"Feed the World": Food, Development, Aid and Hunger in Africa, 1984-1985

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**ABSTRACT**

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This thesis evaluates African reactions to the 1984-85 Ethiopian famine and broader discourses about food, hunger, aid and agriculture through an analysis of reports, editorials and letters in the African press during the height of global concern about famine in Ethiopia. Africa's leaders blamed famine on agricultural underdevelopment as a consequence of the continent's marginality in the global economy. While these discourses revealed how food was a means by which the industrialised world maintained dominance over the developing world, they concealed how African states' political and social divides determined which groups starved and which groups continued to eat.

The Ethiopian famine amplified calls for the development of large-scale, technologically-advanced farming as a means to ensure Africa's political and economic independence on one hand, and valorisations of "traditional" African foods on the other. Debates over the future of African farming were shaped by a paternalistic attitude towards rural populations, especially women, on the part of Africa's urban elites, and revealed how the production and consumption of food is productive of local and transnational political and social networks. As well as examining discourses about food, I examine how Africans responded to events such as Live Aid, which raised millions of dollars for famine relief. While scholars have criticised these events for ignoring the politics of famine, my research shows how Africans saw these events as speaking to them as political subjects in a way that official relief efforts did not.

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INTRODUCTION

On 23 October 1984, BBC Television aired a report from a feeding centre at Korem,

Ethiopia where upwards of a hundred people a day were dying, victims of a famine

affecting Ethiopia's four northern provinces of Tigre, Wollo, Gondar and Eritrea. The

report, by Michael Buerk and cameraman Mohammed Amin, was subsequently aired

worldwide and inspired a massive charitable fundraising effort as Amin's heart-

wrenching images of the dying crowded together in a desert landscape and mothers

crying over the corpses of their children—images that still shock almost twenty-five

years later—inspired people to do whatever they could to help.[1] The scale of the popular

reaction caught humanitarian organisations off guard; a spokesperson for the American

Red Cross said: "People didn't want to wait for us to announce our plans...they wanted to

know what they could do, and they wanted to know right now." A New Hampshire man

raised $900 for famine relief selling roses outside a supermarket; a British farmer

purchased 4000 tonnes of grain to donate by urging his peers to each contribute the price

of a tonne of wheat; a grain exporter in Illinois donated the equivalent of a million meals

and persuaded ten other companies to bag and ship the food free of charge.[2]

    The media quickly involved itself in relief efforts: Robert Maxwell's *Daily Mirror*

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[1] Suzanne Franks, "How Famine Captured the World," *Media History* 12 (2006): 291. The Buerk/Amin report is included on the Live Aid DVD (*Live Aid: July 13 1985, the Day the Music Changed the World* (Rhino Home Video, 2004).). For the story of the Buerk /Amin report, see: Peter Gill, *A Year in the Death of Africa: Politics, Bureaucracy and the Famine* (London: Paladin Books, 1986), 91-95; Paul Harrison and Robert Palmer. *News out of Africa: Biafra to Band Aid* (London: Hilary Shipman, 1986), 93-122. Harrison and Palmer also discuss British and Irish reports on famine in Ethiopia's southern province of Wolaita that aired in July 1984. While these reports created awareness of famine in Ethiopia and led to some £10 million in charitable donations, their effect on the public psyche was nowhere as pronounced as those of the Buerk/Amin report. A second report by Buerk and Amin from Korem aired on 24 October: this contained the now-infamous sequence in which famine victims were seen leaning against a wall—those inside the wall had been selected by humanitarian workers to receive emergency feeding, while those outside the wall did not meet triage requirements and were left to their own devices. On 25 October, Great Britain's ITN Television aired *Bitter Harvest*, a documentary film about the famine by Peter Gill that contributed to the British public's growing fascination with the issue of famine in Ethiopia.
[2] "A Flood of Generosity," *Newsweek*, 26 November 1984.

chartered an airplane, filled it with thirty tonnes of food and flew to Ethiopia on a

"*Mirror* Mercy Mission," while the rival *Sun* started the "*Sun* to the Rescue" fundraising

campaign. In November, a French television station ran a convoy of trucks carrying

humanitarian supplies in a "humanitarian equivalent of the Paris-Dakar Rally" across

several Sahelian countries that were experiencing food security problems.[3] This

combination of culture, commerce and charity was brought to a new level in November

when musicians Bob Geldof and Midge Ure assembled an all-star line-up of British pop

stars under the name of Band Aid to record a song called "Do they Know it's Christmas?"

to raise funds for famine victims. "Do they Know it's Christmas?" was followed by a

series of famine-relief fundraising pop recordings, including the Canadian "Tears are not

Enough" and U.S.A. for Africa's "We are the World." The combination of the charitable

impulse and rock music proved a successful way to raise funds and culminated in Live

Aid; concerts held in London and Philadelphia on 13 July 1985 and broadcast worldwide

which raised over $100 million for African famine relief.

Live Aid's slogan, "Feed the World," and its unprecedented use of satellite

technology to broadcast the event worldwide framed the West's response to the Ethiopian

famine as an instance of "globalisation" before the word had come into vogue. However,

the transnational community of concern created by the Ethiopian famine was by no

means uniform in the ways in which it understood the question of African hunger: as

Arjun Appadurai writes, globalisation is a "deeply historical, uneven and even *localizing*

process."[4] This thesis deals with localised readings of the globalised phenomenon of the

Ethiopia famine by examining discourses about food, food aid, famine and agriculture

[3] Gill, *A Year in the Death of Africa*, 95-97.
[4] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 17.

from four African countries—Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Tanzania—during the time

between the airing of the Buerk/Amin report and Live Aid, a period marked by

worldwide concern over the question of hunger in Ethiopia and Africa more generally.

My focus is on African explanations for the famine and the broader food security crisis

that struck the continent in the mid-1980s, debates over proposed solutions to the

problem of African hunger, and responses to the West's humanitarian reaction to the

Ethiopian famine.

Susanne Friedberg writes that food is "a commodity extraordinarily freighted with

meanings" which shape its "social life." These meanings inform us about the networks

and politics created by the production, marketing and consumption of food.[5] While the

dominant Western explanations for the famine tended to focus on varying combinations

of four basic factors—drought, overpopulation, the Ethiopian government's Marxist

ideology and (to a lesser extent) the country's ongoing civil wars with rebel groups in the

north of the country—many African analyses of the reasons for the famine challenged

these explanations, blaming the famine on the colonial episode's effects on Africa's

agricultural development and on the continent's continued marginal position in the world

economic system: famine and the flood of food aid that the West sent to Ethiopia and

other sub-Saharan countries were evidence that African states needed to attain

agricultural self-sufficiency in order to guarantee their political and economic

independence. This had the effect of concealing the ways in which internal power

relations and economic inequality played central roles in determining the effects of mass

hunger. In other words, while the question of why Africa as a continent seemed to be

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[5] Susanne Friedberg, *French Beans and Food Scares: Culture and Commerce in an Anxious Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9.

going hungry was predominant in African newspaper analyses and in statements by government officials, the question of which particular social and political groups were starving and why was not.

My central argument is that the framing of famine as an effect of the colonial era's neglect of the underdevelopment of African agriculture, combined with the discourses of urban and political elites that constructed African farmers as "backwards" or even "primitive" subjects in need of "modernisation"—discourses which in many ways reflected the attitudes of colonial administrations towards rural Africans—led to the predominance of "production first" agricultural strategies which called for the modernisation and commercialisation of African agriculture. This emphasis on increasing production through modernisation and commercialisation, while intended to secure the continent's food security and thus its political and economic sovereignty, actually involved the adoption of techniques and technologies which would have tied African food production more closely to international corporate food production networks. Moreover, this thesis shows how discourses which called for the modernisation of African famers and farming was complicated by the ways in which media commentators and state officials valorised the production and consumption of "traditional" African crops as a means by which the continent could ensure food security.

Along with analysing discussions and debates over the causes of and proposed solutions to the continent's food security issues, I also look at the question of how African media commentators and the people who wrote in to newspapers saw their continent within the discourses about Africa that were produced through massively popular events such as Live Aid. The iconic image of the African child with a distended belly and

imploring eyes was central to Western fundraising for Ethiopian famine victims. While

effective an fundraising tool, famine imagery has played a crucial role in shaping

outsiders' perceptions of Africa and Africans, creating African subjects as passive objects

existing outside of political and social contexts—what Giorgio Agamben calls "bare

life."[6] However, African reactions to rock fundraising efforts for famine victims show

that many Africans saw these efforts not as apolitical campaigns to raise money to feed

the starving, but as political events that directly engaged with their own concerns

regarding the relationships between food, aid, power and sovereignty.

While the focus of my research is on African discourses about the Ethiopian

famine, it is impossible to separate that event  from the broader food security crisis that

struck much of sub-Saharan Africa in the mid-1980s. A commentary in Tanzania's *Daily*

*News* from 8 November 1984 began with the claim that the BBC's "harrowing pictures of

skeletal Ethiopians" had "shocked the world into the realisation that a large part of Africa

faces...a nightmare of famine." The commentary quoted an aid official as saying that

Western humanitarian groups approved of the Buerk/Amin report's effects on the public's

conscience, as "the attention focused on Ethiopia could benefit the rest of Africa by

making people realise that drought and food shortages were a continent-wide problem."[7]

Over ten million Africans were displaced by drought and food insecurity in the mid

1980s.[8] Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) reports from May 1985 show that

besides Ethiopia, Sudan, Chad, Senegal, Somalia, Mali, Niger, Mozambique and

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[6] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life.* Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
[7] Terry Williams, "Famine Threatens Africa," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 8 November 1985.
[8] "Drought Displaces Millions in Africa," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 22 June 1985.

Mauritania were all facing varying degrees of mass hunger.[9] Meanwhile, Botswana,

Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Swaziland were also experiencing their worst droughts in recent

history.[10] African cereal production totals for 1983 were at their lowest level in a

decade.[11]

John Sorenson argues that the conflation of the Ethiopian famine with broader

African food security concerns in the Western media in 1984-85 occurred due to both

ideology (as this move allowed the West to vilify Ethiopia's Marxist regime for its role in

creating famine) and aesthetics (because of the effect of Amin's remarkable images).[12]

However, an examination of African reporting during the same time period reveals that

the Ethiopian famine, much as it was in the West, was harnessed by African political

leaders, media commentators and everyday citizens as a "stand-in" to frame a wide range

of discussions about a number of food security problems and public health issues tied to

nutrition that were facing the continent. While some countries, notably Chad and Sudan,

did face cataclysmic famine much like the crisis affecting parts of Ethiopia, none of the

four countries which make up my case study experienced the scenes of despair seen in

the Buerk/Amin report, even though certain parts of their populations were not getting

enough to eat or had to rely on food aid in order to do so. The attention directed towards

the famine in Ethiopia, and the internationalisation of the responsibility to ease the effects

of hunger in that country, allowed officials and the public across Africa to talk about their

own food security issues with a particular added urgency.

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[9] "FAO Urges Food Aid for Senegal," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 2 May 1985.
[10] Moreri Gabakgore, "Effects of Drought in Southern Africa," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 21 February 1985.
[11] Cheryl Christensen, Lawrence Witucki, "Food Policies in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *Africa's Agrarian Crisis: The Roots of Famine*, ed. Stephen K Commins, Michael F. Lofchie and Rhys Payne (Boulder: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 1986), 19.
[12] John Sorenson, *Imagining Ethiopia: Struggles for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 88-92.

Food is endowed with economic, political and cultural attributes that lend it a variety of

biopolitical meanings, and discourses around these meanings become amplified during a

food security crisis.[13] One crucial theme that emerged in discourses about food during the

Ethiopian famine was the role of agriculture and diet in the expression and maintenance

of national and continental political, economic and cultural sovereignty. Discourses that

framed food as a key battleground for independence were profoundly shaped by

memories of the colonial episode. Colonialism had important impacts on both food

production (through the imposition of cashcropping and the implementation of migratory

labour, which led to an increased role for women in farming) and food consumption (via

the introduction of new food products and the work of colonial nutritionists) in Africa.[14]

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[13] For a discussion of biopolitics, see: Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 1997), 241-245. Some scholars have objected to the application of Foucauldian notions of biopower to African politics. Meagan Vaughan's work on medical practices in colonial Africa shows how colonial officials were unable to make Africans "fit" into particular sociological categories. She writes that the exercise of biopolitics in colonial Africa was severely restricted by the fact that the ordering of African patients was complicated "by other imposed identities…the African leper could never be 'just' a leper—he or she was, first and foremost, an 'African,' and, beyond that, the member of a 'tribe.'"(See: Megan Vaughan, *Curing their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 97.) Moreover, Foucault, grounded in European historiography, presumes a strong centralised state that exercises power wherever it has sovereignty. James Ferguson contends that African states do not function this way: while biopolitics put the state at the centre, "managing, fostering, and…'optimizing' the vital and productive forces of society," Ferguson's research on development projects in Lesotho leads him to argue that while African states may aim to foster those vital and productive forces, their lack of "a single rationality," means that they cannot order "the biological resources of [their populations] in the sense of the 'bio-power' model." Instead, Ferguson sees the African state as one that "grabs onto and loops around existing power relations, not to rationalize or coordinate them, as much as to cinch them together into a knot."(See: James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 272-4.) This leaves us with an African state that differs profoundly from the Foucauldian model, bringing into question the utility of biopolitics as a way of understanding the relationship between food and power in Africa.

     However, Bayart counters that African states are "ordinary, and (particularly) ordinary in their politics," and links any reluctance to recognise this to the historical subjugation of the continent via the slave trade and imperialism. (See: Jean-Francois Bayart, [1989] *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. Trans. Mary Harper, Christopher and Elizabeth Harrison (New York: Longman 1993), 1-2.). Given the strong links between food, culture and power that dominated African discourses about the famine, a biopolitical analysis is, I believe, appropriate.

[14]For the relationship between migratory labour and women's agricultural work see: Berry, *No Condition Is*

Colonialism gave European states control of lucrative crops like coffee, sugar and tea, provided places to send unemployed European labour, thus easing metropolitan food security issues, and created spaces for research into new crops and agricultural technologies. Finally, colonial officials saw the "civilising mission" as a way to improve the African diet.[15]

None of this is to say that the impact of colonialism on African agriculture was totalising or represented a monolithic imposition of power on Africa by the metropole. Freidberg points out that colonialism's effects on African agriculture need to be understood in terms of the continent's internal power dynamics, writing that while the colonial episode was "brief relative to the *longue durée* of African agricultural history," it lasted long enough to establish "lasting relationships and hierarchies" on both local and transnational levels.[16] Bayart counters dependency-school readings of Africa's alleged agricultural stagnation during colonialism by arguing for agricultural innovations that were the result of African initiative, and not simply a response to "external factors."[17]

As the Ethiopian famine brought intense international attention to bear on the issue of African food security, it provided increased opportunity for neocolonial intervention through such initiatives as the provision of humanitarian aid, new agricultural development projects and the implementation of Structural Adjustment programmes (SAPs) that often targeted food production. In response, African governments highlighted the role of food in the maintenance of African sovereignty, urging their citizens to work harder to produce more food in order to guarantee national

*Permanent*, 87-88; 95. For nutritionists in colonial Africa, see: Vaughan, *Curing their Ills*, 141.
[15] Freidberg, *French Beans and Food Scares*, 35-36.
[16] Freidberg, *French Beans and Food Scares*, 56.
[17] Bayart, *The State in Africa*, 21.

and continental self-sufficiency, such as when Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere said

that political independence was "incompatible with the threat of mass starvation."[18]

Kenyan president Daniel arap Moi echoed that sentiment, saying, "any nation that could

not feed itself becomes a laughing-stock and could never command respect." Moi called

on Kenyans to work harder and increase agricultural output, saying, "*wananchi* should

grow enough food to stop relying on foreign aid."[19] UNESCO's director-general, the

prominent Senegalese educator Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, said that African states could

not "consider themselves independent, if the majority of them continue to depend mainly

on foreign food aid."[20] The *Standard*, a Ghanaian Catholic weekly, took a pessimistic

tone in regards to how the food crisis reflected on African independence, arguing in a

front-page editorial that "what worries us is the serious state of dependence into which

most African States are being driven. And this after nearly thirty years of

independence!"[21]

Echoing Ethiopia's historic role as a pan-African touchstone, the famine was also

harnessed in calls for African, "developing world" and black unity. Nyerere argued that

Africans "have to increase our own endeavours to be self-reliant, both on a regional and

national basis. Separately, we are all very weak....Together we could make Africa just a

little less weak."[22] In March, Nyerere, tying "starvation" to "external domination," said

that "the long term solution to the current problems facing the Third World lay in political

[18] Julius Nyerere, "Let's Safeguard Unity," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 14 November 1984.
[19] "*Wananchi*": citizens. "Plant More—Moi," *Standard* (Nairobi), 23 November 1985.
[20] "OAU Summit Created New Awareness," *Daily Times* (Lagos), 16 November 1984.
[21] "Africa: Food, Independence and Dependence," *Standard* (Accra), 31 March 1985.
[22] "Nyerere New OAU Chairman," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 13 November 1984. For Ethiopia's historic role in pan-Africanism, see S.K.B. Asante, *Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934-1941* (London: Longman, 1977); Getachew Metafaria, "The Ethiopian Connection to the Pan-African Movement," *Journal of Third World Studies* 12 (1995): 300-323; Teshale Tibebu, "Ethiopia: The 'Anomaly' and 'Paradox' of Africa," *Journal of Black Studies* 26 (1996): 414-430.

solidarity and economic co-operation."[23] The Ghanaian press featured several

exhortations urging people to contribute to the cause of relieving Ethiopians' suffering,

framing the issue not as simply one of humanitarian empathy, but one of continental and

racial unity. A November editorial in the *People's Daily Graphic* argued that the lack of

an African campaign to help Ethiopia was a striking commentary on the state of African

unity and berated African leaders for not sending any "token aid to Ethiopia when the

whole world [had] been informed about the famine there."[24] The *Graphic* maintained that

Ghanaians in particular were obliged to help Ethiopia because of Ghana's historical role

in pan-African and anticolonial activism: "Ghanaians should, as, beacons of

enlightenment and the torchbearers of African Unity and advancement… rise up and rally

round our government to send food aid."[25] Another editorial in the *Graphic*, criticising

the under-performance of the country's Ministry of Agriculture and applauding a policy

paper calling for a streamlining of the ministry's operations, urged the country's Secretary

of Agriculture to "keep up the pressure and work towards weeding out those who stand in

the way of our efforts to do away with the begging bowl so that we can live in dignity—

free, beautiful and black."[26]

A pair of OAU summit meetings held in Addis Ababa (coincidentally, each a few

weeks after each of the events which bookend this project) marked important spaces for

the expression of official rhetoric about the Ethiopian famine and the broader African

hunger crisis and their implications for the continent's political and economic

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[23] "Third World Unite-Nyerere," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 16 March 1985.
[24] Bright Akwetey, "The OAU and Prospects for Peace in Africa," *People's Daily Graphic* (Accra), 14 November 1984.
[25] T.A.A. Owusu, "Let's Help the Hungry in Ethiopia and Chad," *People's Daily Graphic* (Accra), 26 November 1984.
[26] "The Time for Hard Decisions," *People's Daily Graphic* (Accra), 24 November 1984.

sovereignty. The first of these summits was held 12-15 November 1984, and the second, a special meeting about economic issues, began on 21 July 1985, a week after Live Aid. The November summit was noteworthy for the emergence of a consensus among African political leaders calling for important changes to the international aid paradigm, as well as concrete measures to help African states take ownership of the responsibility to deal with the continent's food security issues. The July summit was centered on the implementation of the ideas that had been discussed in November.

The role of the OAU in the formation of a common front on the part of Africa's political leadership on the question of African hunger speaks to the ways in which those leaders harnessed the Ethiopian famine in the cause of continental unity. In the mid-1980s, the OAU was in crisis: Two previous summits had been cancelled because of conflict between Chad and Libya and political instability in the scheduled host nation following the death of Guinea's prime minister.[27] The OAU was also confronted with Morocco's objection to the organisation's admission of Western Sahara's separatist Polisario Front, an issue that threatened to jeopardise the November meeting. With the famine drawing the world's eyes to Ethiopia, a failed summit in Addis Ababa would have seriously shaken the OAU's already-damaged credibility. However, even though Morocco withdrew from the OAU over the Polisario question during the conference, under the strong leadership of newly-elected chair Julius Nyerere the organisation managed to overlook its internal divides and presented a concrete plan to deal with Africa's food security issues that foregrounded the suffering going on only a few hundred kilometres from Addis Ababa's conference centre. The conference's final statement, which Nyerere would spend the next nine months selling to the international community

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[27] Attillio Tagalile, "OAU's Thorny Issues." *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 12 November 1984.

while on his retirement tour, argued that given sufficient help, especially in the realms of debt reduction and development aid, Africa could solve its own food security problems.

The most tangible expression of African political unity around the cause of food security was the creation of an OAU-sponsored fund to finance a task force that would work to fight the effects of drought in sub-Saharan Africa. The fund was an Algerian initiative, and Algeria pledged the first $10 million for its establishment.[28] The creation of the fund was an important moment of the summit, one that African commentators saw as a re-affirmation of the OAU's founding principles of African unity and of a desire to implement African solutions to the problem of African hunger. The *Daily News* called the Algerian initiative "a signal of awakening to the realities of the crisis facing the Continent," and argued that "Africa can only count on its people and resources within for its strength" as "any external help will be marginal and should not be the basis for planning its future."[29] Nyerere acknowledged that the task force could not in itself solve the problem of African hunger, but that if Africa was to ask for more and better aid, "we must show our seriousness."[30] The task force's African funding was a way of showing that the continent was serious about tackling its problems. By late May, however, only Zambia had paid its pledge in full; Algeria and Libya had each pledged, but not paid, $10 million while Nigeria had not met its commitment of $5 million, revealing a crucial gap between political rhetoric and political reality.[31]

While the question of African unity was an important touchstone in official African statements about the Ethiopian famine, African media coverage of and debates

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[28] "Algeria Urges Drought Fund" *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 15 November 1984
[29] Comment, *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 16 November 1984.
[30] "Africa Must Be Serious – Nyerere," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 17 November 1984.
[31] "Millions Facing Starvation, Says Onu," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 25 May 1985.

about questions relating to food and hunger during the Ethiopian famine were marked by two important discursive divisions. The first was the social and political division between rural Africans and the urban populations who for the most part were the producers and intended consumers of the media discourses that this thesis examines. Related to this was a second divide, between notions of "modernity" and "tradition" and which of the two would best work to solve the problem of African hunger.

