

**A STUDY ON WESTERN MEDIA REPORTS OF ETHIOPIAN POLITICS:
THE CASE OF SELECTED WESTERN MEDIA**

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has been an issue of discussion among scholars for over 60 years. The globalization phenomenon is particularly tied with media. Without media, we could not see the globalization that we are witnessing now (Rantanen, 2005). Currently, the western media have dominated the international news flow. The developing world, including Africa, has become passive recipient of what comes from the West. Accordingly the dominant relationship that sustained during the ages of slavery and colonization prevailed even today. In light of this, this research aimed at assessing the contents of the stories published by *The Economist* magazine and other Western media (BBC and '30 Minutes') over the last 20 years, in between 1990 and 2010, about Ethiopia. It also tried to envisage the portrayal of Ethiopian politics by these media before the international community. To this end, document analysis was used. After analyzing the reports of the selected media, it was found that the key Ethiopian political circumstances were covered. It was also found that western media exert palpable influences on the international community regarding the internal and external political situations of the country.

Keywords: Globalization, Ethiopianpolitics, Westernmedia, Development

INTRODUCTION

Now a day, we are accustomed to hear the word ‘Global Village’ uttered by scholars, international media, and veteran politicians. The metaphor represents the coming into oneness (a village) of the world, in terms of the social, cultural, economic, and political streams, due to the today’s technological sophistications.

Stallings (2000) describes globalization as a multifaceted, multidisciplinary topic in its broadest reaches. Political scientist, Rosenau (1997) cited in Stallings (2000), defines it as "a label that is presently in vogue to account for peoples, activities, norms, ideas, goods, services, and currencies that are decreasingly confined to a particular geographic space and its local and established practices."

Some scholars are appraising the phenomenon; while others are highly frustrated with the result of it saying it is demolishing the useful cultural and ideological assets of the developing nations. The latter use the analogy of McLuhan (1964), a Canadian scholar whose revolutionary ideas have blasted an explosion of debates. He declared “The medium is the message” to mean those who have the medium (the technology) will have dominance in whatever way they want as the core point is owning the media, not having the idea. In such a way, the west is using its technological advantages to impose its ideological, social, economic, and cultural values over the developing nations.

Media is the driving force of globalization. Rantanen (2005) stated that most theorists are of the same mind in that there is practically no globalization without media and communications. In this respect, the giant transnational corporations situated in the west are facilitating the phenomenon. According to Jan (2009), the six largest global media conglomerates are AOL, Time Warner (U.S.), Disney (U.S.), Vivendi-Universal (French), Bertelsmann (German), Viacom (U.S.), and Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation (Australian). The other four main global firms are AT&T (U.S.), Microsoft (U.S.), and two media groups that are part of much large industrial corporations: General Electric/NBC (U.S.) and Sony/Columbia/ TriStar (Japanese). Of the top 10 global media firms, six are American (counting News Corporations as Australian), mostly produce, distribute, and regulate almost all media outlets. These types of companies were growing and globalizing quickly. Jan (2009) stated that Time Warner and Disney generated around 15 percent of their income outside of the United States in 1900, a figure, which he predicted, to rose to 30-35 percent by 2002.

Western media dominates global news. The media is owned exclusively by the above Western corporate giants whose financial and technological wealth allows them to dictate not only what is reported about the whole world, but they also determine what is reported (or rather “exported”) to the developing world media about Africa and the world in general. For example, according to Michira (2002), two news agencies – Reuters and Agence-France Press - control an estimated 93% of the news that flow into Africa.

Africa, as part of the developing world with the least technological and economic potential, is affected by the reports of such giant media whose purpose is to sustain western superiority. Michira (2002) explicitly pointed out that the portrayal of Africa as “dependent,” “in a crisis”, “facing a grim future,” “needing help” or even as “needing re-colonization” not only informs public opinion in the West, but also informs Western governments’ foreign policies. Such kind of images justifies the

galvanization of the Western humanitarian agencies and governments to “intervene”. He states that the images of starvation splashed by the western media during the 1984 Ethiopian famine, for example, led to an international response called Band Aid.

