of war and famine. This issue is argumentative even among the academic circles. In their illustrations, examples and academic sources, they used Ethiopia as an example to explain famine. For instance, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Oxford English Dictionary* referred Ethiopia to illustrate famine.¹³⁶

Regarding the role of western media in aggravating Ethiopia’s image crisis in the west, some researchers who had got an access to the newspapers critically evaluated the actual reports and the tones of the western media products. The British, American, Canadian and other western journalist were very much active in muddling the image of Ethiopia in the west during the times of famine and civil war. Most media outputs of these western journalists seemed not truly emanated from the humanitarian concern, rather focused on the propaganda campaign against socialism. It is argued that their work lacks objective and balanced judgments. The western journalists were said to have obsessed with political interest. The major objective of the western mass media was creating the bad image of the existing ideology of the socialist government among its people.¹³⁷ Some of the western newspapers such as *The New York Times* (USA), *The London Times* (Britain), *The Globe and Mail*

¹³⁰ Jones, 241.

¹³¹ Qoreccho *e tal*, 97.

¹³² *Ibid*, 100.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 98.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*.

¹³⁶ Sorenson, *Imagining*, 79; Qorcho *e tal*, 76.

¹³⁷ Sorenson, *Mass Media*, 287.

(Canada) were preoccupied with dispatching the bad images of Ethiopia abroad. Regarding the consecutive issues of these newspapers upon Ethiopia, Qorcho Feyisa e tal stated that:

The western newspaper report upon Ethiopia lacks balanced judgments and objectivity. The selection of the terminologies and the nature of narration seemed deliberate attempt to express their hidden political motives on Ethiopia. The Ethiopian diaspora in west were said to have much suffered from such image crisis in particular.¹³⁸ They were portrayed as “beggars” and hungers. Because of Ethiopia’s image crisis in west, its diaspora were saying “የ አ ገ ር ጌ ኅ ገ ር አ ን ደ ባ ረ ኔ ታ አ ውላ ቆ ማኖር ነ ው”¹³⁹ (throw the country’s issue like hat).

On contrary, they mentioned nothing about the positive images of Ethiopia that the country had achieved in the earlier periods. Its experience shows that peasants are self-sufficient in the production of the food crops when the regular rainfall is available. It is evident that Ethiopia is potential rich country. Observing its potentials for agriculture, one of the US diplomats in 1950s stated that Ethiopia is the granary of the cereal crops and “bread basket to the Middle East.”¹⁴⁰ In conclusion, any positive achievements of the country and its contribution to the world in general and Africa in particular received no western media coverage.

5. CONCLUSION

Ethiopia, an old country in Africa has its unique features, which provided it to be known in the world. Irrespective of its territories, Ethiopia is mentioned in some ancient literatures including the Holy Bible and Holy Quran. Indeed, Ethiopia has maintained relations with Europeans and its neighboring countries dated back to the early centuries. As time went on, Europeans had broader picture about Ethiopia with the view of searching the country of Prester John, though it is controversial issue till. In due course, successive internal developments and its achievements made Ethiopia to have different images in the global society. It seems vague to mention every developments and achievements which provided Ethiopia with positive and negative images in the west. To note some, successful anti-colonial struggle during the age of the European scramble for Africa glorified the image of Ethiopia in the global communities. Even though some of the literatures on the Ethiopian victory at Adwa against the Italian in 1896 are characterized by the Eurocentric views, it is taken as the land mark and the symbol of freedom not only in Ethiopia but also in black community all over the world. However, behind the successful anti-colonial struggle, drought and famine, which had perished millions of people at different periods, left its own effect in decaying the image of Ethiopia in west. The persistent drought, famine and war opened an opportunities for some scholars and western journalist to argue that Ethiopia has the history of “war and famine.” The famine, which had affected Ethiopia in the 1980s, was the most severe in terms of, humanitarian crisis, death rate, scope (geographical distribution) and global repercussions. Drought and Famine are natural and not new phenomena in the Horn of Africa. However, the 1980s famine was complicated because of the unending civil war in northern Ethiopia and the cold war politics. The Ethiopian government neglected the famine during the early warning periods and wanted to use famine for political instrument. Likewise, the western governments were in favor of using famine as an ideological instrument to re-direct the foreign policy of the military government of Ethiopia. The ideological dispute added with other factors prevented the domestic and foreign journalists not to broadcast the famine crisis during its early periods. Later, media had played the key role in internationalizing the Ethiopian famine. It succeeded in bringing the Ethiopian famine to the global attention. On contrary, most western journalists who were obsessed with their political interest were said to have created havocs on Ethiopia, which the commutative effect caused its dramatic image crisis in the west.

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¹³⁹ Qorecho *e tal*, 83.

¹⁴⁰ Edward Kissi, 116.

- [2] I have consulted the following box from *Iredata Masitābabāria komešin 1965-1977*: 148/አ.181/231;148/አ.181/ሰ267/1083;148/አ.181/ሰ267/9927;148/አ.181/ሰ267/5388; 148/አ.181/ሰ267/5308.

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Citation: Alemayehu, Erkihun Engida. "Ethiopia in the Image of the West in the 1980S." *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)*, vol 3, no. 4, 2017, pp. 1-21. doi:DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2454-7654.0304001>.

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