*URBAN AND RURAL*

Brinda Mehta writes that food is closely tied to identity and that "seemingly simple acts of eating are flavoured with complicated and sometimes contradictory cultural meanings." Examining the ways in which these meanings are produced "can help reveal the rich and messy textures of our attempts at self-understanding, as well as our interesting and problematic understandings of our relationship to social Others."[32] African farmers were at the centre of discussions about the production of food and debates over how to improve agricultural output. However, their voices were for the most part absent from these discussions. While scholars have examined how Western coverage of the Ethiopian famine played a crucial role in the development of Westerners' views of Africans as "social Others," this project argues that African discourses about the production and consumption of food simultaneously shaped were shaped by the relationships between the continent's urban elites and their own "social Others" in the countryside. Akhil Gupta writes that development discourses create underdevelopment as a subject position in which the people of the developing world are seen as "less-than-fully-formed subjects whose growth and maturity has to be supervised and monitored by

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[32] Brinda J. Mehta, "Culinary Diasporas: Identity and the Language of Food in Gisele Pineau's *Un Papillion dans la Cité* and *L'Exil Selon Julia*," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 8 (2005): 27.

those who have reached adulthood."[33] In the simplest analysis, the West, with its multitude of international financial bodies (such as the World Bank and IMF) and humanitarian aid agencies (whose role as agents in the relationship between Africa and the West took on a new importance during the Ethiopian famine) may be seen as the "adults" supervising an entire continent on the developmental path to full subjecthood.[34] However, in looking at African coverage of issues related to food, hunger and agriculture in 1984-85, what emerges forcefully are the ways in which political and urban elites saw themselves as the "adults" responsible for ensuring the development of rural African whom they often saw as "backwards" or even "primitive" subjects.

Divisions between urban and rural Africa figure prominently in scholarly discussions about the continent's political, economic and humanitarian difficulties. A structural split between urban and rural Africa is central to Mahmood Mamdani's influential analysis of the state in Africa, which he sees as divided along lines separating urban and rural populations, as well as along ethnic lines. Mamdani traces Africa's urban/rural bifurcation to development plans embraced by African governments in the early independence era, arguing that these plans "intensified extra-economic pressure on the peasantry," alienating farmers from the state and making them relate to government as a "single and fused nature of authority" in a way that mirrored colonial power structures.[35]

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[33] Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 11.

[34] On hunger in Africa in the mid-1980s and the expanding role of Western humanitarian NGOs, see: Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 86-105 and Henrietta Lidchi, "Finding the Right Image: British Development NGOs and the Regulation of Imagery," in *Culture and Global Change*, ed. Tracey Skelton and Tim Allen (London: Routledge, 1999), 87-101.

[35] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 26; 53-54.

The alienation from the state that Mamdani presents as the African peasant's political position is evident to many analysts in the persistence of a so-called "urban bias" in African food pricing policies. The phrase "urban bias" describes policies which are intended to keep food costs low in cites by limiting the price that farmers get for their produce. While this guarantees that politically-powerful urban populations have affordable food, it undermines farmers' economic security when prices for their produce are capped at artificially low levels. This can ultimately lead to decreased production if prices fall so low as to make farming not worth the effort. The rationale behind these policies is that by providing cities with cheap food, the state guarantees a measure of political stability. As one relief worker was quoted as saying during the famine: "Starve the city dwellers and they riot; starve the peasants and they die. If you were a politician, which would you choose?"[36] At its worst, the desire to placate urban populations with cheap food can lead to the deliberate deprivation of rural areas: in Ethiopia, the government continued to ensure cheap food for the cities even as the country's surplus production was bottoming out. Farmers had to meet state grain quotas by giving up their own reserves, and the famine-stricken province of Wollo thus ended up exporting grain through 1984.[37]

However, some scholars have questioned the importance of urban bias in their analyses of the role of food in African politics, pointing out that not all urbanites have the type of political clout that analyses centered on urban bias presume. James Ferguson points out that while critics attack SAPs undertaken in the wake of Africa's 1980s economic crises for their effects on African farmers, SAPs often lowered *urban* living

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[36] "Africa in Crisis," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 8 June 1985.
[37] James C. McCann, "A Great Agrarian Cycle? Productivity in Highland Ethiopia, 1900 to 1987," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 20 (1990): 416; de Waal, *Famine Crimes,* 110.

standards. In 1987, Zambia's Copperbelt residents rioted to protest the rising price of corn meal as, "for the urban poor, the price of food had become an issue of bare survival."[38] In addition to the economic imbalances in the city that urban bias-centered analyses obscure, there are political factors that need to be taken into account before broadly attacking African governments for favouring urban populations over farmers. Leander Schneider argues that demands for affordable food are a universal part of the political landscape, and that the accommodation of those demands does not necessarily indicate an inherent policy bias against farmers. The urban poor, as much as farmers, have a "justifiable claim to support from the state," and governments often have to make politically difficult trade-offs.[39] As for Mamdani's claim that urban/rural and ethnic divides "bifurcate" the African state, Frederick Cooper points out that this analysis ignores the ways in which Africans created important links that bridged these divides during the nationalistic struggles of the late colonial era.[40]

Yet while the question of an ingrained bias against farmers in favour of urbanites in food pricing policies is debatable, and while Mamdani's urban/rural divides may be historically shown to be more fluid than he describes them to be, I argue that a strong discursive bias on the part of urban Africans against the continent's rural populations permeated media discussions about food and hunger during Africa's mid-1980s food crisis. This bias emerged in statements by government officials and media analysts about the need to improve peasants' "primitive" farming techniques and in advice printed in

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[38] James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 10.
[39] Leander Schneider, "Developmentalism and Its Failings: Why Rural Development Went Wrong in 1960s and 1970s Tanzania" (Ph.D. diss, Columbia University, 2003), 59-61.
[40] Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005), 17-18.

newspapers about how to improve "poor" rural eating habits. However, this argument is complicated by the manner in which many urban voices strongly embraced the idea that "traditional" African foods were a key element in strategies in the maintenance of national and continental self-sufficiency and economic and political sovereignty. This pointed to an important gap between the valorisation of a particular notion of "tradition" (i.e. African foods) on the one hand and a vilification of the source of that tradition (the farmers who grew those foods) on the other.

### *MODERN AND TRADITIONAL*

The attention brought to the question of African hunger by the Ethiopian famine combined with the strong sense on the part of urban elites that African farmers were in need of help and guidance in order to ensure their proper "development" amplified discourses favouring proposals to increase food production through the wholesale modernisation of African agriculture.

Large-scale agricultural development plans and the application of "scientific" methods to farming have been a crucial part of the political landscape in Africa since independence, and many scholars see important links between these approaches and late colonial-era development plans. Sara Berry traces the popularity of Africa's early-independence era "big push" projects to convergences between the visions of late colonial officials and nationalist leadership, and between the desire on the part of new regimes to stay in power and the development visions of both liberal and Marxist economists.[41]

According to Michael Lofchie, late colonial administrations tended to promote

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[41] Sara Berry, *No Condition Is Permanent: The Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in sub-Saharan Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 54.

the production of cash crops for export over food production for local consumption, dedicating the best land, the most developed infrastructure and the most recent technology to export crops. In the 1960s, as independent African states began to rely increasingly on food imports, they began to impose agricultural development schemes that were intended to help local food production catch up to export production. This would happen through the application of the same approaches that had been used in the production of cash crops, namely "the creation of large-scale farms that could demonstrate scientific agriculture and [the benefits of] advanced agricultural practices." These approaches typically failed to bring about the increased production that they were supposed to. This occurred in large part because poor farmers getting low prices for their produce were unable to secure the necessary credit to take advantage of expensive new methods. However, large-scale projects continued to dominate African agricultural development, even in the face their inability to prevent mounting food crises, because governments were easily able to harness the resources that the projects brought them, because it was easier for donor agency bureaucracies to administer a few large projects rather than many small ones, and because state officials believed that the blame for the failures of these projects lay not with the projects themselves but with the peasants that they were meant to benefit.[42]

James Scott also traces the preference of African states for large-scale agricultural development to the colonial era, when farm policy was founded on European officials' faith in "scientific agriculture" and scepticism towards traditional farming.[43] Scott argues

[42] Michael F. Lofchie, "Africa's Agricultural Crisis, an Overview," in Stephen K Commins, Michael F. Lofchie and Rhys Payne, *Africa's Agrarian Crisis: The Roots of Famine* (Boulder: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 1986), 12-15.
[43] James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Condition Have Failed* (New

that these attitudes survived decolonisation, and until "very late in the game," agencies

such as the World Bank and USAID perpetuated colonial "techno-visions" for African

agriculture. According to Scott, the political leaders who wholeheartedly embraced these

models were more the "consumers of a high-modernist faith that had originated

elsewhere" than they were creators of new approaches to deal with underdevelopment.[44]

However, analyses like these, which frame independent African states'

development policies as simple reproductions of colonial modes of governance obscure

the histories and motivations of later leaders who instituted these policies. Scott has been

criticised for not historicising the processes he describes, and from these criticisms, a key

element in understanding the rationales underlying official explanations for and proposed

solutions to the food crisis emerges: the paternalistic attitude of state officials towards the

farmers that often took the blame for failed development policies. Schneider points out

that Scott frames development discourse "almost as a determinative script," failing to

engage with the motivations of the people who "supposedly enact[ed]" that script.[45] For

example, Schneider blames the erosion of Tanzanian democracy during *ujaama*

villagisation on the fact that state elites "paternalistically—and *not* self-servingly"

pursued policies that they believed were in the common interest.[46] In order to understand

state development visions, Schneider writes, one must take into account the "political

imagination of political elites in the country," and "their unshakeable conviction

that...they, as *competent* developers confronted '*backward*' rural masses."[47]

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Haven, Yale University Press, 1998), 226.
[44] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 247
[45] Schneider, "Developmentalism," 118.
[46] Schneider, "Developmentalism," 22. Emphasis in original.
[47] Schneider, "Colonial Legacies and Postcolonial Authoritarianism in Tanzania: Connects and Disconnects," *African Studies Review* 49 (2006):103; "Developmentalism," 5. Emphasis in original.

This thesis demonstrates how, in a similar vein, the mid-1980s food crisis saw African leaders embracing development plans that often did not have the interests of African farmers—or consumers—at heart in great part because they saw these plans as a viable way to get "underdeveloped" rural Africans on the track to agricultural modernity. Jean-Francois Bayart, Berry, and others have framed political leaders' partiality towards large-scale agricultural planning as a consequence of the fact that these plans provide resources that feed the networks of accumulation that they see to be at the heart of African politics. Without discounting the material benefits that these plans bring to the table, it is evident in statements from many African officials which emerged during the famine that they saw their "social Others" in the countryside as underdeveloped and in need of policies which would help them catch up.

*A NOTE ON SOURCES*

The principle sources for this thesis are reports, analyses, editorial commentaries and letters-to-the-editor appearing in English-language newspapers from Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Tanzania during the time between the airing of the Buerk/Amin report and the aftermath of Live Aid, when the Ethiopian famine and the question of African hunger more generally were the subjects of pointed concern worldwide. While the question of hunger in Africa received much less Western media attention before October 1984 and tended to fall off the radar in the weeks following Live Aid as the rains returned to Ethiopia and people began to return to their farms, African coverage of the question of mass hunger both pre-dated and continued long after the time when Western media had turned it into a *cause célèbre*. However, the period on which my research is focused saw an amplification of African discourses about food and hunger in response to the unprecedented global attention being paid to these issues.

The sources that I am working with provide particular challenges. The first of these are the close links between these newspapers and their respective states: For example, Tanzania's *Daily News* is a state-owned paper, and the *Kenya Times* is the official paper of the then-ruling KANU party. Furthermore, Ghana and Nigeria were both under military rule during the time that this thesis covers, and freedom of the press was curtailed in both countries. Even those newspapers which were not subject to direct state control, such as Nigeria's *Punch*, which was, of the newspapers I examined, the one that did the most to criticise African governments (including its own), were often subject to intense government scrutiny and sometimes worse. In 1983, many of the *Punch's* editors were arrested and the paper suffered a mysterious fire that destroyed a thousand rolls of newsprint.[48]

Beyond the issue of press freedom, there is the question of the reach of the papers that I examined. In the early 1990s, Africa produced close to ten times fewer newspapers on a per-capita basis than did the rest of the world.[49] The limited reach of African newspapers is compounded in my case by linguistic concerns: as I am unable to read Kiswahili or any West African languages, I am precluded from engaging with important elements of public discourse that would have appeared in non-English newspapers. Finally, there is the fact that many of these newspapers relied on foreign wire services for much of their content, a question I address more fully in Part I.

Nonetheless, the sources which I examined provide a valuable lens through which to examine Africa's public discourses. Stephen Ellis argues that even with their shortcomings, African newspapers, even the most "tawdry propaganda sheets" are

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[48] Adigun Agbaje, "Freedom of the Press and Party Politics in Nigeria: Precepts, Retrospect and Prospects," *African Affairs* 89 (1990): 215.
[49] Stephen Ellis, "Writing Histories of Contemporary Africa," *The Journal of African History* 43 (2002): 17.

invaluable and underutilised historical sources.[50] Even with the abovementioned

problems, the newspapers that I examined still allow me to engage with the question of

how African states were positioning themselves in relation to questions about food, aid,

hunger and agriculture. And while direct challenges to the state are absent in many of the

newspapers which I examined, the editors of some papers, especially the *Punch* and to a

lesser degree the *Kenya Times* had a fairly wide berth in being able to run commentaries

that criticised governments (if not always their own). Moreover, my sources provide a

valuable lens onto the ways in which urban Africans thought and spoke about their rural

compatriots.

This thesis is divided into four sections. The first examines African debates over

the causes of mass hunger in Ethiopia and across Africa in 1984-1985. The second

section examines African debates over the question of how to solve the problem of mass

hunger. Part III deals with African discourses about food aid, and Part IV looks at African

responses to Western rock fundraisers such as Live Aid. In examining African coverage

of the Ethiopian famine, the broader African food security crisis and the West's reactions

to African mass hunger, the production and consumption of food emerge as important

locations for political discourse; what also emerges are the ways in which Africans saw

themselves—and each other—at a time when much of the rest of the world often saw

them, often uncritically, as famine victims.

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[50] Ellis, "Writing Histories of Contemporary Africa," 16.

## HUNGER AND FAMINE IN AFRICA, 1984-85: EXPLANATIONS

On 11 February 1985, Ethiopia's political leader, Chairman Mengistu Haile Miriam, outlined a plan to help Ethiopia deal with the famine that was affecting the north of the country. He announced a ban on the importation of foreign goods, fuel rationing, and the earmarking of foreign exchange from coffee sales for famine relief. Mengistu told his people that while demographics, economics and "internal revolt" contributed to the severity of the famine, the real problem was that Ethiopian farmers were "not producing enough." Moreover, Mengistu blamed his country's problems on "internal and external reactionaries," though he did not elaborate on the question of who those reactionaries were.[1]

In blaming Ethiopia's famine on the fact that farmers were not producing enough food and foregrounding the alleged role of the country's enemies in creating the famine while minimising the effects of civil war and Ethiopia's economic policies on the country's food security, Mengistu was following an extreme version of a script that shaped most official African explanations for the Ethiopian famine and the broader African food security crisis of the mid 1980s. As many of Africa's political leaders and media commentators sought to explain rampant food security problems, they proceeded from the underlying assumption that the root of the problem of African hunger was agricultural underproduction, and that the food shortages resulting from underproduction were a consequence of Africa's development being stunted by colonialism and neocolonialism. In this way, food was intimately tied to sovereignty: if Africa could simply produce more food, the continent could ensure its independence from a global

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[1] "Support Anti-Drought Effort," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 11 February 1985.

system that had limited its capacity to feed its population.

This reasoning obscured the ways in which access to food is tied to social position and political power. Framing the food crisis as a technical problem of underproduction and not a political question of entitlement engendered proposals to increase production, as opposed to plans to tackle economic inequality. Western coverage of the Ethiopian famine and high-profile fundraisers such as Live Aid all too often portrayed Africa as an undifferentiated mass of starving people, obscuring the continent's social and political divides. Much in the same way, African discourses which assumed that increased net production would automatically ensure universal food security did little to engage with the question why some groups were starving while others continued to eat.

This chapter examines African explanations for mass hunger in Ethiopia and the rest of the continent in 1984-85. A detailed examination of the specific factors underlying hunger in each of the more than twenty countries that experienced varying degrees of food insecurity is beyond the scope of this project. Rather, I attempt to contextualise the main themes that unified African explanations for mass hunger while presenting those explanations that challenged dominant views on the question of why people were going hungry. While explanations which focused on the role of external forces in creating African food insecurity dominated official discourses about famine, many of the newspapers which I examined presented analyses that complicated those discourses, taking African governments to task for their roles in creating food insecurity, often blaming them for perpetuating colonial approaches to agricultural policy.

*ETHIOPIA: POLITICS, FAMINE AND DEVELOPMENT*

This project is not directly about the Ethiopian famine, but about what discourses generated by the famine can tell us about food and politics in Africa. Nonetheless, in

order to understand those discourses, a certain amount of background on Ethiopian history and politics is necessary.[2] News of the famine came to light following celebrations marking the tenth anniversary of the 1974 revolution that had toppled Emperor Haile Selassie from power. The Ethiopian revolution had its roots in part in a desire on the part of Ethiopia's urban elites—notably students, intellectuals and certain elements of the armed forces—to have the power to implement their broad visions for the country's development.[3]

Ethiopia, in the years following the Second World War, had seen a certain amount of development and modernisation, but most of the resulting improvements to the country's infrastructures were overwhelmingly limited to the capital and a few urban centres in the provinces.[4] The 1960s saw increasing radicalism at Haile Selassie I University (renamed after the revolution to Addis Ababa University). Students began to see the Selassie regime as reactionary and a tool of American imperialism. Moreover, they saw the country's traditional landowning class as being exploitative of the peasantry.[5] Economic shocks tied to the 1973 oil crisis were compounded by drought and famine in the northern provinces of Shewa, Wollo and Tigre. Harold Marcus writes that the failure of the Selassie regime to do anything for famine victims was proof that "the Emperor's government was neither humane nor competent enough to meet the needs of millions of its impoverished subjects."[6] A series of mounting actions against the state by students (often bearing placards with slogans such as "Land for the Tiller," revealing a

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[2] For recent histories of Ethiopia, see: Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991* (Oxford: James Currey, 1991); Paul B. Henze, *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); *Harold* G. Marcus [1994], *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, updated edition, 2002); Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
[3] Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 172.
[4] Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 164.
[5] Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 175-176.
[6] Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 180.

strong sense of rural discontent at Ethiopia's traditional landowning class), teachers and taxi drivers was followed by soldiers and non-commissioned officers arresting their military superiors in order to protest poor conditions (especially food) and low pay. A hasty series of imperial reforms failed to quell radical junior officers' mounting dissent against the regime, and on 27 June 1974 a group of these officers constituted themselves as the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, or more commonly, the Derg.[7] Selassie's government began to crumble as the Derg ordered the arrest of senior officials, and on 12 September, after the broadcast of a British documentary about the famine in the north of the country which contrasted images of mass starvation with images of imperial opulence, including Selassie feeding his dogs from silver platters, the Emperor was deposed and placed under arrest.[8] General Aman Andom, seen as a moderate within the Derg, was named the new head of state, but was himself deposed two months later and Mengistu Haile Miriam, a young major who was one of two vice-chairmen of the Derg, began his ascent to absolute power in Ethiopia.

After the Derg seized power, public debate was centered on the question of what the new regime would do to improve peasants' land situation.[9] On 20 December 1974, the Derg officially declared Ethiopia to be a socialist state, and a series of 1975 reforms carried out under the slogan "*Ityopya tikdem*" ("Ethiopia first") saw the nationalisation of banking and industry and the abolition of private land ownership. Peasants were given usufruct rights on holdings limited to less than ten hectares. The abolition of landlords was accompanied by the creation of 30 000 peasants' associations (as well as urban versions of these called *kebeles*). The creation of these associations increased the reach of

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[7] Amharic for "committee."
[8] On the documentary, see: Harrison and Palmer, *News out of Africa*, 44-66.
[9] Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 241.

the central government into the countryside. The process of better incorporating the

provinces into the central administration was also facilitated by the implementation of the

*zemacha* campaign, which sent students out into the provinces to promote Marxist-

Leninist doctrine and to enact literacy, health, and land reform programmes.[10]

Even though the Derg adopted a hard-line Marxist orientation, for the first few

years of the revolution the regime continued to enjoy American support, in no small part

because the U.S. had an electronic listening base at Kagnew, near Asmara.[11] However, in

1977, as new satellite technology was making the Kagnew base redundant, Ethiopian

human rights violations led the Carter administration to distance itself from Mengistu.

Ethiopia, needing more arms to fight Eritrean secessionist forces as well as an invasion

by Somalia tied to irredentist desires on the Ogaden region in south-western Ethiopia,

finally broke with Washington and sought closer ties with the USSR. These geopolitical

manoeuvrings would have a profound effect on Ethiopian development and on the

humanitarian response to the 1984-85 famine (discussed in Part III of this thesis).

While the Soviets provided the Derg with the military aid that it wanted, they did little to

invest in agricultural or industrial development even as Western development funding to

Ethiopia declined.[12] The first decade of the Derg's rule in Ethiopia was marked by

declining agricultural production, declining exports, increased military spending and

tumbling foreign currency reserves. By 1978, the Derg found that it needed to recreate

the mechanisms of surplus extraction that had been lost with the land reforms; they thus

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[10] For the relationship between the Ethiopian state and the country's rural areas, see: Christopher Clapham, "Controlling Space in Ethiopia," in *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After*, ed. Wendy James, Donald L. Donham, Eisei Kurimoto, Alessandro Triulzi (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 9-36. For how the revolution was experienced at a local level, see: Donald L. Donham, *Marxist Modern: an Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999).
[11] Henze, *Layers of Time*, 297-299.
[12] Henze, *Layers of Time*, 306-307.

created the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC), which imposed quotas from the regional level right down to the individual farmer. The administrative structures brought about through the land reforms were so efficient that the AMC was even able to extract grain from farmers during food shortages; peasants would sell livestock to buy grain on the open market to hand over in order to meet their quotas. The tensions created by the new marketing policies contributed to peasants withdrawing from the marketing system and instead practicing subsistence agriculture.[13] While tenants and the landless had benefited from the end of landlordism, measures intended to regulate farming, including state control of marketing, the fixing of commodity prices, collectivisation and ultimately forced resettlement and villagisation became important factors in the Derg losing the support of Ethiopian peasants and the strengthening of rebel groups active in the north of the country, including the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF).[14]

Broadly speaking, the origins of the 1984-1985 famine may be traced to the failure of the spring *belg* rains in the north of the country in 1983; the subsequent failure of the fall *meher* rains later that year and then the 1984 *belg* rains meant that the northern provinces faced three consecutive crop failures. According to Dawit Wolde Giordis, at the time the head of Ethiopia's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), by the spring

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[13] Christopher Clapham, "Controlling Space in Ethiopia," 15-16.

[14] Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 243; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 291-292. On the Eritrean revolution, see: Dan Connell, *Taking on the Superpowers: Collected Articles on the Eritrean Revolution, 1976-1982* (Trenton, NJ : Red Sea Press, 2003), and *Building a New Nation: Collected Articles on the Eritrean Revolution, 1983-2002* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2004); Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism, 1941-1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).On the Tigrean revolution, see: James Firebrace and Gayle Smith, *The Hidden Revolution: An Analysis of Social Change in Tigray (Northern Ethiopia) Based on Eyewitness Accounts* (London: War on Want, 1982); Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes: A Chronicle of the Revolution in Tigray, Ethiopia, 1975-1991* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1999); John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1974-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

of 1984, some 16 000 people a week were dying of conditions related to starvation in the

north of Ethiopia.[15] The beginning of the crisis in 1983 was actually preceded by several

years of declining rainfall and production: the RRC had previously raised warnings about

persistent drought and impending food shortages in various regions of Ethiopia in May

1981 and again in 1982 and 1983.[16] However, the Derg was anxious to have nothing

interfere with massive celebrations scheduled to mark the tenth anniversary of the

revolution in September 1984. The government did little to appeal for humanitarian aid,

prevented foreign reporters from visiting the famine-struck regions and put up roadblocks

around Addis Ababa in order to prevent famine victims from entering the city. It was only

after Buerk and Amin got to Korem with the aid of Oxfam aid workers that the story of

famine in northern Ethiopia became worldwide news.