Accordingly, the Western media are contributing to keep the long established western domination over the developing world and focus on the negative side of life in such parts of the world as Ethiopia. Such reports seriously affect the images of countries and thereby hamper sustainable development.

WESTERN MEDIA REPORTS ON ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia, as part of the continent, is redundantly reported in the western media. Ethiopia’s name is mentioned several times in various topics. What is ‘real’ or ‘true’ about Ethiopia in the minds of the western society, in particular, and people in the rest of the world in general is portrayed by the western media in one way or another. They acquired these images by the western media through its representations of Ethiopia – via television programs and documentaries, the Internet, the print media like the newspapers, magazines, journals and books. As a result, Ethiopia is now considered as a country that is entertaining ethnical anarchy, civil war, political instability, flagrant corruption, incompetent leadership and managerial ineptitude, hunger, famine and starvation.

The aim of this paper is, therefore, to look in to the stories that had been reported so far regarding the Ethiopian politics in a few selected western media (*The Economist* magazine, BBC & ‘30 Minutes’) and to envisage the possible effects of these reports in portraying the political images of the country in the international community.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research aimed at:

- Assessing the contents of the stories published by *The Economist* magazine and other Western media over the last 20 years, in between 1990 and 2010, about Ethiopia
- Envisaging *The Economist*’s and other Western media’s portrayal of Ethiopia under different political circumstances in front of the international community

Research Questions

- What contents did *The Economist* and other Western media present regarding Ethiopia in the years between 1990 and 2010?
- How did *The Economist* and other Western media portray Ethiopia before the international community when different political circumstances unfolded?

METHODS OF THE STUDY

This study employed document analysis. As to Singh (2006) document analysis is used to examine current records or documents as sources of data. Accordingly, data was gathered from *The Economist* and other Western media (BBC and ‘30 Minutes’) which reported key Ethiopian political circumstances. These media were purposefully chosen because it is believed that they exert palpable influence worldwide by reporting events about Ethiopia.

A few influential media’s decisive reports by BBC and ‘30 Minutes’ are used to clarify their impact on the previous Haileselassie I and Dergue regimes. The 20 year reports (in between 1990 and 2010) of *The Economist* magazine regarding Ethiopian politics are also used to analyze Ethiopia’s portrayal of the media during the final years of the Dergue and the 19 years rule of the current regime, Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The magazine reports are taken from EBSCO HOST’s website (<http://search.epnet.com>).

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

BBC and ‘30 Minutes’ reports on Ethiopia and their Repercussion

In 1954, the BBC reported a news story regarding Ethiopian emperor’s visit of UK and the hot reception on his arrival in Portsmouth which signals the respect of the queen and the UK people to the emperor in particular and the country as a whole. Queen Elizabeth was quoted to say, “We greet you as the sovereign and ancient Christian State which has many links with our own Church.”

This shows that Ethiopia as a country and Emperor Haileselassie I as a king were recognized as relatives by the time.

On October 18, 1973 however, a surprising story that radically changed the preconditioned minds of the international community had been broadcast through the then prominent ‘30 Minute’ TV show, ‘This week’ program. Jonathan Dimbleby’s documentary watched by 12 million viewers entitled “The unknown famine”, disclosed the Wollo Famine, the most devastating and catastrophic disaster causing millions’ of deaths, in the history of Ethiopia. Until the report was presented by this Western media, the issue was not known to the extent it was actually harming the people, even in Ethiopia. The effect of the story did not end up by letting the international community feel negative about the country and the emperor. It also became a potential cause of the emperor’s custody under the military junta, Dergue and planted a feeling of hatred among the Ethiopian people against the emperor.

This means that the Western media reports became potential causes of a government change in Ethiopia.

***The Economist* Reports on Ethiopian Politics**

The Economist presented around 26 articles that are directly related with Ethiopian politics within the time frame of 20 years (1990-2010). Underneath, the headlines of these articles are presented in line with their corresponding publication date and the essences of each story (EBSCO HOST, 2010).