*ETHIOPIA: EXPLAINING FAMINE*

Drought and famine are common in Ethiopia. The country typically experiences seven

major droughts a century, although desertification and changing weather patterns have led

to an upswing in the occurrence of drought in recent decades.[17] From 1888-1892 the

"Great Famine" killed one in three Ethiopians, and between 1958 and 1977, anywhere

from two to five million Ethiopians died from conditions related to drought, poor harvests

and famine. In 1972-1973, a famine which may have killed a half a million people across

the Horn of Africa killed one hundred thousand Ethiopians between April and November

1973 alone.[18]

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[15] Dawit, *Red Tears*, 121-133.
[16] Dawit, *Red Tears*, 122; B.G. Kumar, "Ethiopian Famines 1973-1985: A Case-Study," in *The Economics of Famine*, ed. Jean Dreze, (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1999), 428-430.
[17] Edmond J. Keller, "Drought, War, and the Politics of Famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30(1992), 609.
[18] On the "Great Famine" see: Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (New York: Verso Press, 2000); Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and*

The economist B.G. Kumar, following the analytic framework of Amartya Sen, sees the Ethiopian famine as an economic disaster and not a simple crisis of food availability. According to Sen, a focus on food availability does not tell us why starvation occurs when there is no decline in the amount of available food, or why some groups starve while others continue eating.[19] While Kumar concedes that food shortages played a crucial role in the Ethiopian famine, he argues that the effects of these shortages still played themselves out through what Sen calls "food entitlements"—briefly put, the amount of food a person is able to obtain through labour or trade.[20] Because most Ethiopians relied on subsistence farming or agricultural employment in order to attain their food entitlements, production declines resulted in a loss of entitlements for people with reduced access to cash. Production shortfalls forced subsistence farmers to become market-dependent for food just as farmers with surpluses were keeping those surpluses off the market for their own consumption, driving up prices.[21] Meanwhile, the Derg was seizing any available food for urban markets, a key element underpinning the famine that Kumar does not mention.

The question of how some groups starve while others continue eating is central to David Keen's framing of famine as a political process with particular beneficiaries, including governments using hunger as a weapon against political enemies and merchants

*Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1989), 255-257; Richard Pankhurst, "The History of Famine in Ethiopia," in *Africa beyond Famine: A Report to the Club of Rome*, ed. Aklilu Lemma and Pentti Malaska, (London: Tycooly Publishing, 1989), 135-148. On the 1970s famine, see: Dawit, *Red Tears*, 257-261; B.G. Kumar, "Ethiopian Famines 1973-1985: A Case-Study," in *The Economics of Famine*, ed. Jean Dreze, (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1999), 411-454; Jack Shepherd. *The Politics of Starvation* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1975).

[19] Kumar, "Ethiopian Famines," 412.

[20] A complete discussion of Sen's notion of entitlements and the debates which it has engendered is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. For a good analysis, see Meghnad Desai, "The Economics of Famine," in *Famine*, G.A. Harrison, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 107-138.

[21] Kumar, "Ethiopian Famines," 439.

profiting from rising food prices.[22] In this light, Alex de Waal calls the Ethiopian famine

"a major policy success" for the Derg.[23] He argues that the famine was caused by the

Derg's ongoing struggle with rebel groups in the north of the country: drought and

poverty contributed to the severity of the famine, but did not cause it. De Waal instead

cites the Derg's military actions against the TPLF, including offensives in surplus-

producing areas, the bombing of markets, restrictions on movement, resettlement

programs which displaced labour from rebel areas and the manipulation of relief as the

principle causes of the famine.[24] This analysis is reinforced by statements from the

various Ethiopian rebel movements, who alleged that the central government had

committed serious human rights violations centered on food. EPLF statements from

October 1984 accused the Derg of using food aid to force people into the army and

destroying crops to force people into government-controlled areas. A joint statement from

the TPLF and the Oromo Liberation Front (a rebel group in the south of the country) the

following month charged the Derg with destroying crops and cattle in order to subdue

rebellious areas.[25]

Ethiopia's civil wars need to be understood in their economic, environmental and

political contexts. In his analysis of the environmental roots of the famine, Alemneh

Dejene quotes a report from the World Commission on the Environment stating that

"poverty is a major cause and effect of global environmental problems." Alemneh's

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[22] David Keen, *The Benefits of Famine: A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983-1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 1-7.

[23] Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 132.

[24] De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 112-121. While de Waal's analysis is focused on Tigre and Wollo, the situation was similar in Eritrea, where the Derg used similar methods in its struggle with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF).

[25] Jason W. Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine, 1984-1985* (Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival, 1986), 44-45.

analysis demonstrates how poor agricultural practices which degrade farmer's physical environments both arise from, and cause, food insecurity. However, Alemneh sees war as something separate from the ecological and economic issues that make up the heart of his analysis, writing only that war is "devastating to peasant agriculture," and "fuelled by regional and local politics."[26] James McCann ties ecology and economics to the nationalist and secessionist wars in Tigre and Eritrea, showing how these conflicts arose over access to resources: by the 1950s, Ethiopia was caught in "Malthusian scissors" as productivity stagnated while population increased. "Drought and political change," McCann writes, "set these fundamentals in stark relief."[27]

Other scholars point to the role of Derg centralisation policies in alienating rural Ethiopians and undermining their productive capabilities: Steven Varnis sees the famine as the result of revolutionary policies that the Derg was "ill-equipped" to enact.[28] Edmond Keller writes that the Derg was "more interested in pursuing a political agenda of statist control rather than a strategy designed to achieve food security."[29] Christopher Clapham argues that along with negatively impacting agricultural production, land reforms that liberated peasants from predatory landlords also created administrative structures which better incorporated rural areas into national frameworks, "capturing" the peasantry and making them more vulnerable to the extractions of the state.[30] Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb's research among Ethiopian refugees in Sudan in 1984-85 confirm

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[26] Alemneh Dejene, *Environment, Famine and Politics in Ethiopia: A View from the Village* (Boulder: Lynne Reiner, 1990), 1; 88.

[27] James McCann, "A Great Agrarian Cycle? Productivity in Highland Ethiopia, 1900 to 1987." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 20 (1990): 396.

[28] Steven Varnis, *Reluctant Aid or Aiding the Reluctant? U.S. Food Aid Policy and Ethiopian Famine Relief* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 21.

[29] Keller, "Drought, War, and the Politics of Famine," 623.

[30] Christopher Clapham, "Controlling Space in Ethiopia," in *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After*, ed. Wendy James, Donald L. Donham, Eisei Kurimoto, Alessandro Triulzi (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 15.

these analyses, revealing that most of the refugees blamed their plight on centralisation policies, land redistribution, grain and livestock confiscations, and the coercion of labour, as well as military actions which worsened the effects of drought.[31]

Western coverage of the Ethiopian famine tended to blame weather, Malthusian demographics, war and the Derg's Marxism for the horrible pictures coming out of places like Korem. While African coverage would sometimes evoke the first two themes, direct criticism of the Derg's role in causing famine was muted, though not completely silenced. The spirit of pan-African unity which defined the November OAU summit was reflected in coverage that was generally sympathetic to the Derg's position. This was especially so in Tanzania, where the country's historic commitment to socialism combined with pan-African unity to shape official views of Ethiopia's Marxist regime. However, even in cases where newspapers were directly controlled by the state, as they were in Tanzania, the realities of newspaper publishing in 1980s Africa meant that a variety of contrasting and conflicting explanations of the situation in Ethiopia helped to shape public awareness of the issue.

Relying mostly on official statements from the Derg, Tanzania's *Daily News'* coverage of the Ethiopian famine blatantly overlooked the regime's responsibility for mass hunger and deflected blame for the famine onto the country's internal and external "enemies." The paper portrayed the Derg as a government that was doing its best given the circumstances it faced, noting that Haile Selassie had left behind a poorly-managed economy, poor agricultural practices and infrastructure, and the "complete disintegration of ties" between the country's urban and rural regions.[32] In April, the paper reported that

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[31] Clay, Holcomb, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine*, 189-193.
[32] Georgi Galerpin, "Onslaught on Famine and Drought," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 6 January 1985.

Mengistu had accused the West of forcing Ethiopians, "under the cover of providing food aid," to flee to Sudan and that "imperialist forces" were trying to tear the country apart by backing secessionist movements. The paper also reported that Mengistu blamed "secessionists and supporters of reaction" for putting up "immense obstacles...through international financial and development organisations" to Ethiopia's development.[33] In a twist on analyses which frame the Derg as having taken advantage of the famine in order to use hunger as a weapon, the *Daily News* quoted Mengistu, addressing a graduating class of military cadets, calling for "vigilance to stop Ethiopia's enemies from using the drought to achieve their ends."[34]

Like all of the newspapers I examined, the *Daily News* provided little coverage on the actual fighting in Ethiopia. However, those articles that did cover the wars presented the Derg in a favourable light. One analysis framed the civil wars in terms of Ethiopia facing "so-called fighters for freedom" who had attacked aid convoys, sabotaged irrigation systems, poisoned wells, destroyed crops and attacked refugee camps.[35] Yet while the *Daily News* portrayed Ethiopia's rebels as predatory, it applauded the Derg's formation of "a wide front of struggle against drought and famine."[36]

Part of the Derg's "wide front" in the war against famine was the institution of a massive resettlement programme which the regime claimed was intended to move people

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[33] "'Enemies Force Hungry to Sudan," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 10 April 1985.
[34] "Mengistu Calls for Vigilance," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 4 February 1985.
[35] Georgi Galerpin, "Onslaught on Famine and Drought," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 6 January 1985. Ethiopia's rebel groups did in fact target humanitarian activities in at least two documented cases. In October 1984 the TPLF kidnapped aid workers at Lalibela and in 1987 (some two years *after* the *Daily News* reported on Derg allegations) the EPLF attacked an aid convoy. However, rebel atrocities paled in comparison to the Derg's systematic abuses of food and food aid. On the TPLF's actions in Lalibela, see: Graham Hancock, *Ethiopia: The Challenge of Hunger* (London: Victor Gallancz, 1985), 27. On the EPLF's aid convoy attack, see: Robert D. Kaplan, (1988) *Surrender or Starve: Travels in Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 79
[36] Georgi Galerpin, "Onslaught on Famine and Drought," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 6 January 1985.

from the parched north to more fertile land in the south of the country. Controversial at the time, subsequent scholarship has gone on to show that the resettlement of thousands of Ethiopians was what would today be termed ethnic cleansing, enacted through coercion and leading to the deaths of some 100 000 people.[37] Clay and Holcomb call the resettlement programme a way to take "people who have been problematic to the ruling regime" and make them "dependent on the central state by being placed into regions where residents are predictably hostile to newcomers."[38] The nature of Ethiopian resettlement plans—and the brutality of the methods used to implement them—were no secret. David Rieff, a noted critic of liberal humanitarian interventionism, points out that reports about raids on refugee camps and feeding centres to seize people for resettlement "appeared widely in the press in western Europe and North America during the high-water mark of Live Aid euphoria."[39] In contrast, in January, the *Daily News* quoted Dawit Wolde Giordis, the head of Ethiopia's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), as saying that plans "to resettle 1.5 million of 7.7 million people affected by drought [was] not political and that a small percentage of people in rebellious areas [were] involved."[40] A *Daily News* report from May 1985 detailing the Derg's long-term plans for Wollo province quoted a senior Ethiopian aid official (possibly Dawit) as saying that "the government's only alternative to long-term food aid dependency" was resettlement.[41] The paper also gave a prominent place to Ethiopian denials of the BBC's broadcasting of "malicious propaganda" claiming that Red Cross relief workers had

[37] Keller, "Drought, War, and the Politics of Famine," 621. On the resettlement program, see: Dawit (who claims only 20 000 died as a result of resettlement), *Red Tears*, 281-305; Peter Niggli, *Ethiopia: Deportations and Forced-Labour Camps* (Berlin: Berliner Missionswerk, 1986).
[38] Clay, Holcomb, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine*, 26.
[39] David Rieff, "Cruel to be Kind?" *Guardian*, 24 June 2005. Internet: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/jun/24/g8.debtrelief. Accessed 20 June, 2008.
[40] "Ethiopia Seeks Long-Term Solution," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 22 January 1985.
[41] "Sudan Must Outlaw Bandits – Mengistu," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 2 May 1985.

witnessed Ethiopian soldiers taking 200 people at gunpoint from a ration delivery site to be forcibly resettled.[42]

However, the *Daily News'* pro-Derg position was complicated by the fact that the paper regularly ran articles and commentaries that were highly critical of the Derg and its role in creating famine, more accurately reflecting the regime's responsibility. But while pieces written by *Daily News* journalists were without exception pro-Derg, analyses which criticised the Ethiopian regime all came from Western wire services. In the 1980s, African papers relied on Western sources for 60-70% of their content.[43] A casual survey of the datelines in the newspapers which make up the source material for the present study shows this to be a roughly accurate estimate of the ratio of Western-sourced articles to locally-sourced articles about the famine appearing in those papers. The fact that Western analyses made up an important proportion of what the *Daily News'* readership consumed in terms of coverage of the famine is in itself not remarkable. What is noteworthy are the ways in which this coverage challenged the fundamental assumptions underlying the *Daily News'*—and the Tanzanian government's—position on the Derg. During the famine, the *Daily News* ran several analyses from Great Britain's Gemini news service which blamed the Derg for causing famine. One argued that the Derg "[had] clearly been guilty of underestimating the seriousness of the situation and acting far too slowly," while another pointed out that "the behaviour of the Ethiopian government has done tremendous harm to the cause of the suffering people."[44] The paper's coverage of Live Aid, also from Gemini, contained strident critiques of Derg abuses, faulting the

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[42] "Support Anti-Drought Effort," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 11 February, 1985.
[43] Kevin Cavanagh, "Freeing the Pan-African News Agency," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 27 (1989): 356.
[44] Daniel Nelson, "World Disasters: Rising Toll." *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 15 November 1984; Derek Ingram, "The Case for Checking Mass Starvation," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 22 February 1985.

regime for blocking aid to rebel areas and for imposing import duties on food aid and suggesting that the rest of the world should "bully" the Derg into allowing aid to reach rebel areas.[45]

Unfortunately, I was unable to find any examples of Tanzanians' reactions to these contradictory messages. While a lack of editorial resources forced the *Daily News* to run material that challenged its stated position on the Ethiopian regime, the paper never opened its pages up to debate about the meanings of these contradictory messages. This is an area where further research is needed, either through examining the Swahili-language press or, more perhaps more fruitfully, through the use of oral sources.

Unlike in the Tanzanian case, the press in other African countries did occasionally give voice to locally-sourced analyses and commentaries which were critical of the Ethiopian regime and its role in creating famine. In Kenya, Sylvia Fraser of Thika wrote to the *Standard* to berate the Derg for holding lavish celebrations of the revolution's anniversary while people were starving.[46] An editorial in Nigeria's *Daily Times* called Ethiopia's "war economy" a "sorry mess" and attacked the Derg for "propping up communism" and for "[bartering] Ethiopian goods for Soviet guns."[47] Nigeria's *Punch* was often stridently critical of Mengistu and the Derg. One editorial pointed out that Ethiopia spent enough on its military "to revolutionise agriculture and feed the people three times over"; columnist Gordon Tialobi chastised the Derg for importing large amounts of whiskey for celebrations of the revolution's anniversary.[48] The paper also staged a mock trial of Mengistu in its pages, charging the Ethiopian leader with bearing

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[45] "Shaming the World's Governments," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 6 August 1985.
[46] Sylvia U. Fraser, letter to the *Standard* (Nairobi), 5 November 1984.
[47] "Tales from Ethiopia," *Daily Times* (Lagos), 22 December 1984.
[48] "Drought and Death in Ethiopia, *Punch* (Ikeja, Nigeria), 8 November 1984; Gordon Tialobi; "What Next After Ethiopia?" *Punch* (Ikeja, Nigeria), 14 November, 1984.

full responsibility for the famine and for snubbing Western offers of help for ideological reasons.[49]

Notwithstanding comments like those above, African analyses of the situation in Ethiopia tended to put pan-African unity before holding the Derg responsible for creating and taking advantage of famine. As explanations for the situation in Ethiopia expanded to examine the more generalised food crisis, state officials were even more careful to avoid blaming contemporary policies for creating the conditions that led to hunger and famine. However, as I discuss below, many media commentators used ongoing mass hunger as a launching pad for strident critiques of the failure of independent African states to bring about economic development and equality.

*EXPLAINING AFRICAN FOOD INSECURITY, 1984-85.*

On 27 November 1984, a front-page commentary in the *Daily News* took a chastising tone, telling the nation that "we have known all along that had we fully geared ourselves up for near-food self-sufficiency at home, we would have been spared the embarrassment of looking for food support, let alone spending foreign exchange on food import."[50] In a January interview with West German television, Nyerere argued that African underdevelopment, "corruption and inefficiency" were legacies of the colonial past and the results of current trade terms which "ensured the transfer of resources from the poor in the South to the rich North."[51] These two statements pointed to the intertwined themes which guided official explanations for the African food security crisis for which the Ethiopian famine acted as a stand-in: agricultural underdevelopment as a result of

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[49] Dayo Adeyeye, "The Trial of Comrade Mengistu," *Punch* (Ikeja, Nigeria), 6 May 1985. While the paper invited its readership to write in to deliberate the verdict, I was unable to locate any responses to the article.
[50] "Comment," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 27 November 1984.
[51] "'Africa Needs Marshall Plan,'" *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 23 January 1985.

Africa's colonial past and the continent's continued marginality in the global economy. Philip Mbithi, the chair of Kenya's National Council for Population and Development, told a conference on demographics and food security that Europe "would have gone through the same path" that Africa was currently on if it had not had new lands to colonise.[52] A Nairobi resident using the pseudonym of "Concerned *Mwananchi*" wrote to the *Times* to blame the West for setting unfair trade terms and forcing African governments to devalue currencies, which led to poverty and hunger when prices paid for exports fell below production costs.[53]

Analyses which focus on underdevelopment as a historical phenomenon serve an important ideological purpose, isolating developing world governments from being criticised for their populations' poverty and obscuring the role of social and political divides in perpetuating economic inequality. Gupta writes the framing of the developing as being stuck in an underdeveloped past not only creates the need to help the rural poor "develop," it facilitates official denials that poverty and economic underdevelopment are the result of current policies which reproduce social inequality.[54] Michael Ford and Frank Holmquist argue that Western coverage of the Ethiopian famine "[reinforced] the belief that uniquely poor policy, mismanagement, and simple veniality" were to blame for the crisis. While they urge the reader not to discount African responsibility for African hunger, they point out that we must "guard against the old racist assumption that Africa is simply incapable of doing anything right." Instead of focusing on supposed African incompetence, they add, what needs to be examined are the ways in which food crises

[52] Enos Nyagah, "Africa's Woes Blamed on Developed World Problems," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 14 May 1985.
[53] "Concerned Mwananchi," letter to the *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 15 January 1985.
[54] Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 10.

have "a lot to do with who has power and who does not."[55]

No matter the context of a food security crisis, governments are responsible for their citizens' hunger: As Sen writes, "there is...no such thing as an apolitical food problem."[56] Food security is strongly tied to power: Varnis writes that it is "embedded in the structure and processes of nation building and social development, as the segments and classes of society struggle for food security."[57] Food figures prominently in Jean-Francois Bayart's analysis of the African state, writing that his evocative term describing the exercise of political power in Africa, "the politics of the belly," "refers chiefly to the food shortages which are still so much a part of life in Africa." Key to Bayart's *longue durée* analysis of the state in Africa is his historicisation of the networks of accumulation and patronage that he sees as shaping the exercise of African politics, in that access to resources "[opens] up possibilities of social mobility."[58] With food, this can happen via the manipulation of humanitarian aid by states to achieve political goals and for the enrichment of government officials, or through agricultural development schemes which play important roles in enabling the state to act as "a major manufacturer of inequality."[59]

Michael Lofchie points to urban bias in food pricing policies as an important element in explaining hunger in Africa. He also lists the overvaluation of many African currencies, the important role of parastatal corporations in African economies, the popularity of development policies which favoured industrialisation and import

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[55] Michael Ford, Frank Holmquist, "Crisis and State Reform," in *Coping with Africa's Food Crisis*, ed. Naomi Chazan and Timothy Shaw (Boulder: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 1988), 214.
[56] Quoted in Naomi Chazan and Timothy Shaw, "The Political Economy of Food in Africa," in *Coping with Africa's Food Crisis*, ed. Naomi Chazan and Timothy Shaw (Boulder: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 1988), 2.
[57] Varnis, *Reluctant Aid*, 7
[58] Jean-Francois Bayart, [1989] *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, trans. Mary Harper, Christopher and Elizabeth Harrison, (New York: Longman 1993), xviii.
[59] Bayart, *The State in Africa*, 60

substitution and finally, what he sees as Africa's "inability to respond flexibly to changing market conditions by introducing new high demand crops or more productive varieties of old ones" as other important internal elements underlying food insecurity. In terms of external factors Lofhie lists: poor trading terms for agricultural exports; shrinking demand for exports such as cocoa and coffee and the development of synthetic substitutes for rubber, sugar and cotton; rising oil prices; protectionist policies in the developed world; and financial concerns including the high value of American dollar and rising interest rates.[60] Naomi Chazan and Timothy Shaw add poorly-conceived and implemented development policies, the predominance of cashcropping, official corruption and the disregard of women's agricultural contributions as important factors at in causing African hunger in the mid-1980s.[61] African examinations of the causes of the continent's food crisis invoked many of these factors. However, production shortfalls tied to the underdevelopment of African agriculture as a legacy of the either the colonial past or contemporary neoimperialism typically came to the fore in many discourses about the reasons for mass hunger, especially in statements from political leaders.

Analyses which sought to blame the West for the continent's food problems often singled out cash cropping—an important part of colonial farming policies—for its negative effects on African food economies. Nigeria's *Daily Times* noted that Guinea Bissau grew peanuts for export while children suffered from protein deficiency and that Zimbabwe had record tobacco harvests yet imported maize: Julia Tagwireyi, a Zimbabwean Department of Health official, told the *Kenya Times* that malnutrition was

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[60] Michael F. Lofchie, "Africa's Agricultural Crisis, an Overview," in Africa's *Agrarian Crisis: The Roots of Famine*, ed. Stephen K Commins, Michael F. Lofchie and Rhys Payne (Boulder: Lynne Reiner, 1986), 7-11.