No	Publication date	Story headline	Story essence
1	9/14/91	Morning in Ethiopia	Discusses the turn of events following the ousting in May 1991 of Ethiopian leader Mengistu Haile Mariam by the EPRDF. Front's toleration of street demonstrations; Issuance of a law that explicitly recognizes the right to demonstrate; Front's statement that the UDHR will guide its own policy; Treatment received by Mengistu's defeated army; Similar process under way in Eritrea.
2	4/24/93	Another country	Reports the inhabitants of Eritrea will vote on whether to secede from Ethiopia from April 23-25. Many people fear that if Eritrea splits off, the entire African jigsaw will break up. The fear that Eritrea will start a trend is, not surprisingly, strongest in Ethiopia. Eritrea's claim to be special starts with its history. In colonial days, Eritrea was never a part of Ethiopia. Furthermore, the Eritreans fought almost every year of annexation by Ethiopia. Eritreans are not breaking away as much as making their separation formal. Furthermore, the Eritreans fought almost every year of annexation by Ethiopia. Their victory over the Ethiopian army in May 1991, which ended a 30-year war, led to the liberation of their country.
3	12/17/94	Ethiopia's state terror on trial	Discusses the mass trial in Ethiopia of former dictator, Soviet backed Mengistu Haile Mariam ('butcher of Gondar') and his cronies, charged by the current government with mass murder and other crimes. The huge mass of documents and other evidence; Criticism and support for the trials.
4	5/6/95	The caravan passes on	Focuses on ethnically-based politics in Ethiopia and reports that ethnic affiliation is considered a basis for political affiliation in Ethiopia; Private media permitted, local political parties encouraged; the official use of local languages was also encouraged; and Amharic, the language of the large group in central Ethiopia, declared no longer the national tongue; Plans for a general election on May.
5	05/20/2000	Ethiopia's and Eritrea's forgotten war resumed	The article reports that the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea has resumed after a phase of peace. On May 10, Ethiopian army started shelling Eritrean positions at midnight. Eritrea claimed to have killed or wounded 25,000 Ethiopians in the first three days of fighting. The United Nations (UN) has failed pacify both countries.
6	06/24/2000	Eritrea and Ethiopia at a doubtful peace	Reports on the tenuous peace achieved between formerly warring countries Eritrea and Ethiopia. Interim demarcation of the border between the neighboring countries; Economic conditions in the two countries; Famine; Outlook for the situation.
7	03/24/2001	Meles and the plotters	Focuses on Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. How a faction within TPLF almost unseated him; Thought of some within his own movement that he was not strong enough against Eritrea; Thought that Ethiopia is too reliant on subsistence agriculture and dependent on foreign aid; Growth of Ethiopia's economy.

No	Publication date	Story headline	Story essence
8	05/26/2001	Post victory turmoil	Discusses the government and domestic discontent in Ethiopia. Reasons for the fragility of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's government, including unemployment; Protests by students for academic freedom; Role of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in the country's history; Background on the war with Eritrea.
9	5/21/2005	A taste of democracy	The article looks at elections in Ethiopia and discusses whether the country deserves more international economic assistance. It was the freest election ever held in Ethiopia. Ethiopia has become a less harsh and more open society. Western donors see it as a test case for the argument, advanced by Britain and others in the run-up to the G8 summit in July 2005, that a doubling of aid could help lift Africa out of poverty. Under Meles Zenawi, who now rules pragmatically, Ethiopia is doing better. During the campaign, the prime minister likened the opposition's thinking to that of the Interahamwe, the militia that carried out the Rwandan genocide of 1994. That is ridiculous, but it suggests that Ethiopia's stability cannot be taken for granted.
10	8/13/2005	Hoping that a star won't fizzle	The article focuses on political strife in Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa. Although food production has more than doubled since 1993, 9m Ethiopians now depend on food aid and another 18m are malnourished. And as parts of the country become hungrier, ethnic divisions are sharpening. Demography is just one reason why Ethiopia's foreign well-wishers, who keep the economy afloat, are again getting nervous. As food gets scarcer again, small bands of guerrillas in the south and east, most of them no more than cattle rustlers and displaced people, could turn local tensions into insurrections. There are worries, too, that a row over the disputed border with Eritrea, to the north, could flare up again into war. The stability of the entire Horn of Africa, which is awash with cheap weapons, depends to a large extent on sensible governance in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital. The final results of a general election on May 15th are still in dispute. The election board has picked through a slew of ballot-rigging accusations and other abuses, including the beating and murder of witnesses to election fraud, mainly filed by two large opposition parties, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy and the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces. Their supporters took to the streets of Addis Ababa and other towns after the poll. On June 8th, police and troops fired on protesters who, they said, had been throwing stones, and killed some 40 of them. The prime minister, Meles Zenawi, declared himself shocked and ordered an independent investigation. The United States and the European Union's countries, which together provide Ethiopia with nearly a third of its budget, have urged restraint. A state of emergency enforced after the killings helped calm things down; it was lifted late last month. The hope is that the opposition will now take up its seats in the parliament.

No	Publication date	Story headline	Story essence
11	10/29/2005	Backing the favorite	<p>The article reports that the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague awarded the disputed town of Badme to Eritrea, but Ethiopia has refused to accept the court's ruling. Both impoverished countries are armed to the teeth and a costly United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission is hunkered along the border. And every so often come rumblings of another war, as has happened when Eritrea banned the UN from overflying its territory, drawing accusations from Ethiopia that it was shifting troops to the border. Instead of insisting that Ethiopia accept the loss of Badme, America and the European Union seem intent on having the country as their friend. For America, Ethiopia is of minor strategic importance, as an ally against Islamist extremists in southern Ethiopia and Somalia. Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia's leader, is a personal friend of Britain's prime minister, and was a member of Tony Blair's "Commission for Africa".</p>
12	11/12/2005	A darling of the west turns nasty	<p>The article reports on government-sanctioned violence against protesters in Ethiopia. For the second time since a disputed general election, Ethiopian government forces opened fire on protesters, killing at least 46 and injuring hundreds more. Ethiopia's prime minister, Meles Zenawi, regretted the shootings, but said that the police were mostly acting in self-defence. Western countries do have some leverage over Zenawi through the large amounts of aid they are giving to his country; Britain and several other donors have already suspended some of that money. Many, perhaps most, Ethiopians and many foreign observers argue that, despite the government's recent bloody brutality, Zenawi is still the best man to keep Ethiopia on a path to development.</p>
13	12/17/2005	Big brother has other worries	<p>The article looks at international relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea. War between Ethiopia and Eritrea was averted, at least for a while, when Ethiopia agreed to pull its troops back from its disputed border with Eritrea. It was canny of Ethiopia, much the bigger of the pair, to run for the high moral ground just when Eritrea was being cudgelled forward by its dictatorial leader, Issaias Afwerki, who promptly denounced Ethiopia's move. Ethiopia's prime minister, Meles Zenawi, may have pulled back in part to divert attention from his government's treatment of its political foes.</p>