[61] Chazan and Shaw, "The Political Economy of Food in Africa," 2.

most severe among the children of commercial farmers because of cash crops.[62]

Newspapers gave prominent coverage to reports by international agencies that criticised cashcropping, such as one by Oxfam which found that export-oriented agriculture failed to allow Africa's poor farmers to feed themselves or their countries.[63]

Along with the effects of cashcropping on African agricultural development, some African analyses tied the environmental degradation that was widely seen as an important factor in agricultural underproduction to Africa's place in the global economy. Some explanations simply blamed the famine on drought without exploring the deeper implications of the relationship between the two phenomena. An editorial in the *Daily News* noted that "acute food shortages" were "caused mainly by bad weather"; Nyerere remarked to the OAU that drought was "a widespread visitation against which we can only pray."[64] In fact, in the months before the famine became international news, Africa's political leaders did not seem to see the environment and its relationship to food security as a crucial political issue. In February 1984 the OAU, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the FAO, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) co-sponsored a conference in Addis Ababa on African environmental issues. While the conference adopted a plan to fight effects of drought on the continent, the journalist Odungo Nyang'ayo pointed out that the meeting was "a major disappointment," citing the fact that only 23 of 50 OAU member states had sent representatives to the conference, and most of these were diplomats already based in

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[62] John Tanner, "Real Cause of Hunger," *Daily Times* (Lagos), 14 November 1984, 18; Sheila Bassopo-Moyo, "Cash Crops: Planting the Seeds of a Dietary Disaster," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 21 May 1985.
[63] "Food Production Alone no Solution to Hunger," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 3 June 1985.
[64] Comment, *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 24 January 1985; Julius Nyerere, "Let's Safeguard Unity," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 14 November 1984.

Addis Ababa and not heads of state.[65]

However, as McCann and Alemneh demonstrate, environmental concerns have political and economic causes and ramifications. The relationship between politics, food security and environmental concerns came to the fore in several instances during the time when the famine was dominating the world's headlines. Analyses by the British environmental NGO Earthscan that presented African ecological questions in a political framework appeared regularly in the *Standard* and the *Daily News*. One of these called 1984 "the year when Nature announced it had had enough," but blamed the famine in Ethiopia not simply on drought as a natural disaster, but on drought arising from "deforestation due to poor land management," putting policy, and not weather, at the forefront of its analysis.[66]

In at least one instance, the environmental concerns at the heart of many analyses of food insecurity were framed as a consequence of economic inequality between Africa and the West. The *Kenya Times* quoted the noted Indian journalist and activist Anil Agarwal arguing that if African farmers had a negative impact on their environment, it was because the forces that led to poor farming practices were "the same forces as those which, at the global level, create the imbalance between North and South, rich and poor." Agarwal argued that the environmental degradation that many were blaming for catastrophes like the Ethiopian famine was caused in no small part by over-consumption by the world's wealthy nations: "What I have seen is that the ecological infrastructure is not threatened by the poor. It is the wealthy and their consumption patterns—despite the 'liberal' view that it is the poor using the ecology much more intensely." The solution to

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[65] Odungo Nyang'ayo, "Why Africa's Environment Needs Serious Attention," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 2 January 1985.
[66] Lloyd Timberlake, "Nature Takes Revenge," *Standard* (Nairobi), 24 December 1984.

the problem as Agarwal saw it was land reform to ensure that small farmers controlled the land that they farmed. As this was unlikely, he concluded, "despite decolonisation, Third World land" would continue to be used "to meet consumption in Western countries."[67]

Explanations for African hunger which pointed to the effects of colonialism and neocolonialism on African agricultural development and production drew heavily on the intellectual legacy of the University of Dar es Salaam, where radical scholars such as Walter Rodney, Giovanni Arrighi and John Saul had taught in the 1960s and 70s.[68] The most important touchstone in analyses which sought to frame African hunger as a legacy of colonialism was Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, a work strongly influenced by dependency theory and world systems theory. Rodney argued that the causes of Africa's underdevelopment were not to be found in Africa, but in the continent's historical relationships with imperialists and foreign capitalists. He traced a straight line linking colonialism to contemporary underdevelopment, identifying two main factors behind underdevelopment: the unfair procurement of African resources during the colonial era, and metropolitan restrictions on Africa's economic growth.[69] Agriculture figures prominently in both parts of his analysis. Colonial farm policies which imposed monoculture and cash crops—replacing diversified subsistence agriculture—were an important aspect of imperial plans to extract African resources.[70] Meanwhile, colonialism did little to modernise African agriculture, limiting the

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[67] "Is the West Obliged to Bail out Africa?" *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 6 February 1985.
[68] On the University of Dar es Salaam and Africa in the 1960s and 70s, see: Andrew Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam*, (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming) and David R. Morrison, *Education and Politics in Africa: The Tanzanian Case* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976).
[69] Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1974), 22-25.
[70] Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 157; 234-235

continent's economic growth: Rodney called colonialism's neglect of agricultural technology its greatest failure, famously writing that "the most convincing evidence as to the superficiality of the talk about colonialism having 'modernized' Africa is the fact that the vast majority of Africans went into colonialism with a hoe and came out of it with a hoe."[71] While the Dar es Salaam school of thought provided African political leaders with an easy scapegoat for their countries' food security issues, not all of Africa's commentators accepted the official reading of the situation.

## COMPETING DISCOURSES: BLAMING THE AFRICAN STATE

In contrast to Rodney's view of the effect of colonialism on Africa's agricultural development, Bayart argues that framing Africa's postcolonial political, economic and humanitarian problems as the results of externalities obscures the continent's internal social, political and economic divides. He criticises the application of dependency theory to the African context for "[giving] rise to an increase in dogma and hypocrisy rather than to a careful study of political dynamics" and for "at times refusing to admit that the State had any autonomy in relation to the world economic system."[72] While the application of dependency theory to the development of African agricultural may be problematic, a closer reading of Rodney and his contemporaries shows how African leaders and commentators who borrowed from these writers to frame hunger as the fault of external interventions were in selective in their use of this body of work. Their explanations missed the ways in which Rodney *et. al.* were stridently critical of postcolonial African states and their role in perpetuating the social divides created by colonialism. While these thinkers all saw underdevelopment as a lingering effect of capitalist and imperialist

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[71] Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 219.
[72] Bayart, *The State in Africa*, 5; 7.

interventions, they also all blamed independent African states for reproducing colonial social and economic policies.

Rodney, speaking at a youth conference in Dar es Salaam in 1969, pointed to a gap between African political elites' stated commitments to progressive policies and their political actions. He chastised African governments for being the "beneficiaries, at the expense of Africa's toiling masses, of the 'Briefcase Revolution' which had negotiated an end to colonial rule," and for embracing socialism as "a bush behind which to hide their exploitative tendencies."[73] Like Rodney, Arrighi saw food production as an important element in Africa's economic marginalisation. He pointed out that because multinational corporations saw the economic development of the Third World as a potential threat to their dominant position, they invested in developing African agriculture in such a way that it would "feed the population of the developed capitalist countries" and thus help keep African economies in a dependent position.[74] While this part of his analysis was reflected in many African explanations for the mid-1980s food crisis, what these explanations missed were the ways in which Arrighi tied these investment strategies and their effects on African agricultural development to the fact that independent African governments had perpetuated unfair colonial trading terms: He argued that after decolonisation, independent African governments had switched from economies based on small enterprises to a massive "capital inflow in mining, manufacturing and industrial agriculture."[75] Arrighi and Saul also traced the origins of what they saw as a parasitic urban elite class, which they termed a "labour aristocracy," to the failure of independent

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[73] Quoted in Ivaska, *Cultured States.*
[74] Giovanni Arrighi, "International Corporations, Labor Aristocracies and Economic Development in Tropical Africa," in Giovanni Arrighi and John Saul, *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 106.
[75] Arrighi, "International Corporations," 110.

states to reverse colonial policies, writing that the labour aristocracy arose in great part thanks to the fact that independent states had maintained colonial-era salary structures.[76]

Direct criticisms of postcolonial governments and their roles in creating policies which led to mass hunger did not commonly appear in most of the newspapers which I examined. This was especially true for the *Daily News*, given the fact that Nyerere was an important figure in the anticolonial struggle and the "father of the country." However, two newspapers in particular, the *Kenya Times* and the *Punch*, featured several commentaries that took Africa's post-independence leaders to task for perpetuating underdevelopment, using the ongoing famine in Ethiopia and other food crises as a launching pad for attacks on the postcolonial African state.

Caleb Owiti Okoti of Busia, Kenya wrote to the *Times* and argued that blame "for retarding African advancement" did not just fall on the Western powers, but should be shared by Africans themselves for having "failed to live up to expectations, despite their waking up from the colonial hangover 2 ½ decades ago."[77] John Gachie, a Kenyan journalist who is now working in Sudan and active with the human rights NGO Article19, was pointed in his criticism of Africa's postcolonial development and the role of state elites in shaping it, writing in the *Times* that the first two decades of African independence were marked by "economic mismanagement, over-borrowing from external sources and poor agricultural policies...uncontrolled corruption, population growth and misplaced faith on wrong development models." Gachie urged governments to enact policies which would "arrest the cruel and biased view against the rural people in favour

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[76] Giovanni Arrighi and John Saul, "Socialism and Development," in Arrighi and Saul, 20-21.
[77] Caleb Owiti Okoti, letter to the *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 15 March 1985.

of the urban population.[78] In a similar vein, James Tumushme of the *Times* blamed

African governments for neglecting agriculture and implementing farm policies "in a

haphazard manner."[79] In Nigeria, Banjo Ogunrosoye argued that successive governments

had not only failed to undo colonialism's damage to Nigerian farming, but had

perpetuated elements of colonial rule by putting the interests of ruling elites above those

of the people. He called Nigerian rice policies "nothing more than a replacement of

colonial strategies by the ruling class in Nigeria…to satisfy their dubious collaboration

with the world rice merchants."[80]

These criticisms demonstrate that, even given all limitations constricting debate in

the African press, African governments were not immune to public criticism directed

towards their shortfalls in ensuring food security. However, while these discourses

challenged governments to do more to meet their obligations to their citizens, what was

missing from discussions over the causes of mass hunger was an engagement with the

question of which particular social groups were bearing the brunt of food insecurity.

While policies ensuring cheaper food in the cities helped ensure that famine remained a

rural phenomenon—although this does not mean that poor urbanites were immune from

food security and nutrition issues—not all rural dwellers in regions facing famine

suffered equally. De Waal shows how in Sudan in 1984, wealth was closely tied to food

security as Darfurians went through a severe drought and famine. Wealthy cattle herders,

knowing that the lack of rains would mean that their herds would be starving to death in a

few months' time, were able to sell off cattle while prices were high. Poor herders who

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[78] John Gachie, "The African Tragedy," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 20 May 1985.
[79] James Tumushme, Mike Njeru, John Mugo, "We Have the Power and the Resources: Why Do We Go Hungry?" *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 25 January 1985.
[80] Banjo Ogunrosoye, "Nigeria's neo-Colonial Food Policies," *Punch* (Ikeja, Nigeria), 7 November, 1984.

did not have excess animals to sell had to retain their herds for as long as possible, going

hungry in the hopes that they could avoid destitution if a few cattle could survive the

famine.[81] Similarly, McCann shows that ownership of oxen was a factor in deciding who

survived the Ethiopian famine.[82] According to Alemneh, larger families with more

dependent children were more likely to be vulnerable to famine in Ethiopia, and farmers

with access to irrigated land, whether inherited in the case of private landowners or as

members of cooperatives, were far less likely to go hungry in famine-stricken areas.[83]

Famine did not strike all Africans equally. However, even those discourses which looked

beyond stock official explanations which blamed the developed world for African hunger

did little to engage with the social and political divides which helped to determine who

would go hungry.

*CONCLUSION*

While explanations for mass hunger which sought to blame the crisis on Africa's

economic and political position vis-à-vis the West were dominant in the newspapers

which I examined, it is clear that even in state-controlled media, dissenting voices were

able to find expression and point to the ways in which Africa's postcolonial leaders had

failed to deliver what they had promised. Yet for the most part, detailed analyses of how

that failure impacted particular social and political groups by undermining their food

security were absent from the sources which I examined. Thus, while we can see the

existence of public debate over the question of why parts of Africa as a whole were

starving, there is little evidence to indicate the existence of a sustained public debate over

why mass hunger was affecting particular parts of the continent's population. This

[81] De Waal, Alex, *Famine that Kills: Darfur, Sudan, 1984-1985* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 162-163.
[82] Quoted in Alemneh, *Environment, Famine and Politics in Ethiopia*, 71.
[83] Alemneh, 32; 77.

obscuring of Africa's political and social divides led to the dominance of "production first" strategies which sought to increase food production on a continent-wide basis but did nothing to deal with the question of unequal food entitlements.

# PART II

## FAMINE: SOLUTIONS

On 8 April 1985, Tanzania's *Daily News* reported that M.S. Swaminathan, the "Father of India's Green Revolution," had told the BBC that within fifteen or twenty years, Africa could be the "world's breadbasket." Swaminathan said that in order for this to happen, African governments needed to look beyond large-scale research, reforestation and water conservation projects; changes in agricultural policies instead needed to be focused on "the needs and desires of the farmers themselves."[1]

This section examines African discourses about potential solutions to the question of widespread food insecurity. These discourses were complex and contradictory, valorising both the need to take a "modern" and "scientific" approach to the question of how to increase food production on the one hand, and "traditional" African food crops on the other. Here we can see how the production and consumption of food become focal points for power relationships, as both modernising and traditionalist approaches to the question of solving food security problems saw the emergence of discourses which reproduced paternalistic attitudes on the part of African urban elites towards the continent's rural population.

During the Ethiopian famine, African newspapers often featured optimistic evaluations of the continent's agricultural potential such as Swaminathan's alongside horrific images from the feeding camps. To most African politicians, agricultural policy experts and media commentators, the obvious remedy to the recurring images of starving children coming out of places like Korem was increased agricultural production. However, while many analyses paid lip service to Swaminathan's urgings to put farmers

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[1] "'Africa Could Feed World,'" *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 8 April 1985.

first, most proposals for unlocking Africa's agricultural potential focused on large-scale commercial farming involving the intensive use of technology such as chemical fertilizers and pesticides and high-yield hybrid drought- and pest- resistant crops. Proposed approaches to solving Africa's food crisis were complex and often contradictory. Swaminathan, while he urged small-scale approaches to developing African agriculture, was himself at the head of an organisation which hoped to use Ethiopia as a foothold for the importation into Africa of high-tech approaches to growing rice. Similarly, while cash cropping was almost universally framed as a colonial legacy which prevented Africans from growing enough to feed themselves, Kenya's agricultural rehabilitation plan encouraged farmers in some districts to switch from producing food to growing cotton: A Ministry of Agriculture official told the *Times*, "it is hoped that instead of selling all their food, the people will sell cotton instead."[2]

Andrew Ivaska suggests that in the 1960s and 70s, the Tanzanian state saw culture as a domain in which it could "perform its own postcoloniality, its difference from its colonial predecessor, at a time when the pressure to produce tangible signs of that difference were immense." These performances helped to blur important continuities between colonial and postcolonial approaches to shaping the content of national culture.[3] African leaders in the mid-1980s were also under immense pressures, both from their constituencies who were demanding solutions to their food security problems and from foreign donor governments who needed to see concrete results in order to justify the continued funding of relief and development operations. Because they were blaming

[2] John Mugo, "The Drought-Relief Scene is not all a Tale of Misery," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 12 February 1985.
[3] Andrew Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam*, (Durham: Duke University Press), forthcoming.

widespread food insecurity on the effects of colonialism and neocolonialism on Africa's

agricultural development, political leaders also needed to be seen as working towards

creating food policies which would ensure national and continental economic

independence. Given these intense pressures, politicians attempted to "produce tangible

signs" that they were making progress on the question of ensuring food security while

maintaining their roles as the defenders of their countries'—and the continent's—

interests. These "tangible signs" often took the shape of policy initiatives which were

variations on the theme of an "African Green Revolution."

*COMMERCIALISATION, MODERNISATION AND PRODUCTION*

In January, Rajab Kondo Rajab, in a letter to the *Daily News*, called the Ethiopian famine

"a warning to every Tanzanian to think of the ways to overcome such calamities, possibly

by increasing productivity in all our economic sectors and the cultivation of drought

resistant crops."[4] This sentiment reflected the way in which governments, media

commentators and agricultural experts from the continent and abroad presented increased

production through the institution of an "African Green Revolution" as the solution to the

problem of hunger and a means to ensure the continent's independence from a world

economy that had stunted its agricultural development. This "Revolution" would come

about with the modernisation of agriculture through a shift to large-scale farming,

increased commercialisation and the intensified use of advanced farming technology,

especially high-yield, drought-resistant hybrid crops. Debates around plans to modernise

African agriculture in this manner exposed tensions between on the one hand discourses

which blamed colonialist and neocolonialist interventions for underdeveloping Africa and

on the other hand discourses calling for increasing production by making it more

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[4] Rajab Kondo Rajab, letter to the *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 10 January 1985.

"scientific," a move which would require the further subordination of African food production to Western interests in order to procure the necessary agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizers and pesticides) and technology to "revolutionise" farming.

Calls for the modernisation of agriculture were ubiquitous in the African press in 1984-85. In March, the *Daily News* quoted a USAID official who said that while Ethiopia's famine was unlikely to be the last before Africa solved its food security problems, hope could be found in the cases of countries such as Ghana, Malawi and Zimbabwe which had posted maize surpluses during droughts because market incentives allowed farmers to purchase chemical fertilisers and thereby increase outputs.[5] Ghana's Catholic newspaper, the *Standard*, commented that the food security crisis had "accorded the church a real and unique opportunity of participating as a catalyst of innovative agricultural programmes that will solve Africa's underlying production bottlenecks, once and for all to turn the continent into the world's food basket."[6] Kenya's National Food Policy emphasised the need to grow most of the country's food locally: journalist James Tumushme argued that if this was to happen, "many aspects of the food production process would need to be scrutinised," including "technology, cultural practices, and marketing," and that Kenya would have to improve irrigation, transportation and storage facilities.[7] The *Times* reported on Algerian farming reforms, applauding how that country had "[improved] farm productivity with a dedication reminiscent of a military operation in a major effort to become less dependent on food imports." Algeria's five-year agricultural plan was built on the modernisation of farming, including improved

[5] "'Famine to Persist," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 16 March 1985.
[6] "Church Should Lead in Food Production," *Standard* (Accra), 11 August 1985, 3.
[7] James Tumushme, "Famine Crisis Averted," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 5 April 1985, 19.

infrastructure and marketing.[8]

Technology was a key element of many proposed plans to increase African food production. A *Times* editorial on the need for long term-solutions to Africa's food situation evoked the image of local mango fields overflowing with fruit, but pointed out that "if…one immerses themselves into the humanitarian feeling evoked by the plight in Ethiopia and other places, the watering [in one's mouth] disappears from the thought that half of those… fruits will rot before your own eyes for lack of technology to process them."[9] In a report which appeared in both the *Daily News* and the *Standard* on an Ottawa meeting of the Commission on the Application of Science to Agriculture, Forestry and Aquaculture [CASAFA], Joseph Hulse, the chair of CASAFA, named improved storage facilities, along with improved weather research, the development of more drought-tolerant strains of seeds and improved management of irrigation as the key elements of a "scientific approach" to African famine.[10] Technology would not only guarantee improved food production, it would help guarantee the continent's independence: a *Daily News* front-page editorial pointed out that new approaches to transportation, communications, industry and energy, and trade would be required to overcome the "balkanization of the continent by colonial powers." [11]

While the modernisation of Africa's approaches to farming and the development of large-scale commercial agriculture dominated discourses about improving food production outputs, many voices were careful to make it appear as if the needs of

[8] Jean-Francois Richard, "Algeria Starts to Grow its Own Food Once More," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 28 January 1985.
[9] "Food Is Africa's Best Investment," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 15 February 1985.
[10] Alinalem Tebeje, "Research Director Takes a Tip from Genesis," *Standard* (Nairobi), 30 November 1984; "Fighting Drought through Research, *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 29 November 1984.
[11] Comment, *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 9 April 1985.

smallholding farmers were of primary concern to agricultural policymakers. In June, the

*Times* gave the headline "U.S. Experts Think Peasants are Answer to Africa's Problems"

to an article about a conference in Washington bringing together officials from USAID,

development NGOs and other experts to discuss the ongoing food crisis. The report

pointed out that conference participants had agreed that development plans needed to be

built around "the individual small farmer, in his or her village, on his or her plot of land."

However, the concrete solutions laid out in the conference's final statement all pointed to

large-scale, technologically-driven, production-based changes to African agriculture,

including dam-building and the increased use of hybrids.[12]

Large-scale, technologically-focused visions for African agriculture also

dominated the second of the two OAU summits which took place during the famine. In

July 1985, a week after Live Aid, the OAU met in Addis Ababa for the second time in

nine months to adopt a five-year/five point plan to tackle underdevelopment with a

particular focus on food security. As at the Washington conference, the OAU Priority

Plan paid lip service to the revival of smallholding agriculture, but in the end the plan

was focused on increasing food production through industrialisation, economic

cooperation between African states, debt rescheduling and increased exports. Ben Wisner

calls the OAU Priority Plan proposals "not terribly radical…but…the products of an

African elite consensus." Wisner sees important overlaps between the Priority Plan and

World Bank approaches to African economic recovery: an emphasis on increased

commercialisation, privatisating farm inputs and marketing and diminishing the role of

the state.[13]

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[12] "US Experts Think Peasants Are Answer to Africa's Problems," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 12 June 1985.
[13] Ben Wisner, *Power and Need in Africa: Basic Human Needs and Development Policies* (London:

By emphasizing large-scale production, solutions proposed at forums such as the Washington conference or the July OAU summit had at their core the assumption that increased production would lead to a corresponding improvement in peasant diet. The ability of marginalised groups such as the landless and women to improve their food entitlements was not taken into account in production-first approaches. Wisner argues that these strategies may well have employed some of Africa's landless poor and provided cheaper food for urban areas, but they also increased pressure on small farmers "through privatization, rising rents and speculation on the land."[14] Even those official statements which hinted at entitlement inequalities as being the problem framed production increases as the way to ensure economic equality, without addressing the political and economic factors at the root of unequal entitlements. For example, Zimbabwe's deputy prime minister, Simon Muzenda, urged African states to "take bold steps to improve their food production," arguing that increased production would fix "the high incidence of inequities in the distribution of wealth and food."[15]

Blaming mass hunger on production shortages led to the emergence of "production-first" strategies which did little to engage with the political causes behind the economic inequality which manifested itself in unequal access to food. However, while debates about "production-first" strategies did not get at the question of exactly who was starving and why, they did engender complex debates about the economic, political and cultural consequences of modernising African agriculture. These debates focused on the question of who would ultimately benefit from the modernisation of African agriculture, and brought into question the cultural, social and political implications of the

Earthscan 1988) 159-160.
[14] Wisner, *Power and Need in Africa*, 163.
[15] "Avert Food Crisis – Muzenda," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 6 November 1984.

Westernisation of African food production and consumption practices.

## OPPOSITION TO LARGE-SCALE DEVELOPMENT: ECONOMICS

Opponents to proposals to increase African food production through commercialisation, large-scale farming operations and technological modernisation attacked these plans as being economically unsound and more beneficial to the multinational corporations which would provide the necessary resources for farming modernisation.