No	Publication date	Story headline	Story essence
14	3/18/2006	Injustice will be done	<p>The article focuses on alleged injustice in Ethiopia. The trial of 129 opposition politicians, journalists and other dissenters starts later this month in Addis Ababa. The accused face a range of charges, including treason and planning "genocide". Among them are the leaders of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), an umbrella organisation of several parties, mainly representing one of the largest ethnic groups, the Amhara. The prisoners include the coalition's elected mayor of Addis Ababa, Berhanu Nega, and 13 of the country's more independent journalists. But putting opponents and critics in the dock on trumped up charges will not endear the government of Meles Zenawi to the western governments that have given Ethiopia hundreds of millions of dollars in aid. The accused, held without bail since November, were among thousands of people arrested in a general crackdown after the violent anti-government protests that followed Mr Meles's disputed election victory last May. The accused face a range of charges, including treason and planning "genocide". Human Rights Watch, a New York-based lobby group, argues that the government is engaged in the violent suppression of any form of protest, punishing suspected supporters of the opposition. However, the trial is a reminder--if one were needed--of the true nature of the regime and of its authoritarian roots. Amnesty International, another human-rights monitor, considers those standing trial in Addis Ababa to be non-violent "prisoners of conscience".</p>
15	8/19/2006	A general defects	<p>Reports on the facing internal and external political challenges of Meles Zenawi. Ethiopia's Oromo Liberation Front wants to see Zenawi replaced. Ethiopia sent its military into Somalia in defense of the Transitional Government in Baidoa; this action could lead to conflict with Islamist militias based in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu. Ethiopia may also go to war with its arch-enemy Eritrea</p>
16	10/28/2006	Soviet school	<p>The article reports Ethiopia's return to torture and violence to keep dissidents in line. Human rights lawyer Yalemzewd Bekele was arrested while attempting to escape the country. Alemayehu Fantu was arrested for passing out calendars calling for the release of dissidents and the overthrow of the government. Street protests in June and November 2005 ended with the killings of dozens of people.</p>
17	9/29/2007	An archived of murders past	<p>The article reports on one woman's (Hirut Abebe, a former victim of 'Red terror') efforts to make publicly available the files and archives of Ethiopia's dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam. The former dictator left detailed historical records of many atrocities committed, including the murder of the former emperor Haile Selassie. These records also provide evidence for thousands of criminal cases brought by a special prosecutor.</p>

No	Publication date	Story headline	Story essence
18	11/3/2007	A brittle western ally in the horn of Africa	It portrays how Ethiopia, the previous western ally become antagonistic in the post 2005 election stalemate when a lot has been killed; opposition leaders accused in high level crimes of genocide and treason.
19	11/6/2007	Thank you and good bye	Cover story- This article reports on the invasion of Somalia by Ethiopia. Most of Somalia has been ruled by Islamists with assistance by Al Queda. They marginalized the weak transitional government, but Ethiopia, with tacital aid from the United States, quickly routed them. However, the author feels that Ethiopia needs to leave the country quickly before they are seen as an occupying force.
20	12/15/2007	Bad words over Badme	The article discusses a border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Between 1998 and 2000, the countries warred over contested lands. The Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission finished its business in December 2007 with no agreed demarcation of those contested areas. Eritrea's authoritarian president, Issias Afwerki, losing popularity over his harsh and erratic rule, is using the border issue to win back public support. Ethiopian president Meles Zenawi has vowed to annihilate Eritrea.
21	11/1/2008	The tragedy of the decade	The article reports that a severe drought in the horn of Africa may cause mass starvations in several countries including Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya. In 2000 the UN set a goal to eliminate extreme hunger in the world by 2015, but the International Committee of the Red Cross has suggested that the drought may cause a famine that would be worst tragedy of the first decade of the 2000s.
22	12/6/2008	A promised withdrawal	Describes the process of Ethiopia's involvement on Somalia since December 2006. The loss of 800 Ethiopian soldiers; unknown coast paid; insignificant stay except facilitating peaceful negotiation between Somalia's impotent transitional government and moderate Islamists.
23	2/7/2009	A row over human rights	Deals with the reports of the Human rights watch reports and the Ethiopian government's response saying some are outright lies; yet it couldn't assure the human rights of some threatening politicians like Birtukan Midekssa.
24	8/15/2009	The two sides of Meles Zenawi	The article discusses Meles Zenawi. Among his accomplishments are the construction of roads, schools, and clinics, as well as a low crime rate. However, Zenawi's government has also demonstrated little tolerance for political dissent. Protesters have been shot dead and political opponents imprisoned.
25	8/22/2009	Movements of Jah people	The article discusses the release from prison of Ethiopian popular musician Teddy Afro. Afro was released after serving 16 months of a two-year sentence for a fatal motor vehicle accident. Critics of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi have said the conviction was a political retaliation for songs Afro had written criticizing the government. Afro is popular with Ethiopia's young people, and the government faces elections in 2010.

No	Publication date	Story headline	Story essence
26	1/23/2010	Jangling nerves	Authoritarian President Meles Zenawi is expected to easily win re-election in May, 2010. Zenawi, a member of the party that has held power since 1991, has presided over an increase in economic development and some social progress in what remains a poor country; former Marxist rebels from Tigray holds power; forum strongest opposition; independent newspapers closed and journalists fled.