The technologies at the heart of "Green Revolution" crops are for the most part created and marketed by Western multinational corporations. James McCann writes that the popularity of high-yield strains of maize in African agricultural development plans has led to the "globalization of maize in an industrial economy that requires inputs...and a market infrastructure that links farm production directly to global markets," bringing about "the erosion of smallholder prerogatives."[16] McCann's insight reflects warnings about the adoption of high-tech crop varieties which emerged alongside mid-1980s calls for an "African Green Revolution." The *Times* quoted agricultural activist Anil Agarwal as saying that like cash-cropping, growing hybrid strains primarily benefited multinational corporations. Agarwal added that "the spread of the cash economy" through commercialised monocropping would not "benefit the majority," and argued that instead, African development plans needed to focus on promoting biomass diversity and enacting land reforms which would allow small farmers to have more control over their crops.[17] These sentiments were echoed in a report appearing in March in both the *Standard* and the *Daily News* on the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), an organisation with substantial American funding headed by Swaminathan. The IRRI was considering setting

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[16] James C. McCann, Maize *and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop, 1500-2000.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 93.
[17] "Is the West Obliged to Bail out Africa?" *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 6 February 1985.

up pilot projects near Addis Ababa, and was claiming that its new high-yield strains of rice could have a significant positive impact on African agriculture. However, the article pointed out that a former IRRI official had alleged that the inputs required by the new strains benefited multinational corporations more than they did farmers, and that countries that committed to IRRI rice would never be able to break "the cycle of indebtedness and dependence."[18] Similar analyses questioning technological approaches to farming came not only from intellectuals and policymakers, but also from people such as Ezra K. Masai, who wrote a letter to the *Times* pointing out that many of the prerequisites for commercialised production such as tractor time, fertilizer, and pesticides were beyond the reach of small farmers. Mr. Masai argued that Kenya's farmers should not look to more mechanisation, but to oxen power for the advantages that it would provide them, including affordability, availability, the use of manure for fertiliser, and a productive way to dispose of crop by-products as feed.[19]

Criticisms of the economic implications of large-scale modernisation revealed the contradictions at the heart of discourses which blamed the West for famine in the one hand and yet valorised Western agricultural techniques on the other. While debates over the ability of large-scale commercial farms to secure African food security were unfolding, a complementary set of discourses—reflected in Mr. Masai's suggestion about the suitability of oxen power over tractor power—which looked to African "tradition" instead of modernisation as the key to unlocking the continent's agricultural potential also appeared in many African papers. These discourses revealed how the strong associations between food, culture and identity create an important ground for the expression of

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[18] T.R. Lansner, "Asia's Rice Men Plan to Move into Ethiopia," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 7 March 1985; *Standard* (Nairobi), 6 March 1985.
[19] Ezra Masai, letter to the *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 8 February 1985.

political relationships.

*FOOD, TASTE AND CULTURE.*

In December 1984, the *Punch's* weekly "Woman to Woman" column informed mothers that they could supplement the country's "highly starchy diet" with the "abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables" available to Nigerians, and urged the women who read the column to give their children fresh fruits. The article also provided a recipe for a bitterleaf soup, "eaten all over the country" and made with local ingredients.[20] Women were ideal targets for discourses which valorised local foods as a way to ensure both the population's food security and national sovereignty: Nigeria instituted home economics workshops for women that overtly tied food choices to both nutrition and nationalistic sentiment. The workshops were intended to "[inculcate] the spirit of nationalism and patriotism through the use of locally grown food and home made goods." One official claimed that using locally-grown produce rather than "imported food items of low or non-nutritive value" would help Nigeria increase its food production.[21]

The valorisation of the consumption of African foods as a way to ensure food security and economic independence (and the simultaneous vilification of Western foods as un-nutritious and a means by which the West could maintain its dominant position over Africa) during the African food crisis existed in tension with discourses that presented the "modernisation" of agriculture as the key to ending African hunger. Tensions between modernity and tradition can arise where farming approaches have been modernised: Gupta shows how Indian farmers' enthusiasm for the productive capabilities of new "Green Revolution" varieties existed in tension with sharp criticisms of their

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[20] Mugo Ogunfidodo, "Cooking the Natural Way," *Punch* (Ikeja, Nigeria), 7 December, 1984
[21] Iyeke Okoye, "Need to Rely on Local Foods Stressed," *Punch* (Ikeja, Nigeria), 29 October 1984.

perceived inferior taste, and with a valorisation of the older ways of farming.[22] Sara

Berry points out that African farmers were slow to adopt those same "Green Revolution"

crops not only because these crops require the mobilisation of scarce labour and precise

timing in adding inputs, but also because they were not compatible with African farmers'

traditional preference for quickly-maturing crops over potentially high-yielding ones.[23]

Debates over proposals to "revolutionise" African agriculture not only brought into

question the economic implications of commercialisation and modernisation, they also

brought to light the ways in which development discourses can fail to account for the

preferences, tastes, and culture of the people they are intended to help.

As was the case in African discourses about the role of the West in causing

African food insecurity, discussions about the role of Western food in undermining

African sovereignty reflected the thinking of Rodney and his counterparts. Rodney

pointed out that although most Africans were coerced into cashcropping in order to raise

money to pay taxes, some took to cash crops in order to get money to satisfy their desires

for European goods.[24] The consumption habits of urban elites were central to Arrighi and

Saul's analysis of postcolonial Africa's economic development, which they saw as being

constrained not only by international capitalism draining surpluses from the continent,

but also by the fact that surpluses were "consumed by self-indulgent domestic elites."[25]

They argued that in order to rectify the structural imbalances between rural and urban

Africa, development needed to be targeted at producing the goods required by the

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[22] Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 6-7.
[23] Sara Berry, *No Condition Is Permanent: The Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in sub-Saharan Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 196.
[24] Rodney, 157.
[25] Arrighi and Saul, "Socialism and Development in Tropical Africa," in Arrighi and Saul, *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa*, 12.

"traditional" sector, and not those desired by an urban elite class that "[would] continue to use its power in a state-controlled modern sector in order to appropriate a considerable share of the surplus in the form of increasing discretionary consumption."[26] Some more recent scholarship has reflected this one-sided approach to understanding the role of Western food and other commodities in mediating power relationships between Africa and the West and between African social groups. Muyae Mulinge and Margaret Munyae argue that the introduction of Western consumption practices during the colonial era led to a rejection of local foods: Chazan and Shaw write that postcolonial African agricultural policies were often crafted to account for the tastes of urban middle classes, who "shunned local foods, preferring Swiss cheese and pickles to gari and fufu."[27]

On the other hand, Timothy Burke provides a more nuanced analysis of the role of Western commodities in mediating colonial relationships, demonstrating how in colonial Rhodesia, local populations used and understood Western consumer goods in their own ways, often as a means to ensure a measure of social mobility that otherwise might have been more difficult to attain. He argues that desires for European commodities were a crucial element in the reproduction of African social relations, and that this did not reflect the imposition of monolithic imperial power on powerless colonial subjects. Rather, European commodities marked a site where complex intersections of power helped to "reproduce and redefine numerous forms of social difference." While critiques of capitalism often foreground the role of commodity fetishism in undermining the "natural

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[26] Arrighi and Saul, "Socialism and Development," 20-21.

[27] Muyae M. Mulinge and Margaret M. Munyae, "Globalization and Sustainable Development in Africa: Putting Old Wine in a New Wineskin?" in *Globalisation, Democracy and Development in Africa: Challenges and Prospects*, ed. Taye Assefa, Severine M. Rugumamu and Abdel Gheffer M. Ahmed, (Addis Ababa: Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa, 2001), 115; Naomi Chazan and Timothy Shaw, "The Political Economy of Food in Africa," in *Coping with Africa's Food Crisis*, ed. Naomi Chazan and Timothy Shaw (Boulder: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 1988), 4.

and essential desires" of consumers, an analysis of the histories of commodities and consumption helps to refute these types of "disingenuous claims." Needs have profound histories, Burke writes, and attempts to wish or legislate them out of existence are futile.[28]

Because food is so closely tied to culture, identity and tradition, debates over agricultural policy become weighted with considerations beyond the question of which course of action will put the most food on tables. Writing at the height of public concern about Ethiopia, the West Indian author and activist George Lamming picked up on the ideas of Rodney and his contemporaries and used them to argue that the ability of economically-marginalised states to protect themselves from cultural imperialism was strongly tied to food self-sufficiency. Lamming framed culture as "the means whereby men and women feed themselves, clothe and shelter themselves... [and] reproduce their material existence." Without local control of food production, debating broader issues of cultural sovereignty is moot: "No food, no life," Lamming wrote. "No food, no book, no religion, no philosophy, no politics, no performing arts." As evidence of an agricultural economy—and a culture—in crisis, Lamming pointed out that the Caribbean was capable of producing enough food to meet its needs, but instead imported $700 million in food annually: Just as West Indian artists struggled to compete against American mass culture, so too did Caribbean farmers struggle while competing against cheap imports from the West.[29] Lamming's analysis showed the influence of Ali Mazrui, who wrote that along

[28] Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 215-216.
[29] George Lamming, "In Defence of Cultural Sovereignty," *Caribbean Contact*, March 1985. Lamming's essay was part of a talk that he gave at a Trinidadian fundraising event for Ethiopian famine victims. The West Indian response to the Ethiopian famine, shaped in no small part by the significance of Ethiopia and Haile Selassie in Rastafari, provides a fascinating lens into the cultural politics of food in the context of the "Black Atlantic." See: Paul Hébert, "'O, Ethiopia!': West Indian Responses to the Ethiopian Famine, 1984-

with religion, multinational corporations were the principle institutions responsible for

Africa's "cultural dependency" on the West. Mazrui's criticism focused on the role of

Western corporations in creating a "new consumerism" in Africa, influencing African diet

and further forcing African labour to serve the interests of non-African economies. He

called educated Africans the "cultural captives of the West," and urged Africans to work

towards "cultural emancipation" in order to ensure economic independence and political

sovereignty.[30]

Reflecting Lamming and Mazrui, objections to commercialised production and

biotechnological solutions to food insecurity framed these approaches as a threat not only

to Africa's food economy, but as an existential cultural threat. Dr. Sibusiso Bengu of the

NGO Lutheran World Foundation said that "Africa's drift to dependence on others for

food [was] related to models of development and food production methods recommended

to Africa from outside." Bengu argued that non- African development strategies "were

not only unsuccessful, but also disastrous as they were completely unconcerned with the

cultural and social values of the people in Africa."[31] Writing in the *Times*, the columnist

Musembe Wills argued that "the promotion of African cultures for the purposes of the

study of African philosophy and genius can and ought to be a basis for cultural and

economic development."[32]

Along with questioning the wisdom of implementing Western farming technology,

the foregrounding of the need for African solutions to food security problems brought

1985" (Unpublished manuscript).

[30] Ali Mazrui, "Beyond Dependency in the Black World," in *Decolonisation and Dependency: Problems of Development of African Societies*, ed. Aguibou Y. Yasane (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), 87-88.

[31] "Church Should Lead in Food Production," *Standard* (Accra), 11 August 1985.

[32] Musembe Q. Wills, "Africa's Own Culture Lies at the Heart of Development," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 7 May 1985.

into question the relevance of Western ideologies to the problem of African hunger. Kenya's Vice-President Mwai Kibaki used the food crisis to attack Marxism, calling on Africans to "discard ideologies as an easy route to development," as "conditions prevailing now in Africa are a far cry from those that existed during the industrial revolution in Europe."[33] Kenyan statements about the ideologies underlying proposals to solve the problem of hunger reflected not only Kenya's ideological opposition to socialism, but a sense of frustration at both socialism and capitalism. *Times* columnist Leonard Gatuguta argued that "today much of the African continent is witnessing massive decline that could not be stemmed by the adoption of western socialist or capitalist modes of development."[34] The *Times* also featured excerpts from a lecture by Goran Hyden where the historian elaborated on the need for African states to look beyond European ideologies, saying that "Marxism and capitalism have failed in Africa because they are not deeply rooted in the culture and structure of the people."[35]

The Kenyan press in particular was a site for discourses which framed Western foods as a force that undercut the continent's ability to feed itself and African foods as a potential remedy to the problem of food insecurity. An editorial in Kenya's *Sunday Times* bemoaned the fact that imperial development had prioritised cashcropping "at the expense of traditional crops and by extension, at the expense of the African people."[36] Mombassa's District Commissioner told his constituents that they should eat less rice, as much of it was it was not locally grown.[37] Newspapers gave prominent place to reporting

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[33] "We Need Solutions, Not Ideology," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 7 March 1985. Kibaki is currently the president of Kenya.
[34] Leonard Gatuguta, "Can African Development Strategies Resolve our Development Crisis?" *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 20 March 1985.
[35] "Foreign Ideologies Have Failed in Africa." *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 24 March 1985.
[36] "The Press in Africa," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 10 April 1985.
[37] Saferi Oouma, "Change Eating Habits, Mombasa Residents Told," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 19 March

about statements from prominent international organisations that framed traditional crops

as a potential solution to African hunger, such as an FAO report arguing that the food

crisis was worsened by a lack of emphasis on local crops such as cassava, plantain, yams,

millet and sorghum, which "have actually been an important source of food for residents

in rural areas for ages."[38] Soon after that report appeared in the *Times*, Tumushme used

his *Times* column to urge Kenya's Ministry of Agriculture to devote more effort to

researching traditional crops such as sweet potato, cassava, millet and sorghum as they

had been shown to be "resistant to harsh weather conditions and yield high under poor

husbandry practices."[39] "Dr. Amref," a health columnist for the *Times*, criticised Western

foods, warned urban mothers against letting their children become "junkies" by allowing

them to consume Western foods like white bread, soda, chips or chocolate, saying that

children who eat prepared foods from the West "will be just as badly off as the child in

Uganda who has nothing to live on but *matoke*."[40]

Directives which urged Africans to focus their consumption patterns around

traditional foods, generated by and for the consumption of a particular class of urban

elites—politicians, newspaper columnists and people who attend university lectures by

historians—speak to the discursive divide between urban and rural Africans. Previously,

we saw how Ivaska argues that elite consensus about national culture served to blur the

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1985.

[38] "Traditional Foods 'Could Save Third World,'" *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 30 March 1985.

[39] James Tumushme, "Famine Crisis Averted," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 5 April 1985.

[40] Note the irony in the inclusion of chocolate in the list of Western foods. "Doctor Amref, ""Starvation and How it Affects Children," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 20 February 1985. *Matoke* is a Ugandan staple similar to banana or plantain in appearance. "Amref" is actually an acronym for African Medical and Research Foundation, an international health NGO headquartered in Nairobi; the medical advice column "Ask Dr. Amref" was one of their health awareness projects. "Dr. Amref" was actually the pseudonym of Dr. Nancy L. Caroline, an American MD who worked in Kenya from 1982-1987. See: http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~sch00364 for a brief biography and description of her papers from Harvard's library web site. (Note that the Harvard library's biography claims that the column ran in the *Standard*: In 1984-1985, at least, it appeared in the *Times* and not the *Standard*.)

links between colonial and independent administrations. In a similar fashion, this elite

consensus on "authentic" African culture—in this case, food—also served to reinforce

social and structural divides between urban and rural Africans. A.O. Amoko demonstrates

how a campaign led by the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o in the late 1960s and

early 1970s to replace the English Department at the University of Nairobi with a

Department of African Languages and Literature reflected the ways in which educated

African urban elites conflate "an actually existing *school culture* with a substantially

imagined *national culture*."[41] Borrowing Kwame Anthony Appiah's term "comprador

intelligentsia," Amoko argues that African intellectual elites work to create subjects based

on essentialised notions of "national, continental and racial civilizations," and that the

postcolonial university is "a means for the unequal distribution of cultural or knowledge

capital and…a means, therefore, for the reproduction of unequal social relations."[42] In a

similar fashion, efforts such as the Nigerian home economics programme and directives

which presented certain foods as unsuitable for African consumption (and argued that

Africans should eat "traditional" cassava and yams) reflect how the national cultures

imagined by certain elites could serve to reinforce the roles of those elites as being

responsible not only for the maintenance of African sovereignty, but also responsible, in a

paternalistic fashion, for the development of rural subjects.

*FOOD AND PATERNALISM*

In March, *Times* columnist Leonard Gatuguta argued that colonialism had negatively

impacted elite perceptions of rural knowledge, creating urban elites "with Western values

that considered rural life largely primitive." This, in the early independence era, led to the

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[41] A.O. Amoko, "The Problem with English Literature: Canonicity, Citizenship and the Idea of Africa." *Research in African Literatures* 32 (2001): 22-23.
[42] Amoko, "The Problem with English Literature," 36.

implementation of development programs which, in their neglect of farming, reflected

disdain for "primitive" rural Africa.[43] This "disdain" for rural Africans frequently

emerged during the famine in discourses about the farmers who grew the 'traditional"

foods which were so important to food security and continental sovereignty.

Read closely, "Dr. Amref's" column (quoted above) actually manages to vilify

both Western foods (for turning children into "junkies") and rural food production and

eating habits (rural Africans have "nothing to live on but *matoke*"). While planting and

eating traditional African crops was presented as part of a strategy to ensure food security

and African sovereignty, discourses about the farmers responsible for producing those

crops revealed a deep-seeded sense of official paternalism about rural Africans. "Dr.

Amref" went on to tell her readers that "*matoke* alone is bad, mixing foods is good." She

said that rural mothers should learn to mix foods by colour (white cassava with green

spinach and brown nuts) or source (food from trees like *matoke* mixed with leafy cabbage

and roots like carrot). In this way, "if a mother does such a reasonable amount of menu

mixing her child will get a reasonably balanced diet, regardless of what she doesn't know

about protein, carbohydrates or joules."[44]

The suggestion that rural mothers should be taught to "colour-code" family meals,

with the underlying assumption that these women would be unable to understand

anything about "protein, carbohydrates or joules" points to serious gaps between rural

realities and urban perceptions. If the question of food policies that deliberately short-

changed rural Africans is complicated by arguments that "urban bias" was actually a

reflection of informed and politically necessary choices, there is less doubt that a strong

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[43] Leonard Gatuguta, "Can African Development Strategies Resolve our Development Crisis?" *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 20 March 1985.
[44]"Doctor Amref," "Starvation and How it Affects Children," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 20 February 1985.

sense of bias against rural populations, framing them as unable to make necessary changes to ensure their own well-being was evident in statements made in the African press during the food crisis, complicating discourses which valorised the foods which African farmers produced.

The state's paternalistic attitudes towards rural Africa emerged in official statements about peasant agriculture. In February, Nyerere told a UN conference on famine that even without drought, Africa's agricultural output was falling behind population growth "because of the primitive tools…and ignorance among the peasants of scientific farming methods."[45] A few days later, he told a meeting of Scandinavian and Soviet diplomats as well as representatives from various UN agencies that peasant agriculture was "still very backward."[46] A participant at a symposium of Ethiopian agricultural experts and development workers blamed the country's food crisis in part on "the haphazard use of crop varieties and backwards cultural practices."[47] Statements about the need to implement technologically-driven solutions to the problem of hunger often used paternalistic language about the people that technology was meant to help, such as a *Times* editorial which pointed out that meteorological and hydrological information "should not be limited to experts," but shared with "the beneficiaries [i.e. farmers] in a non-technical language they understand."[48] State paternalism could also take on a personified form, such as when Nyerere told Tanzanians: "If I can provide adequate fertilizer and insecticides we can produce more food than we need next year."[49] In a similar vein, in January, Kenya's Pan-African Bank Group took out a full-page

[45] "Nyerere Urges More Food Aid," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 12 February 1985.
[46] "Nyerere Urges Relief Aid," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 16 February 1985.
[47] "Ethiopia 'Uses Only 18 p.c. of Potentially Arable Land, *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 7 February 1985.
[48] "Drought and the Need to Keep Farmers Informed," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 6 April 1985.
[49] Mkumbwa Ally, "OAU Tasks Outlined," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 23 November 1984.

advertisement in the *Times* personally thanking Daniel arap Moi for launching the

Kenyan National Famine Relief Fund, thus portraying the country's success at holding

off famine as the work of one man.[50] Personifications of the state-as-provider conflicted

with government statements meant to show how new approaches to educating farmers

were in fact avoiding the paternalism of colonial-era state/farmer relationships.

Newspaper reports that were meant to highlight African governments' positive

relationships with farmers sometimes revealed how new approaches to teaching farmers

were in many ways reminiscent of colonial practices, with farmers still being directed by

state officials who had to "persuade" them to work in particular ways, with no hint given

that the farmers may well have been aware of the principles being discussed—or even

had better ideas of their own. In an article about soil conservation, the *Times* reported that

in colonial times conservation techniques were "mandatory and appeared like

'punishment,'" because the colonial regime was "concerned about soil erosion not so

much for their love for the colonised people, but rather because they did not wish to risk

spells of massive famine which could give them an unnecessary headache." As opposed

to colonial approaches, which made soil conservation seem like "punishment," Kenya

"has adopted persuasion as a means of making people understand the seriousness of the

situation to enable them to make a much more meaningful participation."[51] Likewise, a

Kenyan Ministry of Agriculture official told reporters on a tour of regions where drought-

prevention and rehabilitation programmes were being implemented that "Nairobi's

intention [was] not to dictate, but to act on what the locals have decided." The official

also criticised development NGOs for having developed "paternalistic" tendencies.

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[50] Advertisement, *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 26 January 1985.
[51] Evans Ernest Luseno, "Soil Conservation: The Trick's in the Method," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 10 April 1985.

Meanwhile, another official told reporters on the same tour that farmers were being instructed to keep their excess produce instead of selling it for cash to spend as they saw fit, again showing how the state believed that it knew best what farmers needed.[52]

African farmers, for the most part, were given little if any chance to express their own concerns in any of the papers which I looked at. One notable exception, however, spoke to the ways in which some farmers felt alienated from the state and urban populations. In the lead-up to a major international women's conference in Nairobi (see below), the *Standard* asked Kenyan women about their awareness of the forthcoming meeting. Given the headline "Don't be Ashamed of us, Rural Woman Tells her Urban 'Sisters,'" the story featured an interview with a farmer named Mrs. Nasha ena Leuka who told the paper: "If anything like that is going to take place in our country, please tell the organisers that we would like to attend and should be considered first. Let our sisters in town not be ashamed of us."[53] While it is only one example, Mrs. Leuka's statement points to the possibility of an awareness among some rural Africans that they may not have been highly regarded by urban populations.

Mrs. Leuka's comment speaks to an important and overlooked aspect of the African food security crisis of the mid-1980s: its effects on Africa's women farmers. The crisis amplified discourses about the need to help farmers "develop," thus strengthening the paternalistic position of political and urban elites as the ones responsible for ensuring that development. Many newspaper reports and commentaries about the challenges facing Africa's farming women revealed a clear awareness that African states needed to do much more to take into consideration the needs of female farmers. However, this

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[52] John Mugo, "The Drought-Relief Scene is not all a Tale of Misery," Kenya Times, 12 February 1985.
[53] "Don't be Ashamed of us, Rural Woman Tells her Urban 'Sisters,'" *Standard* (Nairobi), 8 July 1985.

awareness did not translate into the emergence of concrete policy directed at women farmers' concerns.