Summary of *the Economist* Reports

The Economist has given substantial coverage for decisive political circumstances in Ethiopia. Most of the stories have been presented in line with the prevailing western ideology and political interests. The magazine reported the mass trial of the ex-president of Ethiopia, Mengistu, (coined as ‘butcher of Gondar’, ‘Soviet backed dictator’, etc) and his cronies on their leave from power. On the other hand, the magazine welcomed the incumbent (EPRDF), and wrote a story headlined “Morning in Ethiopia” on its arrival. It appreciated the unleashed freedom allowed to the people on EPRDF’s arrival to the capital and the rest of the country. It also reported the process of the Eritrean secession. It clearly indicated the internal incongruity among members of the TPLF as a result of stand differences on the issue.

The Economist depicted the ethnic problems of the country and the plan of the incumbent in this regard. It reports the encouragement of the official use of local languages; and the declaration of Amharic to be no longer the national tongue. In addition, it reported Ethiopia’s government friendly relationship with the west, up to the extent of calling ‘darling of the west’ until the 2005 national election which is reported to be ‘the freest election ever held in Ethiopia’. It is considered as the turning point for the relationship with the west as the incumbent deports and alleges the then CUD (Coalition for Unity and Democracy) opposition politicians and killed the demonstrators in several towns including the capital in the post election turmoil. Then, the magazine wrote articles entitled, ‘The darling of the west turns nasty’, and ‘a brittle western ally in the horn of Africa’ on 2005 and 2007 respectively. It also goes to the extent of the personal characteristics of the prime minister in the article headlined ‘the two sides of Meles Zenawi’ emphasizing on the dictatorial side of the man. The western community, therefore, come to learn that political instability prevails in the country. A few US senate members therefore proposed and supported HR-2006, though unsuccessful, that indicated their detestation towards the incumbent Ethiopian politicians. As an influential and renowned medium having international circulation and readability, it is safe to think that the magazine has unreserved impact over the international community.

It also gave substantial coverage to Ethiopia’s intervention in the internal affairs of Somalia. What is exceptional here is that some stories have been situated as cover story. This implies that the issue is chosen to be the best among all. It reviewed the pros and cons of Ethiopia’s involvement to Somalia- up to 800, or more Ethiopian soldiers killed. In such articles Ethiopia is considered to play insignificant roles except its effort to negotiate ‘the impotent Somalia’s transitional government and the moderate Islamists.’ Starvation and famine are also the issues reported in the magazine.

In general, the reports approved that the basic Ethiopian political situations have been covered by the magazine. The reports tend to criticize those who infringes from the prevailing western ideological and political interests; and they tend to praise those who are under the purview of the western thinking. Similarly, the reports have given better placement for stories of western interests (the case of Ethio- Somalia dispute as cover story) than the internal political havoc in the country (no such a story become a cover story).

This shows that the way the selected Western media present politics in Ethiopia is highly influenced by the stand of the respective Ethiopian governments and leaders towards the western countries and the chosen western media tend to promote western domination using their technological advantages. This phenomenon could be bottleneck to the sustainable development of the third world.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, the phenomenon of globalization has become an opportunity to the Western countries to extend their long established domination over the developing world. On the other hand, the phenomenon has become quagmire to the development of the developing world, including Ethiopia. Using the opportunity of technology, the western world has controlled global information flow. The media is owned exclusively by Western corporate giants whose financial and technological wealth allows them to dictate not only what is reported about the whole world, but they also determine what is exported to the African media about Africa and the world in general.

What is in the minds of the western community is, therefore, the result of western media reports in one way or another. Such media as *The Economist* are exaggerating the negatives while totally overseeing some development activities in countries like Ethiopia.

Therefore, the western media is exerting palpable influence over the political and ideological progress of the developing countries.

In Ethiopia, the selected media witnessed the same trend. The western media have shown its capacity by sympathizing millions, galvanizing internal and external political atmospheres and guiding western policies towards Ethiopian politics.

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