*FOOD AND WOMEN*

Women's roles as wives and mothers made them important targets for directives concerning food choice and preparation. This, however, revealed a limited view of women's roles in the process that put food on African plates. Studies undertaken from the 1960s through the 1990s reveal that women are responsible for anywhere between 70-90% of sub-Saharan Africa's agricultural production, a figure remarkably higher than the rest of the world. These figures include women's labour on cash crops, a domain often associated with the male sphere.[54] Yet while women perform most of the continent's agricultural labour, as Rose Gawaya writes, "their voices barely shape public policy," and they face "systematic forms of discrimination in access to and control over resources such as livestock, farm inputs, [and] equipment."[55] Female farmers are the ones who typically become dispossessed in the commercialisation process, even in regions where they play the strongest roles in farming.[56] Nonetheless, Africa's female farmers are more likely to initiate grassroots political movements directed at the environmental issues that directly affect their economic well-being.[57]

Given their crucial role in agriculture and the enormity of the food crisis, women were in many ways conspicuous by their absence in many official state discourses about potential solutions to food security crises. A few official statements did take note of issues surrounding the fact that most African farming was done by women: Julia

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[54] Judy C. Bryson, "Women and Agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for Development (an Exploratory Study)," *Journal of Development Studies* 17 (1981): 30-31.
[55] Rose Gawaya, "Investing in Women Farmers to Eliminate Food Security in Southern Africa: Policy-Related Research from Mozambique," *Gender and Development* 16 (2008): 147-148.
[56] Berry, *No Condition Is Permanent*, 163.
[57] "Women Make the Difference," *Environment*, October 1994, 22-23.

Tagwireyi, the Zimbabwean official mentioned above, said that cash crops were depriving women of the chance to grow their traditional crops such as groundnuts.[58] However, while government officials did little to link the concerns of farming women to broader food security issues, the coincidental timing and location of a major women's conference led to the foregrounding in the Kenyan and Tanzanian presses of discourses which criticised the historical treatment of Africa's woman farmers.

Two days after Live Aid, Nairobi played host to a major international conference marking the end of the United Nations Decade for Women. The continent-wide food crisis led to the conference placing a strong emphasis on questions related to women and food production. In the lead-up to the conference, the *Times* ran an analysis which argued that there was a fundamental "lack of consideration on the part of Western development schemes to account for women's role in agriculture," pointing out that many foreign-sponsored agricultural training programmes were focused on training men who would often end up leaving farms for cash employment.[59] The journalist Yahane Sangare wrote that even though "she produces, processes, stores and markets 80 per cent of her country's food for family consumption," "the African woman" was still ignored by most development and training programmes and her labour was mostly unaccounted for. Sangare showed how the Decade for Women had led to the institution of several important programmes targeting rural women in Africa. Nonetheless, Sangare also argued that governments, development agencies and donor nations needed to do much more to

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[58] Sheila Bassopo-Moyo, "Cash Crops: Planting the Seeds of a Dietary Disaster," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 21 May 1985.

[59] Ineke Holtwijk, "We're Left out of Development Projects, Complain Women," Kenya *Times* (Nairobi), 11 June 1985.

create development plans that took Africa's women farmers into consideration.[60]

Moreover, in the newspapers that I examined, there was no hint that the food crisis had done anything to encourage African states to craft policies that would specifically address the concerns of farming women.

A few articles brought up criticisms, sometimes coming from individuals or agencies outside of Africa, about the lack of official attention to women in their roles as farmers. These criticisms were sometimes directed at states, and sometimes directed at international aid agencies. An article which in part discussed the advances that Zimbabwe's black farmers had made since independence also pointed out that Oxfam had recently blamed African leaders for not taking into account the concerns of female farmers.[61] Meanwhile, Agarwal pointed out that aid agencies failed to engage with women as farmers, saying that "in India…they did not know who uses the biomass: women. So they introduce male-oriented programmes."[62]

While these criticisms show that Africa's woman farmers were not overlooked in discourses about how to best develop African agriculture, the fact remains that outside of the realm of forums that were framed as being specifically for women, such as the Nairobi conference, the African food crisis did little to engender concrete policy initiatives to improve the situation of female farmers, as seen, for example, by the lack of concern paid to the concerns of women at the July OAU conference.

*CONCLUSION.*

In Part I, we saw how Rodney faulted colonial officials for the fact that African farmers

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[60] Yahane Sangare "Helping where it Counts Most: Africa's Farmer is Woman," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 15 July 1985.

[61] "Food Production alone no Solution to Hunger," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 3 June 1985, 8.

[62] Mugambi Karanja, "Is the West Obliged to Bail out Africa?" *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 6 February 1985.

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left colonialism the same way that they had entered it—"with a hoe." With this

observation, Rodney foreshadowed many of the contradictions that shaped debates over

the modernisation of African agriculture in the light of the mid-1980s food crisis. The

tensions that emerged in Rodney's bitterness at the fact that imperialism did not, in

essence, have a greater impact on Africa than what he sees as its already-catastrophic

impact on the continent's development were also found in discourses which called for

African food production to be modernised along Western lines in order to guarantee

political, economic and cultural sovereignty. Moreover, as these discourses took shape,

the ways in which they spoke about and to rural Africans revealed important gaps

between rural realities and urban understandings. In neglecting to account for the ways in

which Africa's farmers saw themselves in terms of elite notions about "modernisation"

and "tradition," discourses that valorised a technological approach to farming and

discourses that valorised a particular and in some ways essentialist notion of "tradition"

both served to reproduce a paternalistic relationship between urban elites and African

farmers.

## AFRICAN RESPONSES TO HUMANITARIAN FOOD AID, 1984-85

In early November, as stories about the Ethiopian famine and the broader question of

hunger in Africa were gaining prominence in the Western media and the public was

raising funds to help the starving—often in the context of commercially-oriented aid

ventures such as Robert Maxwell's *Mirror* Mercy Missions—Kenya's ambassador to the

UN said that Africa was "at the verge of bankruptcy unless the international community

[came] to [its] rescue."[1] While the ambassador's plea resonated with the way in which the

West's response to the famine was taking shape—like a humanitarian rescue mission

following a natural disaster—many Africans were not interested in having the

international community simply come to the continent's rescue. While African leaders

appealed for more and more food aid during the famine, their appeals were tempered by

strident critiques of how that aid was given and its long-term effects on Africa. These

critiques focused on a number of issues, including the preference of donors for short-term

emergency aid as opposed to long-term development aid, the effect of superpower

politics on aid to Ethiopia, the commercial advantages of aid for donor nations and the

effects that floods of relief food would have on African cultures.

This chapter examines African reactions to the massive amounts of food aid that

the West sent to Africa in the months following the airing of the Buerk/Amin report.

While scholars have examined the political implications and the shortcomings of the

West's humanitarian response to the Ethiopian famine, the question of what African

politicians, commentators and everyday citizens made of these responses has received

very little attention aside from critical evaluations of the use and distribution of

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[1] "UN Urges Aid to Africa," *Daily Times* (Lagos), 7 November, 1984

humanitarian aid by state elites. While I do address some of the literature on the question of the use and misuse of humanitarian aid by African governments, especially the Derg, my primary focus is on the discourses written by Africans on the West's humanitarian response to their food security issues.

There was a contradiction at the heart of African political leaders' appeals for more aid. On the one hand, in a scene repeated over and over again, Julius Nyerere, speaking in an interview with the BBC in November, pleaded for more emergency food aid, saying that "countries that had enough food were not doing enough to save the hungry."[2] On the other hand, many Africans expressed a profound awareness that food aid to Ethiopia and other sub-Saharan countries in 1984-85 represented the potential exercise of power by economically powerful core nations on the weak nations at the periphery of the global system.

As was the case in explanations for the reasons for famine, common to almost all African responses to Western efforts to ease the effects of hunger was the framing of food as a vital element of national and continental sovereignty; food aid was therefore both symptomatic of a failure on the part of African states to attain and maintain their sovereignty and a force with the potential to erode African sovereignty. Steven Varnis writes that the predominance of this type of dependency thinking in state authorities' framing of food aid allowed those authorities to blame the democratic politics of the developed world for African famine by citing the preference of donor nations to send emergency food aid as opposed to long-term development aid. Varnis also writes that by framing food aid as an element of the dependency relationship, African states helped to

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[2] "Nyerere Calls for Food Aid to Poor," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 11 November 1984

obscure their own agency in the use of aid as a means for furthering policy goals.[3] While

this analysis may well have reflected the attitudes of officials in states where

humanitarian aid was being hijacked towards political ends—such as Ethiopia—it does

not account for the predominance of similar discourses across political and social lines in

Africa; nor does it account for the ways in which Africans saw important differences

within the various humanitarian responses, especially the pop music fundraisers which I

discuss in Part IV of this thesis.

*THE BENEFITS OF FAMINE, THE BENEFITS OF AID*

Liberal interventions in the developing world both shape and are shaped by any number

of intersecting power relationships. Although his work does not specifically concern

emergency aid, James Ferguson's analysis of development projects in Lesotho points to

the ways in which well-intentioned development projects were affected by local and

international power dynamics and had profound effects on the politics of the recipient

country. Development institutions construct the countries in which they are deployed as

objects of particular types of knowledge, and then base their interventions around those

structures of knowledge. Although the resulting projects often fail at their stated goals,

they nonetheless have important effects, including "the expansion and entrenchment of

bureaucratic state power," and the denial and suspension of local politics.[4]

We saw in Part I how David Keen frames famine as a political process with

beneficiaries and losers. In order to maximise the benefits which famine brings,

politically powerful groups which benefit from the process have a vested interest in

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[3] Steven Varnis, *Reluctant Aid or Aiding the Reluctant?: U.S. Food Aid Policy and Ethiopian Famine Relief* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 9.
[4] James Ferguson (1990), *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1994), xiv-xv.

preventing the provision of effective famine relief.[5] Food aid provides recipient states

with a powerful and easily-mobilised political resource. The politically-motivated abuse

of humanitarian food aid African states may be traced back to the 1960s, when Tanzanian

officials announced that only those living in *ujamaa* villages would be eligible for famine

relief.[6] Jean-Francois Bayart writes that Africa's continent-wide economic crisis, dating

back to the oil shocks of the early 1970s, not only increased the amount of aid that

African states had at their disposal, but also gave those states the power to "stir up

competition amongst the aid donors themselves" in order to maximise the amount of aid

coming into the country.[7] In Ethiopia, competition between NGOs for donations—and the

resulting need for them to be active in such a high-profile location—was an important

factor in facilitating the Derg's ability to abuse food aid, as humanitarian NGOs feared

being kicked out of the country—and out of the Western public eye—if they publicly

criticised the regime's abuses.[8]

The Derg used the food aid that flowed into the country as a weapon in its

ongoing conflicts with Eritrean and Tigrean rebel forces. In December 1984, a "high

ranking" Derg member was overheard by the American *chargé d'affaires* in Addis Ababa

saying that "food is a major element in our strategy against the secessionists," and that

the Ethiopian army was hoping to "cut off the rebels from food supplies."[9] The Derg not

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[5] David Keen, *The Benefits of Famine: A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983-1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 1-7.

[6] James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 233.

[7] Jean-Francois Bayart, [1989] *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, trans. Mary Harper, Christopher and Elizabeth Harrison, (New York: Longman 1993), 26-27.

[8] Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 124.

[9] Varnis, *Reluctant Aid or Aiding the Reluctant*, 61; Christopher Clapham, "Controlling Spaces in Ethiopia," in Wendy James, Donald L. Donham, Eisei Kurimoto, Alessandro Triulzi, eds. *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After*. (Oxford: James Currey, 2002) 9-30, 17; Edmond J. Keller, "Drought, War,

only withheld relief from rebel areas, they also used the massive amounts of food aid coming into the country to assist their military efforts by imposing some $30 million in import duties on incoming food and using those funds to buy weapons, and by diverting relief food for military use and using it to induce civilians to join the army. The Derg also used food in order to help implement coercive resettlement policies which may have been responsible for over 100 000 deaths.[10] In Alex de Waal's analysis, humanitarian aid to Ethiopia "prolonged the war, and with it, human suffering."[11]

Not surprisingly, the manipulation of humanitarian aid by African states did not figure in official African statements during the famine—except for vehement denials that such a thing was happening—and was only sparingly mentioned in African newspapers. One notable instance of public criticism of the use of food aid was a *Punch* commentary by Alex Adikankwu, in which he argued that one of the problems with aid was that "half the time" it did not get where it was needed, pointing to Uganda's Idi Amin and Sudan's Jaafar Nimiery as two leaders who were chronically guilty of stealing aid. Adikankwu also pointed out that while humanitarian aid was appreciated, the food would only sustain recipients for a short time, and "sooner or later they will turn to the world again for more food, more grains and more medical supplies."[12]

Writing in 1980, Aguibou Yasane argued that aid programmes "historically served the interest of the giving nation more than the receiving one," and often did little to promote the development of local resources for local consumption.[13] While African

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and the Politics of Famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30(4) 1992, 620
[10] Keller, "Drought, War, and the Politics of Famine," 621. On the use of food aid in the resettlement programme, see: Peter Niggli, *Ethiopia: Deportations and Forced-Labour Camps* (Berlin: Berliner Missionswerk, 1986), 9-10.
[11] De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 127.
[12] Alex Adim Adikankwu, "Beyond Fundraising," *The Punch* (Ikeja, Nigeria), 1 June 1985.
[13] Aguibou Y. Yasane, "Introduction," in *Decolonisation and Dependency: Problems of Development of*

newspapers did not do much to engage with the question of the benefits of aid for the states that received it, they did engage with the question of the benefits of aid for donor nations. Turning Keen's analysis around on itself, many African commentators argued that donor nations approached the question of helping Ethiopia with an eye on how giving aid would allow them to maximise the benefits that famine provided them. In a February editorial, the *Kenya Times* pointed out that donors gave for reasons of political self-interest and that aid workers "have their own individual, professional agency and national interests to foster."[14] As with African framings of the causes of the famine, understandings of the motivations at the heart of the West's humanitarian response to African hunger were often strongly influenced by dependency theory, reflecting anxieties harkening back to the effects of colonialism on Africa's development and a sense of insecurity towards the continent's peripheral location in a "globalising" economy.

*COLD WAR TENSIONS AND AID TO ETHIOPIA*

Ethiopia's crucial location at the mouth of the Red Sea and the fact that it was the only truly communist state in Africa gave the country a crucial role in Cold War strategising. Ethiopia's geopolitical situation shaped donor nations' approaches to giving aid to the country, and many African commentators pointed to this fact in their analyses of the situation. In December, the *Standard* reported that Commonwealth Secretary-General Sridath Ramphal argued that millions were dying in Ethiopia because the country was being treated "as a pawn" in East/West power struggles.[15] Alex Kibao, also writing in the *Standard*, called it "shameful" that the American and British governments, while claiming to be concerned about the welfare of the Ethiopian people, were "cynically

*African Societies*, ed. Aguibou Y. Yasane (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), 28.
[14] "Africa: The Worst Yet to Come?" *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 4 February 1985.
[15] "Ethiopian Case: What Went Wrong?" *Standard* (Nairobi), 16 December 1984.

playing with human lives as part of their political machinations."[16] The *Daily News* reported that the Derg, "needy and grateful as it is" had complained that the West was "using food as a political weapon in which the starving people are turned into pawns for destabilisation."[17]

Analyses which criticised the subordination of the humanitarian imperative to Cold War manoeuvrings pointed to the failure of the industrialised world to effectively intervene in Ethiopia before the airing of the Buerk/Amin report as evidence of the desire to put geopolitics before humanitarian concerns. These criticisms ran both ways—while the Tanzanian and Ghanaian presses focused their attention on the lack of a Western response and valorised the Soviets for their long-term commitment to Ethiopia's development, the *Times* commented that feeding Ethiopia was not only the West's responsibility and blasted the USSR for not sending food to Ethiopia even though they had sent huge amounts of military aid.[18] However, most African criticisms at the lack of an earlier humanitarian response were directed at the West. Allegations by Charles Elliott, the former head of the British NGO Christian Aid, that the American and British governments had, before Buerk and Amin made it politically untenable, deliberately withheld aid from Ethiopia in the hopes that famine would lead to the downfall of the Soviet-aligned Derg—a repeat of the events that had led to Selassie's downfall in 1974— were featured prominently in African newspapers.[19] In a front-page commentary published soon after the airing of the report, the *Daily News* pointed to the fact that although Western media was now filled with "gory scenes of emaciated children," relief

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[16] Alex Kibao, "Cashing in on Famine," *Standard* (Nairobi), 3 November 1984.
[17] Comment, *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 7 November 1984.
[18] "Ethiopian Case: What Went Wrong?" *Standard* (Nairobi), 16 December 1984.
[19] "Britain to Send Food to Addis," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 29 October 1984; Alex Kibao, "Cashing in on Famine," *Standard* (Nairobi), 3 November, 1984.

agencies had been aware of impending famine in Ethiopia and other African nations for almost two years before the story broke, but that the requested aid "was not readily forthcoming."[20]

Allegations such as Eliot's are complicated by the politics which surround the aid process and the particular nature of the Ethiopian famine. B.G. Kumar blames the lack of an earlier concentrated humanitarian response to the Ethiopian RRC's reports of impending famine in the months and years before the airing of the Buerk/Amin report on the reticence of the international community to recognize the gravity of the situation and on Derg censorship during celebrations marking the tenth anniversary of the Ethiopian revolution.[21] De Waal complicates Kumar's analysis of the delayed humanitarian response by pointing out that the Derg had lumped the origins of the crises in the north together with food security problems in other parts of the country which pre-dated and were in many ways unrelated to the situation in the north, creating the illusion of a single, undifferentiated "Ethiopian famine." This allowed the regime to claim that it had been requesting aid for three years before October 1984, when in fact those requests had little to do with the crisis at hand.[22]

Notwithstanding the fact that claims that the West had deliberately withheld aid from a devastating famine were more complicated than they appeared, there is no doubt that political concerns and Cold War realities shaped the Western humanitarian response to the Ethiopian famine. Just as humanitarian interventions need to engage with the political realities of recipient nations, analyses of the ways that aid is given must also

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[20] Comment, Daily *News* (Dar es Salaam), 7 November 1984.
[21] B.G. Kumar, "Ethiopian Famines 1973-1985: A Case-Study," in *The Economics of Famine*, ed. Jean Dreze, (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1999), 428-429.
[22] De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 112-117.

bear in mind that aid does not come out of a political vacuum. Varnis writes that the lack

of an immediate humanitarian response to famine warnings which began to emerge from

Ethiopia in 1981 may be attributed to the fact that at the time, the West in general and the

U.S. in specific had "a poor sense of current developments in Ethiopia," that there were

no anti-communist groups that the Americans could support (both the EPLF and the

TPLF had Marxist orientations) and there was no sense that Ethiopia could be enticed

into closer relationships through humanitarian aid.[23]

Moreover, Varnis argues that there is an American expectation of reciprocity in

the aid relationship, wherein the recipient government bears responsibility for making aid

a viable and practical option and the donor nation only takes on the task of providing aid

when doing so becomes feasible.[24] Given that Ethiopia had not proven itself to be

particularly open to Western humanitarian intervention, the potential aid relationship

between the U.S. and Ethiopia could hardly meet those expectations. Finally, and closely

related to the previous point, were the dilemmas posed by the fact that the policies which

produced the famine in the first place were rooted in the Derg's communist ideology and

were backed up by substantial Soviet military assistance. As well, one needs to bear in

mind dilemmas posed by a recent history of poor U.S./Ethiopia relations.[25] Varnis's

analysis of this aspect of the situation is worth quoting in full:

> When a former recipient of massive aid has nationalized the private
> investments of American citizens, expelled U.S. embassy officials,
> denigrated Western development strategy wholesale, ruthlessly handled its
> farmers and political opponents, dived deeply into the Soviet orbit, and
> been unwilling to help its own people survive a famine largely of its own
> making, [the expected American reaction] would hardly be clear.[26]

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[23] Varnis, *Reluctant Aid*, 47-48.
[24] Varnis, *Reluctant Aid*, 5- 11.
[25] Varnis, *Reluctant Aid*, 5.
[26] Varnis, *Reluctant Aid*, 64.

Even though an earlier and more substantial American humanitarian reaction was outside the realm of political possibility, African leaders expanded allegations that Ethiopia's hungry were being held hostage to Cold War politics to advance arguments that all of Africa was at the whim of the interests of powerful industrialised economies, and that food aid played an important role in mediating that relationship. The president of Ghana, Jerry Rawlings, cautioned that the OAU would only be able to overcome its internal divides when member states "[refused] to be used in the divisive manipulations of power blocs outside the continent."[27] Julius Nyerere argued that the industrialised world's tendency to try to deal with developing world poverty on a "case by case basis" was part of a strategy for maintaining economic and political control over poor nations.[28] As Africans saw humanitarian concerns being hijacked by the political needs of donor nations, the apparent preference of donors for short-term emergency assistance as opposed to long-term development aid came to the forefront in critiques of Western humanitarianism.

### DEVELOPMENT AID VERSUS EMERGENCY AID

Nyerere, addressing the November OAU summit in Addis Ababa, said that while Africa was appreciative of the aid coming from the West, it was "too little and too late," and not "the real answer to the problems which face Africa."[29] He argued that while "catastrophe could be halted if the stocks of food available in the world were properly mobilised to reach the needy populations," this could only be a stopgap measure; what was needed

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[27] "Present State of the OAU," People's *Daily Graphic* (Accra), 5 December 1984.
[28] "Nyerere New OAU Chairman," *Tanzania Daily News*, 13 November 1984.
[29] "Nyerere New OAU Chairman," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 13 November 1984; Julius Nyerere, "Let's Safeguard Unity," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 14 November 1984.

over the long term was development aid, not emergency aid.[30] Speaking in Belgrade the

following March, Nyerere repeated those arguments, pointing out that while millions of

Africans relied on relief food, the developed world seemed uninterested in tackling the

underdevelopment which caused the problem in the first place.[31]

Discourses about the balance between food aid and development aid demonstrate

how aid needs to be seen not only in terms of the politics of both donor and receiver

nations, but also in terms of broader African histories of insecurities about national and

continental independence. Comments such as Nyerere's reflected the dominant view of

African leaders towards food aid: it could only serve to keep African states in a

dependent position in relationship to the industrialised world, while development aid

would allow African states to break the chains of dependency, develop their agriculture

and industry, prevent recurring food security crises and ultimately become self-sufficient.

Reflecting Varnis's assertion that emergency food aid allowed African leaders to

deflect blame for food shortages back onto the West, African leaders and commentators

cited food aid as a primary reason for continued African dependence and a lack of

effective policy initiatives to ensure food security. Ghana had relied on international aid

to deal with food security problems in 1983: a week after the Ethiopian famine made

international headlines, S.G. Obimpeh, the chair of Ghana's National Mobilization

Committee, bemoaned Africa's "overdependence" on food aid, which saw as part of a

"dangerous trend which negates the sense of urgency in resolving [Africa's] food

production problems." [32] In a similar vein, a *Times* editorial blamed emergency food aid

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[30] Ancalet Rwegayura, "Nyerere Calls for Food Aid to Poor," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 14 November, 1984.
[31] "Third World Unite-Nyerere," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 15 March 1985.
[32] "Too Much Food Aid Negates Sense of Self-Sufficiency," *Ghanaian Times*, (Accra), 30 October 1984.

for the failure of African states to do more to encourage the consumption of local foods, arguing that access to food aid "[gave] the Government a strong incentive not to revise its farm policies towards domestic consumption."[33] Analyses which foregrounded the role of emergency aid in the erosion of African self-sufficiency had the support of key international bodies. In April, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) released a report tying emergency food aid to underdevelopment, arguing that while aid had the potential to "build up the infrastructure needed for food production efforts, to support desirable changes in agricultural policies, to stabilise supplies in years of crop shortfalls, and to improve access to food," it also posed a threat to food security in the long term, as it risked undermining peasant livelihood by undercutting local market prices. Concern with emergency situations, the report concluded, must not overshadow long-term development issues.[34]

In the Ethiopian case, the debate over the balance between emergency and development aid was complicated by the fact that the Derg was using the pretext of "development" to justify its resettlement programmes. The Derg's statements about Western aid walked a line between expressing gratitude for the aid that the country received and criticising the ways in which that aid limited the state's ability to implement resettlement. When the West German charity *Menschen fur Menschen* donated $4.8 million to Ethiopia for tools and seeds for the "20,000 famine victims that are starting a new life in the south-western Illubanor Region," Dawit thanked the German NGO but pointed out that "to date, Western donor countries and aid agencies have centered their assistance on emergency relief, despite government appeals that they should assist

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[33] "Food Production Alone no Solution to Hunger," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 3 June 1985.
[34] "'Famine Needs Long-Term Plans,'" *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 15 June 1985.

resettlement."[35] In an appeal for aid to help the resettled, Dawit said that the programme was "of paramount importance" and that the world's "response to the resettlement scheme had not matched the generosity of the emergency relief effort."[36]

The Ethiopian resettlement programme was a particularly egregious example of the "benefits of famine" in action, with humanitarian aid being hijacked in order to facilitate the forcible removal of populations which were politically troublesome to the Derg. Notwithstanding this particular case, which would to a certain extent justify the withholding of development aid in favour of emergency food aid, African leaders legitimately saw the withholding of development aid as a means by which the West was able to perpetuate African dependence on the West. As African leaders, opinion makers and the general public discussed the implications of emergency food aid for Africa, the benefits that the ongoing aid relationship provided to the West were brought into sharp relief.

*THE BENEFITS OF FAMINE FOR DONOR NATIONS*

On 14 March, the *Times* ran a critical analysis of American foreign aid programmes since the Marshall Plan. The author, Kiarie Ng'ang'a, pointed out that USAID, instead of sending cash abroad for recipient governments to spend as they saw fit, spent over 90% of its funds in the U.S. on food and equipment for export to needy nations: Ng'ang'a quoted figures that showed that "for every aid dollar that leaves the US two or three dollars flows back."[37] Closely related to discourses that blamed the prevalence of emergency aid over development aid for stalling Africa's drive to agricultural self-sufficiency were discourses that framed emergency food aid as a means by which the

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[35] "FRG Body to Aid Resettlement," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 18 May 1985.
[36] "Adededji Urges Africa Fund," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), April 1985, 2.
[37] Kiarie Ng'ang'a, "The Politics of Aid: Who Really Benefits?" *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 14 March 1985.

industrialised nations were able to maximise the economic benefits which African famine provided them.

Chief among the perceived benefits of emergency food aid for donor nations was that it provided a way to get rid of the vast amounts of surplus food that had accumulated in European and North American granaries thanks to generous farm subsidies. As was the case in the West, African reporting pointed to the record North American and European agricultural surpluses which coincided with the Ethiopian famine as a sign that there were serious structural problems in the global food economy. The *Daily News* was particularly incensed that developed countries which were stuck with large food surpluses—so large that food was being thrown away and farmers were being paid not to produce—"withheld food aid to Ethiopia until the eleventh hour."[38] However, while the *Standard* reported that Ramphal had argued that the millions of tonnes of surplus food which the EEC had on its hands would be cheaper to give to starving Africans than to store,[39] others saw those tonnes of surplus food as a direct threat to African self-sufficiency and a means by which the West could secure its hold on the African market.

Accompanying outrage at the idea of European farmers ploughing excess tomatoes back into the ground as fertiliser or simply destroying surplus grain while Ethiopians were starving was the idea that the government subsidies that made those surpluses possible were a weapon that the developed world wielded against the economic sovereignty of the developing world. Yohana Sharma, writing in the *Daily News*, argued that sending emergency food aid to Africa allowed the EEC to hide the effects of farming subsidies and to offload food surpluses as part of its humanitarian budget, thereby

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[38] Comment, *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 7 November 1984.
[39] "Ethiopian Case: What Went Wrong?" *Standard* (Nairobi), 16 December 1984.

"enabling part of the farm budget to be concealed under the aid budget and helping build a demand in the Third World...which can then be met by commercial imports."[40] Reflecting this understanding of the aid paradigm and the benefits that it provided donor nations, Daniel Kamanga wrote a letter to the *Times* arguing that food aid was "obviously outmoded" if it was meant to act as an outlet for the developed world's surpluses. Food aid, Mr. Kamanga argued, "should cease to be an end in itself and integrated into comprehensive food and agricultural strategies."[41]

In August 1985, Ghana's *Standard* quoted Dr. Sibusiso Bengu of the NGO Lutheran World Foundation as saying that Western programmes dealing with African poverty "tended to treat the victims of poverty and hunger as objects for research in as much as the same way as many food aid donors treated the victims of hunger—as passive stomachs ready to be filled up." Bengu was critical of attempts to deal with hunger in Africa that did not take into account "the cultural and social values of the people."[42] As was the case in debates over the modernisation of African farming, critiques of food aid that were focused on the commercial advantages that aid provided to donor nations often brought to light the links between food as an expression of national culture on the one hand and political and economic domination on the other. Food aid was seen as a way to modify African recipients' tastes and consumption habits in order to create within them a desire for Western food products, reflecting the ways in which writers like Lamming and Mazrui had linked food to questions of economic, political and cultural sovereignty.

In January, the West African musicians Manu Dibango and Mory Kanté visited

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[40] Yohana Sharma, "Europe's Crisis of Plenty," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 13 November 1984.
[41] Daniel G. Kamanga, letter to the *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 8 February 1985. However, Kamanga did see the need for an exception in crises such as Ethiopia's.
[42] "Church Should Lead in Food Production," *Standard* (Accra), 11 August 1985, 3.

the feeding camp at Korem after recording "Tam Tam pour l'Ethiopie," a song to raise

funds for famine victims (see Part IV). Dibango, writing in *Jeune Afrique*, described the

*"paysage lunaire"* of the feeding centre and pointed out that the food that was being

distributed at the camp was not compatible with the diets camp's inhabitants. *"Le Sud qui*

*recoit n'a pas l'habitude de manger la meme chose que le Nord qui donne,"* Dibango

wrote.[43] Ghana's Obimpeh also pointed out that the food provided by aid programmes

was not always compatible with the tastes of aid recipients, saying "what you get may not

necessarily be the type the people eat."[44] Peter Ossei-Wusu, a columnist for the *People's*

*Daily Graphic*, echoed Obimpeh's critique of the compatibility of aid food with local

diets arguing that one of the "nefarious long term consequences" of the food provided by

aid programmes was that "those who consume [it] for a long time acquire foreign tastes.

Consequently it becomes difficult and unpleasant for such people to abandon these food

items when they cease to be free." The end result was that the developing world became a

market for Western surpluses.[45]

These framings of food aid as a strategy for keeping Africa in a dependent

position and as a means to turn the continent into a market for Western corporations

reinforced calls on the part of state elites for citizens to work harder to produce more

food, not only in order in order to prevent future food security crises, but also to ensure

national and continental independence from neoimperialism. As Mwai Kibaki said:

> The dream of an Africa free from hunger, sickness, ignorance,
> unemployment, poverty and external pressure can only come true if Africa
> is self-sufficient. This can only be achieved through self-perpetuating
> development with free and effective participation of its people, instead of

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[43] Manu Dibango, "Un morceau de survie intense," *Jeune Afrique*, 30 Janvier 1985, 44.

[44] "Too Much Food Aid Negates Sense of Self-Sufficiency," *Ghanaian Times*, (Accra), 30 October 1984.

[45] Peter Ossei-Wusu, "Food Aid and Development," *People's Daily Graphic* (Accra), 27 December 1984.

dependence on foreign aid.[46]

Around the same time that Kibaki made that statement, a *Kenya Times* editorial argued

that the African experience with humanitarian food aid had taught the continent that

"hunger problems will not be solved from outside," and that Africans had to "begin

[seriously] thinking about feeding [them]selves."[47] In another commentary, the *Times* also

pointed out that the Ethiopian case illustrated that "aid donors tend to react with 'too little

too late,'" and that this placed the onus for food security "entirely on the shoulders

of...African governments."[48] In Tanzania, the *Daily News* examined aid to Ethiopia and

argued that the delays in aid arriving from the West were a "grim reminder to all of us

that locally grown food, as opposed to external grain handouts, is the surest guarantor of

survival," and that "political independence will only be won through economic freedom,

which can only be attained and maintained through hard work."[49]

*CONCLUSION*

Both the giving and receiving of food aid happen in political contexts; any analysis of

humanitarian action needs to engage with the complex politics on either side of the

exchange. Moreover, the cultural significance of food and its close ties to national

identities add another level of complexity to discourses that frame emergency food aid as

a threat to political and economic independence. While Africa's political leaders needed

to ask the West for more and more aid in light of important food security problems, they

used the widespread attention generated by the Ethiopian famine both to challenge the

ways in which aid was given to Africa, to deflect blame away from the role of their own

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[46] "Africa: The Worst Yet to Come?" *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 4 February 1985.
[47] "Food Is Africa's Best Investment," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 15 February 1985.
[48] James Tumushme, Mike Njeru, John Mugo, "We Have the Power and the Resources: Why Do We Go Hungry?" *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 25 January 1985.
[49] "Comment," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 24 January 1985.

policies in creating food insecurity, and to reinforce their roles as the protectors of national and continental sovereignty against the threats posed by a flood of cheap food aid.

Broadly speaking, African generosity for Western food aid was sharply tempered by criticism of the aid system. The final section of this thesis looks at African reactions to what was arguably the most visible element of the Western response to the Ethiopian famine and shows how many of the political discourses which we have seen thus far were attached to rock humanitarian fundraising projects.

CHALLENGING THE FOOD AID PARADIGM: ETHIOPIA'S ROCK FUNDRAISERS

The proximity of the Nairobi women's conference (see Part II) to Live Aid led to the

following pointed expression of the way in which many Africans saw rock fundraisers for

Ethiopian famine victims such as Live Aid as being about more than simply raising

money to feed starving children. In an editorial cartoon included in a two-page *Kenya*

*Times'* spread of articles dedicated to the conference, two women stop a man in a car so

that they may cross the street, quoting the lyrics to U.S.A. for Africa's charity fundraising

single: "Stop: We are the world!" (See fig. 1). "We are the World" was not just the chorus

to a pop song raising money for famine victims in Ethiopia: it was, in this context, a

rallying cry for marginalised people seeking recognition of their worth. Many Africans

saw the use of popular culture as a weapon against famine in terms of discourses of

liberation. The *Times* cartoon shows how that notion was attached to the cause of

women's liberation at a time when that question was the topic of a substantial amount of
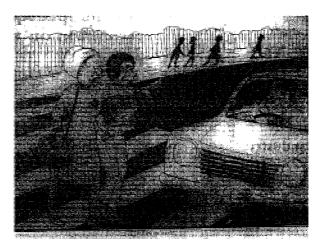
media coverage.



Figure 1: "Stop: We are the world!"[1]

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[1] Editorial cartoon, *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 18 July 1985.

We have seen how African analyses saw the humanitarian response to the Ethiopian famine in terms of the benefits that the giving of emergency food aid provided to Western donor nations. Yet at the same time that many Africans saw those elements of the Western response which were closely tied to Western governments and businesses as a means by which the West took advantage of the opportunities that African hunger presented them, using food and food aid as a way to perpetuate a neoimperial relationship between Africa and the West, many Africans saw popular elements of the Western response to the Ethiopian famine as a challenge to an aid paradigm that put political and commercial concerns above the humanitarian imperative. Columnist Alex Kibao, writing in the *Standard*, argued that the fact that the British government had offered to send help at all was "a tribute to the power of the media which raised public opinion," inspiring the people to force the government to change its approach to the situation.[2] In a similar vein, the *Daily News* featured an analysis by Derek Ingram of the Gemini news service which argued that the individual private generosity demonstrated in donations to famine-relief fundraising campaigns belied fears that the public would not support their governments lending more assistance to Africa.[3]

Fundraising efforts such as Band Aid, Live Aid and U.S.A. for Africa have been singled out in the scholarly literature for depoliticising the question of African famine and for perpetuating negative images of Africa in the Western imagination. While these important criticisms are relevant to Western readings of the Ethiopian famine's rock fundraisers, they do not engage with the question of how Africans understood and saw themselves within these charitable projects. Even though rock fundraisers relied on

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[2] Alex Kibao, "Cashing in on Famine," *Standard* (Nairobi), 3 November 1984.
[3] Derek Ingram, "The Case for Checking Mass Starvation," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 22 February 1985.

intensely essentialising images of Africans in order to ensure their success, African

responses to these projects saw political leaders, media commentators and everyday

people attaching their own political meanings to them, framing them as a challenge to the

official responses of Western states, and harnessing them in discourses of resistance to

neoliberal/neoimperial interventions in Africa and in self-criticism at a perceived weak

African charitable response to the famine. The ways in which Africans saw rock

fundraisers as being relevant to their own political concerns challenge those readings of

events such as Live Aid that such events as presenting Africans as "bare life," existing

outside of political and social contexts.

This chapter examines African responses to charity projects such as Live Aid,

Band Aid and U.S.A. for Africa. However, African coverage of these projects, at least in

the newspapers which I was able to examine, was spotty at best. None of the West

African newspapers which I examined contained much beyond wire service reports on

rock fundraisers. In East Africa, the Kenyan press carried a few articles on the projects,

but an ongoing ban on Western music on Kenyan airwaves may have served to limit

Kenyan public awareness of and interest in rock fundraisers.[4]

Tanzania's *Daily News* offered the most coverage of rock fundraising for

Ethiopia. Most of this coverage was actually focused on the American fundraising single,

"We are the World," recorded by an ad hoc band of pop stars under the name U.S.A. for

Africa. Michael Jackson, who wrote and performed on "We are the World," was at the

apex of his popularity at the time, and this may have accounted for a greater amount of

attention being paid to the project. Also, as discussed below, several musicians from

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[4] While I could find no evidence of the debate over Western music on Kenyan radios intersecting with
interest in efforts such as Band Aid, in the fall of 1984, there was a prolonged debate in the *Standard's*
letters-to-the-editor pages about the ban on Western music and the breakdancing craze.

U.S.A. for Africa participated in a lengthy tour of eastern Africa, generating interest in and awareness of their project.[5] Race also may have played a role in the American project's African popularity: as the *Standard* reported in April, "at least 50 per cent of the artists and technicians who made 'We Are the World'...are Black."[6] Moreover, in February, Harry Belafonte, who would lead an African tour by a group of the U.S.A. for Africa musicians was arrested in February 1985 for protesting apartheid outside the South African embassy in Washington.[7] It is quite likely that a transnational sense of racial solidarity—especially at a time when prominent Africans Americans like Jesse Jackson were challenging the Reagan administration on the question of apartheid—may have helped to give U.S.A. for Africa an especially prominent place in Tanzanian eyes.

*LIVE AID, BAND AID, U.S.A FOR AFRICA: AFRICAN REACTIONS.*

Suzanne Franks writes that as Western celebrities began to raise money for famine relief, "the charitable effort became a major story in itself."[8] Band Aid and its sibling efforts not only became a central part of the Western narrative of the Ethiopian famine, they also marked an important stage in the development of the ongoing relationship between Western celebrity culture and African humanitarian issues.

Two slogans employed at Live Aid spoke to the event's planet-wide vision, as it saw the "Global Jukebox" created by the combination of technology and concern for the world's poor as a viable way for the West to meet its obligations to "Feed the World." It remains the biggest live television event of all time. By way of comparison, while four satellites were employed to broadcast the 1984 Olympic Games the previous summer,

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[5] Bob Geldof also went to Africa in January 1985, visiting Ethiopia and Sudan in order to find out how the Band Aid Trust could best spend its money.
[6] "They're Singing for Africa's Starving!" *Standard* (Nairobi), 25 April 1985.
[7] "Police Arrest Belafonte," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 2 February 1985.
[8] Suzanne Franks, "How Famine Captured the World," *Media History* 12, 2006: 307.

Live Aid used an unprecedented twelve to broadcast the concerts to over 160 countries worldwide.[9] Introducing Phil Collins to concertgoers at Philadelphia's J.F.K. Stadium, Bette Midler and Jack Nicholson said: "Anything is possible. We can beat time; we can beat hunger if we just pull together."[10] Collins had performed only hours earlier at Wembley Stadium as part of the London portion of Live Aid; immediately after his performance he boarded the Concorde and "beat time" by flying to Philadelphia to become the first person to perform on both sides of the Atlantic on the same day. Lisa Christine Scott, a California woman, wrote a letter to *Time* magazine after the event which stated that "Live Aid has demonstrated that we can transcend political and geographical barriers to conquer apathy and alter the course of humanity."[11] Gestures such as Collins's trans-Atlantic performances showed how Live Aid framed itself as evidence that technology was shrinking the world, amplifying the West's humanitarian obligation to the developing world while at the same time facilitating the fulfilment of that obligation.

However, Live Aid was not as "global" an event as it may have seemed. While broadcast around the world, the overwhelming majority of performers were American and British, with Nigeria's Sade being the only African performer and Mexico's Carlos Santana being the only other featured performer from the developing world who appeared in London or Philadelphia.[12] Musicians from Japan, Austria, Iran, Yugoslavia, Germany and the Soviet Union did contribute performances via videotape and live satellite uplink.

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[9] "Rocking the Global Village," *Time* 22 July 1985, 42; "Rock around the World," *Newsweek* 22 July 1985, 56.

[10] *Live Aid: July 13 1985, the Day the Music Changed the World.* Rhino Home Video, 2004.

[11] Lisa Christine Scott, letter to *Time*, 12 August 1985.

[12] Freddy Mercury, the lead singer of Queen, was born in Zanzibar but spent most of his youth in India. His family moved to London when he was 17.

However, their contributions took the shape of generic Anglo-American rock, only sung in other languages. Tellingly, the Live Aid DVD, issued to mark the event's twentieth anniversary, lumped all of these performances together on a single track titled "Overseas Contributors," demonstrating that these "global" contributions actually play a small role in Live Aid's official memory.[13]

Kumar praises projects like Band Aid and Live Aid for their role in raising Western awareness of the situation in Ethiopia and thereby "making it impossible for governments to ignore the demands of a concerned electorate for narrow political ends."[14] In the months after Live Aid, Maurice Strong, at the time the director of UN food relief programmes and now a noted environmental activist, also commended the projects for "injecting a whole new life and spirit into the international relief effort by using their capacity to reach people to stimulate new interest and mobilize new resources for those in need in Africa."[15]

On the other hand, Alex de Waal scathingly calls out what he calls "Band Aid humanitarianism," arguing that while the Band Aid Trust (the charitable corporation set up by Bob Geldof to manage the funds raised through Band Aid and Live Aid) may have spent the funds that it raised in a sensible manner, the adoption of the cause of African hunger by pop stars drowned out the politics at the heart of the famine, leading humanitarian NGOs to "scramble" for celebrity endorsement. This process, he argues, marked what an important stage in the gradual process of the deregulation and privatisation of the humanitarian "business" as the political priority in the West became

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[13] *Live Aid: July 13 1985, 1985, the Day the Music Changed the World.*
[14] B.G. Kumar, "Ethiopian Famines 1973-1985: A Case-Study," in *The Economics of Famine*, Jean Dreze, ed. (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1999), 429.
[15] Maurice F. Strong. "Beyond the Famine: New Hope for Africa," (London: The David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies, 1985), 8.

"[avoiding] embarrassment at the hands of...Bob Geldof," instead of tackling the political

and economic roots of mass hunger.[16] David Rieff argues that Live Aid and subsequent

similar celebrity campaigns such as Richard Gere's work on behalf of Tibetan

independence and the benefit concerts held for the victims of the 2004 Asian tsunami

reveal a fundamental disconnect between popular Western notions of the nature of the

problems facing the developing world and the actual political realities underpinning those

problems. Rieff calls efforts such as the Band Aid projects "part of this Western fantasy

of omnipotence...a politically correct version of the imperial impulse to give some

money and all will be well, as if the problems of Africa are just the results of our not

paying enough attention."[17]

April Biccum argues that the spiritual descendents of 1980s rock

humanitarianism, projects such as "Make Poverty History" and Live8—concerts

organised by Geldof during the summer of 2005 to focus the attention of the G8 onto the

question of African poverty—are intended to produce a "'Global Citizen' who advocates

development under neoliberal terms." These projects, Biccum writes, co-opt and silence

voices which are critical of the processes of globalisation and neoliberal interventions in

the developing world.[18] According to Biccum, Live8—much like Live Aid—was

intended to create "a sense of trans-national unity" around a commitment to eradicating

poverty. Live8 did so in part by using massive rock concerts to drown out anti-

globalisation protests, recreating public confidence in the WTO and other "institutions of

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[16] Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 121-122.
[17] Alan Cowell, "The Politics of Aid and Celebrities' Mass Activism." *International Herald Tribune*, 1 July 2005.
[18] April Biccum, "Marketing Development: Live 8 and the Production of the Global Citizen." *Development and Change* 38 (2007): 1112.

global governance."[19] This process, Biccum argues, echoes colonial development policies which saw the "civilizing mission" as both a moral obligation and an important part of the domestic economy.[20] Live Aid's use of the rock spectacle also served to obscure many of the political questions around famine and aid which were outlined in the first three parts of this thesis, reducing the question of African hunger to a problem which could be fixed with a sufficient infusion of Western cash and preventing discussions about how Western food, food aid and agricultural development models were actually seen by many on the receiving end of the charitable process as factors which perpetuated African underdevelopment and dependency.

The Band Aid projects have been criticised not only for not doing enough to engage with the politics of famine, but for playing an important role in the propagation of negative images of Africa and Africans for Western consumption. As Henrietta Lidchi writes, Band Aid constituted Africa "as 'other,'...a timeless space where a biblical famine—an event alien to the modern industrial West—could unfold without resistance," thereby confirming and reinforcing Western preconceptions of African reality.[21] Lidchi calls Band Aid's portrayals of Africans "counterproductive and untrue," in that they ignored how many Africans have "constantly engaged in effective strategies to circumvent the possibility of starvation." Moreover, echoing many of the critiques that came to the fore in the African press during the famine, she argues that these portrayals became "self-fulfilling prophesies" in that they tended to invite the interventions of

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[19] Biccum, "Marketing Development," 1123.
[20] Biccum, "Marketing Development," 1124.
[21] Henrietta Lidchi, "Finding the Right Image: British Development NGOs and the Regulation of Imagery," in Tracey Skelton and Tim Allen, eds. *Culture and Global Change* (London: Routledge, 1999), 92

development solutions which tended to encourage further dependence.[22]

Other recent research has shown how Band Aid's portrayal of Africans has had lasting effects on Western perceptions. In 2002, the British charitable NGO Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) released "The Live Aid Legacy," a report on British views of the developing world. VSO found that almost twenty years after the Ethiopian famine, the images that the Band Aid movement played on, the "starving children with flies around their eyes, too weak to brush them off" were the first thing that came to mind for 80% of British poll respondents who were asked what they thought of when they heard the term "developing world."[23]

Giorgio Agamben points to advertising campaigns on behalf of Rwandan refugees featuring those all-too-common images of starving children as a representation of the transformation of human life into "bare life" existing outside of all political and social contexts. This process, he argues, is a necessary precondition for certain people to be "made into the object of aid and protection."[24] In 2005, when the Band Aid Trust released Live Aid as a four-DVD set, the packaging included several stark black-and-white images of starving African children accompanied by the legend: "This DVD Saves Lives," thereby perpetuating many of the discourses which Rieff, Lidchi and Agamben are criticising, showing Africans as nothing but bare life and claiming that sending more cash is a viable way to resolve the problem of hunger.[25]

The people at the heart of these images, the intended beneficiaries of Live Aid,

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[22] Lidchi, "Finding the Right Image," 92.
[23] Voluntary Service Overseas, "The Live Aid Legacy: The Developing World through British Eyes – A Research Report." Voluntary Service Overseas, 2002.
[24] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 133
[25] *Live Aid: July 13 1985, 1985, the Day the Music Changed the World.*

were simultaneously omnipresent and completely absent from the concert and television audiences' awareness. Their persistent presence took the shape of the now-iconic Africa-shaped guitar which served as Live Aid's logo (fig. 2) and in a haunting video of Ethiopian famine victims from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation which was played on giant screens in both stadiums (with no commentary except a song by the Cars to contextualise the images).[26] However, Africans as fully-formed human subjects living in social and political contexts were nowhere to be seen at Live Aid or any other of the West's rock fundraising projects.
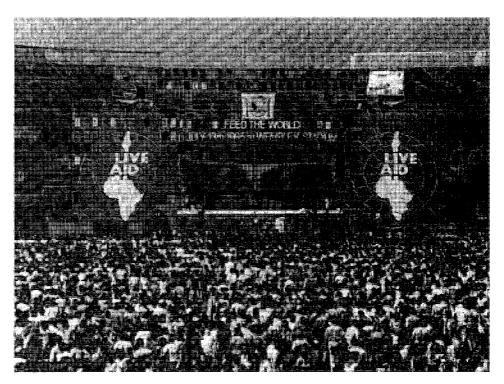


**Figure 2: Feed the World: Africa commodified as a guitar.**

While Lidchi's and Biccum's analyses show us how Live Aid's spectators may have thought about the relationship between themselves and event's intended beneficiaries, a relationship in which one party exists only as an object of the other's pity,

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[26] *Live Aid: July 13 1985, 1985, the Day the Music Changed the World.*

they do little to bring to light how Africans saw themselves in the context of a global

event such as Live Aid. James Ferguson writes that Africa's sense of "membership" in a

"globalised" world is shaped by the ways in which the continent's recent history of

poverty and violence has distanced it from the rest of the world and destroyed the "sense

of connection with, and membership in, an imagined world community that so many

Africans experienced during the early years of independence." He describes African

awareness of the privileged world and sense of "social and economic disconnection from

it" as a state of "dejection."[27]

While African newspaper coverage of the West's rock humanitarian fundraisers

for Ethiopia was limited in scope, what emerges from the analyses and coverage which I

was able to locate is not a sense of African isolation from the discourses created by these

projects, but a sense that these projects, much more than the aid plans put forward by

governments, spoke to Africans as citizens, addressing their political concerns in a way

that state discourses about aid and development did not. Many African reactions framed

the efforts of Geldof *et. al.* not as apolitical fundraisers, but as a direct challenge to a

Western political establishment that was unwilling or unable to overlook their own

political concerns while delivering assistance to Ethiopia.

Based on what coverage I was able to examine, it would appear that both official

and popular response to rock fundraisers was overwhelmingly favourable. In Ethiopia,

Dawit expressed profound thanks to Live Aid's organisers—but also used the opportunity

to point out that Ethiopians would continue to starve unless the country received more

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[27] James Ferguson: *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 166.

development aid.[28] The *Daily News* ran a commentary (reprinted from a wire service)

calling "We are the World" "an appeal for humanity to unite which could well have been

drafted by the United Nations itself."[29] This resonated with sentiments expressed at a

more local level: Prime Minister Salim Ahmed Salim told Harry Belafonte that U.S.A. for

Africa represented a "tremendous example of human solidarity" that had profoundly

moved the Tanzanian people and himself personally.[30] Julius Nyerere told Belafonte that

the food crisis required "a massive mobilisation of political will," and that he hoped that

the musicians would use their songs to address problems associated with

underdevelopment and debt as they had done with issues like American civil rights

struggles and the Vietnam War.[31] On a more practical and policy-oriented level, the *Daily*

*News* in a front-page commentary applauded U.S.A. for Africa for its spending plan. The

American charity earmarked 35% of the funds that it raised to go towards emergency

food relief, 35% for seeds, fertiliser and other agricultural necessities, 20% for long-term

development projects and 10% for the fight against hunger in America. The *Daily News*

saw U.S.A. for Africa's budgeting as a sign that, unlike the aid which Western

governments were offering, the musicians understood that "Africa's problems require

long-term solutions. International concern for immediate relief must go along with long-

term development."[32] The correspondence between the official position of the Tanzanian

government regarding the need for more development and agricultural aid and U.S.A. for

Africa's spending plan made it easy for the Tanzanian government to embrace the project.

    This favourable reaction was echoed in letters to the editor of the *Daily News*. A

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[28] "Feed the World Raises 720/-m" *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 15 July 1985.
[29] Vivienne Walt, "Songs the U.N. Could Have Written," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 12 May 1985.
[30] "PM Urges Fight against Famine," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 20 June 1985.
[31] "Belafonte Backs Addis Plan," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 1985, 2.
[32] Comment, *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 18 June 1985.

pair of letters run under the headline "Hail U.S.A. for Africa" predicted that the performers' "historical deed will go down with the liberation history of mankind," and called the record "a challenge to other organisations and individuals to find alternative solutions for the world's hungry."[33] Nuyumayinzu Billenzi wrote in and called efforts such as "We are the World" and "Tam Tam pour l'Ethiopie" (see below) "a revolutionary weapon to tackle famine and drought in African countries."[34] These letters, with their framing of the performances in terms of "liberation" and "revolution" and as challenges to the aid status quo not only point to a positive feeling about rock fundraising, but to the ways in which Africans could see these events in the context of their own discourses about the significance of the Ethiopian famine and issues surrounding the ways in which aid was given.

Resonances between rock humanitarian efforts and African concerns about aid also came to the fore in the *Daily News'* coverage of a June 1985 tour of eastern Africa undertaken by a number of performers and organisers from U.S.A. for Africa, led by Belafonte. The musicians visited Ethiopia, Tanzania, Sudan and Kenya in order to evaluate the situation in countries that would be receiving aid from the project. A look at the *Daily News'* coverage of the tour sheds light on the ways in which Africans attached their own political messages to these efforts. The *Daily News* walked a fine line throughout its coverage of the tour, embracing and commending Belafonte and the other (predominantly African-American) performers while maintaining a detached attitude towards the United States itself: throughout its coverage of the tour, the paper repeatedly

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[33] Ahmad Mfula and Lameck M. Daniel, letters to the *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 30 June 1985.
[34] Nuyumayinzu Billenzi, letter to the *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 13 July 1985.

described Belafonte not as American, but as "Caribbean" or "Caribbean-born."[35] (In fact, while he cites his years in the West Indies as being formative to his work, Belafonte was born in New York, and lived in Jamaica for about four years when he was a child.)

Throughout its coverage of the U.S.A. for Africa visit, the *Daily News* highlighted the ways in which the American performers presented their understandings of the politics of the famine and dealt with emerging allegations about the misuse of food aid by Ethiopian authorities. Many of Belafonte's statements reflected the dominant discourses about aid which had been appearing in the African media. During his meeting with Salim, Belafonte talked about how development aid focused on agricultural production, and not continued emergency food aid, was what was required to stave off famine. Belafonte said that a "prolonged welfare programme in Ethiopia would diminish the dignity of the people," and that the West should instead provide such necessities as farming tools in order to help farmers increase their production levels. Belafonte also told reporters that instead of imposing solutions, the West should "support [those] programmes which the government thinks are best for the country."[36] He also involved himself in debates over the question of the misuse of aid by the Derg, telling reporters that while in Ethiopia the delegation had seen no evidence of relief supplies being blocked; he claimed that the musicians' visit had "cleared the misconception that assistance provided to Africa was diverted to arms purchase."[37]

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[35] See, for example: Lucas Liganga, "'USA for Africa' Arrives," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 23 June 1985; "Mwalimu Hails USA for Africa," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 21 June 1985); "PM Urges Fight against Famine," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 20 June 1985; "Use Music to End Poverty: Belafonte," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 25 June 1985.

[36] "Belafonte Backs Addis Plan," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 1985, 2.

[37] "Mwalimu Hails USA for Africa," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 21 June 1985. It should be noted, however, that at least while they were in Ethiopia, the musicians saw what authorities wanted them to see. Dawit revealed in his memoirs that when the musicians visited a hospital near a resettlement site at Asos they were not told that most of the patients that they saw were in fact not famine victims but war casualties.

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The political readings which dominated African media accounts and analyses of rock fundraisers challenged the selective ways in which the musicians themselves tried to portray their events as being above politics. Bob Geldof believed that politics was not the solution to mass hunger, but something that stood in the way of effective famine relief. In January 1985, the *Standard* ran a wire-service report which quoted Geldof as saying that what annoyed him the most was "the attitude of some Governments that they shouldn't get too deeply involved as the regime out there [i.e. the Derg] is Marxist-Leninist....A three-month-old baby is not Marxist-Leninist."[38] Looking back in 1991, Geldof maintained that rock fundraisers were above politics, arguing that it was "not hopeless to ignore the discourse of development research and political polemics, and to reach above and over their impenetrable roar and touch the human beings on the other side." Yet on the one hand, while he denied the politics that were inherent in sending tens of millions of dollars' worth of aid to African states, on the other hand he engaged with a particular reading of the politics of famine, arguing that poverty and hunger would be checked only when "African leaders cease to use their citizens as fodder for monstrous utopian idiocies of social engineering, when they enfranchise the poor, when they begin to respect their countrymen, when they cease to accrue the products of the countries for their own personal glory, then there will be change."[39] In a similar vein, while Belafonte's statements about Africa's need for development aid instead of emergency aid and his denials of aid hijacking were blatantly political—and were presented as a political engagement with the question of African hunger and development in the *Daily News'*

The Americans also had the opportunity to speak with many "peasants" who were actually party cadres who had been planted in the various villages for the event. See Dawit, *Red Tears*, 217-218.

[38] Jill Serjeant, "Rock-Star Bob Helps the Hungry," *Standard* (Nairobi), 31 January 1985

[39] Band Aid Trust, "With Love from Band Aid." Internet: http://www.live8live.com/docs/bat-withlovefrombandaid%20.pdf . Accessed August 23, 2007.

coverage of the tour—the singer did his utmost to maintain the fiction that interventions

such as U.S.A. for Africa were not political, telling reporters that "we made it our

business not to get caught in the crossfire of ideology."[40]

The positive responses that Africans gave to rock fundraising efforts were

complicated by a number of letters and commentaries revealing that some people were

frustrated at their own countries in particular and Africa in general because of a perceived

dearth of African contributions to charitable efforts for Ethiopian famine victims. The

*Daily News* ran several letters which charged that African artists were not doing enough

to follow the lead of their Anglo-American counterparts—and that African governments

were not doing enough to encourage them. Sam Kasulwa of Dar es Salaam asked why

fundraising songs were being produced by Canadian, American and British artists and not

African artists, asking if the Westerners were not "more concerned than we are in Africa"

and urging the Ministry of Culture to do more to organize local artists to compose and

perform a song for famine relief.[41] Jimmy Nsimbillah wrote in and suggested that

Tanzanian artists should produce a Band Aid-type record in Swahili.[42] Nuyumayinzu

Billenzi's letter pointed out that such an effort would be in keeping with a history of

Tanzanian musicians using their art for social change, giving examples such as NUTA's

"*Kilimo cha Kufa na Kupona*" ("The Farming of Life and Death"), a 1974 song meant to

encourage increased agricultural production, and a song by DDC Mlimani Park calling

for the release of Nelson Mandela.[43]

While mostly invisible in the Anglo-American world, and remarkably under-

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[40] "Belafonte Shocked by Famine, Poverty," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 29 June 1985.
[41] Sam Kasulwa, letter to the *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 9 June 1985.
[42] Jimmy Nsimbillah, letter to the *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 29 June 1985.
[43] Nuyumayinzu Billenzi, letter to the *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 13 July 1985.

reported in the African newspapers which I examined, there were at least two African efforts to use popular music to raise funds for Ethiopian famine victims, one more successful than the other. The first was an ill-fated concert planned by a group of wives of African diplomats at the UN. The idea generated controversy when it was revealed that many of the invited musicians (including artists who would go on play at Live Aid such as the Beach Boys and Queen, and Ray Charles, who sang on "We are the World") were on the UN's blacklist for having violated the cultural boycott of South Africa.[44] The concert was finally held, featuring Manhattan Transfer and Roberta Flack, but received little coverage in the African press.[45] A more successful project was the recording of "Tam Tam pour l'Ethiopie" by a group of West African musicians including Mory Kanté, King Sunny Adé, Salif Keita and Youssou N'Dour under the direction of the Cameroonian saxophonist and singer Manu Dibango. Dibango pointed out that people from around the world had done something for Ethiopia *"sauf—ou rarement—les Africains eux-memes,"* and that his plan to record an all-African charity single had been received with a certain amount of scepticism, noting that few people believed that African artists from so many diverse backgrounds would ever unite for a good cause.[46]

While Dibango's effort did not generate the same kind of attention as U.S.A. for Africa and the other Anglo-American projects in the papers that I examined (possibly because of linguistic divides, given the Franco-African orientation of the Dibango project), and while East African musicians did not rise to the challenges set forth by letter-writers to the *Daily News*, there is still evidence of popular attempts to raise funds in the name of fighting mass hunger. These efforts were mostly directed at the local level,

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[44] "Blacklist Hits U.N. Concert," *Trinidad Guardian*, 12 February 1985.
[45] Andrew Lycett, "Food for Wheat," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 28 July 1985.
[46] Elimane Fall, "Musciciens solidaires contre la famine," *Jeune Afrique*, 9 January 1985, 59.

such as a March 1985 campaign by high school girls in Nachu, Kenya to raise money by foregoing milk and meat for two weeks. The girls contributed the savings to the less fortunate in the area, raising enough cash to buy maize and maize meal for 300 families.[47] On a broader scale, in 1984-85 Kenya had a national famine relief fund which garnered regular contributions from individuals and local businesses to raise funds for agricultural rehabilitation programmes.

*CONCLUSION*

Africans as political subjects were absent from many aspects of the Live Aid/Band Aid phenomenon, and these types of projects may be seen as productive of discourses which further neocolonial Western agendas in their framing and presentation of Africans as objects of pity in need of development. Nonetheless, the limited coverage which I was able to examine shows how Africans were able to see these events as political challenges not only to Western neoliberal and neocolonial agendas, but also to African political and cultural elites who people like Sam Kasulwa and Jimmy Nsimbillah saw as not having done enough to respond to the famine crisis.

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[47] Victor Riitho, "Alliance Girls Go Hungry to Feed Hungry Villagers," *Kenya Times* (Nairobi), 29 March 1985.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown how African discourses about the Ethiopian famine and the

broader food security crisis for which it acted as a stand-in were shaped by anxieties over

Africa's marginal place in the global economic system as well as questions of culture,

identity and gender and a profound discursive gap between urban and rural Africans.

African political leaders and other commentators blamed the crisis on the West's

historical and continued domination of Africa and that domination's effect on the

underdevelopment of African agriculture. However, while there is no doubt that Africa's

relationship vis-à-vis the West had particular effects on the way that food was produced

and consumed on the continent, colonialism did not represent a time when metropoles

imposed monolithic power on their African holdings. Rather, as Bayart argues, by

looking at the *longue durée* of African history, we can see how colonialism shaped, and

perhaps more importantly, was shaped by, complex political, social and class divisions

and intersecting networks of power operating on local and regional levels. Moreover, as

Friedberg, Burke, and Berry show, the production and consumption of food played an

important role in mediating and shaping the colonial episode, as well as being shaped by

it.

Nonetheless, selectively ignoring the ways in which scholars such as Walter

Rodney and others blamed independent African governments for perpetuating elements

of colonial rule in the formulation of postcolonial development policies, Africa's leaders

framed the continent's food security issues as being the result of the effect of external

forces on the continent's food economies, and used the Ethiopian famine to renew

discourses of pan-African unity, re-energising the OAU when it appeared to be at risk of

losing all political relevance. The close ties between food, culture and national and continental notions of identity added resonance to proposals which framed production-first strategies and the modernisation of African agriculture as the only way to ensure plentiful food while liberating the continent from a system which perpetuated its economic marginality. These proposals, however, obscured the political and social divides which determined who was eating and who was going hungry. Moreover, production-first strategies existed in tension with the realities of the modernisation of agriculture. Much like Rodney's strident criticism that colonialists left African farmers as they found them, working with a hoe—in effect, faulting colonialism for not having had enough of an effect on Africa—proposals to modernise African farming through the institution of an "African Green Revolution" overlooked the ways in which this revolution would have tied African farming more closely to the world system, and not liberated it from that system.

Absent from most of these discussions were the farmers themselves—especially female farmers. African elites used the food crisis to reinforce their paternalistic position in relation to rural Africans, sometimes imploring them to "modernise," sometimes embracing the "traditional" foods that they grew, but always, it would seem, seeing them as "backwards" if not "primitive."

These portrayals of rural Africans as "primitive" subjects in need of a paternal hand to help them develop mirrored similar discourses about Africa writ large that were created by the West's charitable reaction to the Ethiopian famine. The Western response was triggered by Mohammed Amin's images of skeletal black infants, and those images

were and continue to be the stock-in-trade of the flagship of that charitable response, Bob

Geldof's Band Aid projects.

Band Aid, Live Aid and U.S.A. for Africa have been stridently criticised—and

rightly so—for not addressing the politics of hunger and for trading in horrific imagery in

a way that perpetuates a dependent humanitarian relationship between Africa and the

West. However, a look at even the small amount of African coverage that I was able to

locate shows that Africans saw within these inherently de-politicising projects a set of

discourses which addressed Africans as citizens and envisioned a political challenge to

the status quo.

In the summer of 2008, Africa was again in the midst of a widespread food

security crisis, arising from a variety of factors including global climate change, an

emphasis on the production of biofuels (perhaps *the* cash crop of the new millennium),

and rising oil prices. The effects of H.I.V./AIDS on the African labour force should also

be taken into account in any analysis of the continent's ongoing food security issues.[1]

Ethiopia was once again at the heart of the crisis. In June, the BBC began to report on

famine in the southwest of Ethiopia; perhaps not surprisingly, the BBC's reporting in

many ways echoed the work of Buerk and Amin from a quarter of a century earlier, with

the same iconic images of starving black babies, desperate mothers and a focus on

explaining the famine as the result of a natural disaster and not a political phenomenon.

One report began with the words: "The rains did not come."[2]

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[1] See: Stephen Lewis, *Race against Time* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2005).
[2] Gavin Hewitt, "Desperation as Ethiopia's Hunger Grows," BBC News, 9 June 2008. Internet: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7444753.stm. Accessed 26 June 2008; Wendy Urquhart, "Ethiopia's Humanitarian Crisis," BBC News 31 May 2008, Internet: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7428936.stm. Accessed 26 June 2008

Perhaps more surprising is the fact that the solutions that were proposed virtually mirrored discussions dating from 1984-85. Central to 2008's discourses about continent-wide food insecurity was the need for a technologically-driven "African Green Revolution" to unlock the continent's productive potential and warnings about the possible side-effects of that revolution for African economic and political sovereignty. In May, Blaise Compaore, the president of Burkina Faso, used an ECOWAS meeting to call on member states "to undertake a regional offensive on the shortage of food production and hunger." Compaore urged the international community to help African nations "develop modern and competitive agriculture," as "the main challenge was to increase productivity in the region's rural sectors."[3] Also in May, a major UN summit held in Rome on the global food crisis "asked rich nations...to help 'revolutionise' farming in Africa and the developing world to produce more food for nearly one billion people facing hunger." Nigeria's Minister of Agriculture, Sayyadi Abba Ruma, told the conference that the food security crisis was "a wake-up call for Africa to launch itself into a 'green revolution' which has been over-delayed." Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told reporters at the conference that his organisation, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) "[hopes] to spur a green revolution in Africa which respects biodiversity and the continent's distinct regions."[4]

Opposition to calls for an African Green Revolution also reflected elements of discourses from 1984-85, pointing to the ways in which Western interventions targeting food insecurity allowed multinational corporations to expand their presence in Africa. The journalist John Mbaria, writing in Kenya's *East African*, pointed out that initiatives

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[3] Juliana Taiwo, "Ecowas Leaders Move to Tackle Food Crisis, Power," *This Day* (Lagos)
[4] "Summit on Food Crisis Seeks 'Green Revolution' for Africa," *L'Express* (Port Louis), 5 June 2008 Internet: http://allafrica.com/stories/200806050872.html. Accessed 26 June 2008.

such as Jeffrey Sachs's Millennium Village Project represented "a silent merger between business agendas pushed by the private sector and what Western governments want to achieve in Africa." "The push for a Green Revolution in Africa," Mbaria wrote, "will not benefit millions of farmers but will instead severely affect their resiliency even as it realises a boom for big-bucks biotech corporates." [5] Also featured prominently in 2008's discourses about food security problems is an urban framing of African farmers as underdeveloped subjects. According to Ruma, Nigeria "had the potential to become the food basket of Africa," but what held it back was the twofold combination of a lack of irrigation and the fact that Nigeria's 14 million small farmers relied on "rudimentary" agricultural techniques. [6]

During the 1984-85 Ethiopian famine, discourses about food policy were shaped by complex histories inextricable from considerations of empire, gender, class and national culture. Africa's subsequent food security crises continues to bear that out.

[5] John Mbaria, "'Green Revolution' Comes Under Fire Again," *The East African* (Nairobi), 15 June 2008. Internet: http://allafrica.com/stories/200806160609.html. Accessed 26 June, 2008.
[6] "Summit on Food Crisis Seeks 'Green Revolution' for Africa," *L'Express* (Port Louis) 5 June 2008.

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