UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Press

A SAMARITAN STATE REVISITED: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CANADIAN FOREIGN AID
Edited by Greg Donaghy and David Webster

ISBN 978-1-77385-041-2

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Press

press.ucalgary.ca

"Tears Are Not Enough": Canadian Political and Social Mobilization for Famine Relief in Ethiopia, 1984–1988

Nassisse Solomon

On 1 November 1984, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's flagship evening news program, *The National*, aired a four-minute editorial on the devastating famine in Ethiopia by reporter Brian Stewart. This short clip scaled the depths of human suffering with its vivid depictions of apocalyptic famine, and has since been credited as the impetus driving the Canadian government and thousands of ordinary Canadians to respond to the humanitarian crisis on the African continent. Canadians, Progressive Conservative MP Reg Stackhouse told his colleagues, were "shocked by television reports of mass starvation in Ethiopia."[1] These morbid and haunting images enabled Progressive Conservative prime minister Brian Mulroney and his secretary of state for external affairs, Joe Clark, to galvanize non-partisan support for a broad humanitarian rescue mission. Consequently, between 1984 and 1988, the Ethiopian famine became a unifying national cause and "clarion call" to international action for Canadians from coast to coast.[2]

The global response to what was widely referred to as the "African crisis" was immediate and largely unprecedented in its scope and level of citizen engagement.[3] Canada was no different. Canadian engagement

with the Ethiopian famine crisis was multifaceted and extended across the political and social spectrum. Inspired by the federal government's determination to assume an unusually high-profile leadership role in fostering various forms of participatory and citizen-engaged politics, Canada and Canadians embodied, and even aspired to exceed, the tenets of "good Samaritanism" that Stephen Brown explores in his chapter. Notions of altruism and humanitarianism articulated by politicians and citizens alike reflected Brown's premise that true altruism required that "a state, like a person, should be generous to complete strangers without any self-interested motive." By 1985, nearly a million Canadians had donated "an average of $60 each to help save 30 million Africans from starvation."[4] During the four years of sustained public support for Ethiopian relief, a wide variety of Canadians in and outside of government joined together in a socio-political phenomenon that was later dubbed the "Mulroney model."[5]

Canada provided more aid to Africa than to any other region of the Global South between 1980 and 2011.[6] Yet there has been little scholarly examination of the socio-political implications of Canadian involvement in Ethiopian/African famine relief efforts. Most discussions of the famine relief campaign in Canada are subsumed as mere footnotes in discussions of Canadian foreign policy under Mulroney, diminishing the fervour and determination of Canadians and their government to collaborate in tackling famine eradication in Africa. This chapter examines the ways in which Canadian involvement with the Ethiopian famine was distinct and unparalleled in its range of state and non-state actors, and in its level of public support for, and engagement with, famine relief efforts. It explores too how exposure to the difficult challenges of humanitarian relief sowed the seeds for popular disenchantment and the resurgence of domestic partisan divisions. The "Samaritan State" was clearly an ephemeral phenomenon.

The Samaritan State Rallied

Ubiquitous publicity about the Ethiopian famine through multiple media forums fostered close government and public cooperation in Canada aimed at eradicating famine in Africa. The African famine encouraged several facets of Canadian society, many with no prior exposure to foreign aid questions, to merge into a truly "Samaritan State." New Democratic Party

MP Pauline Jewett attributed "steadfast public support to the cause" as an outcome of the "global village" created by television.[7] Without doubt, as anthropologist Sonya de Laat discusses in chapter 9, the *"aestheticization"* and "the packaging of famine as a shocking and dramatic crisis" was integral to the discursive construction and the rallying of both political and public support for famine relief in the Horn of Africa. The plight of the millions of people in the afflicted regions was undeniably desperate, and much of the photographic coverage of the famine featured close-ups of the most emaciated individuals. The images of famine victims and the endless cover stories devoted to the Ethiopian crisis permeated Canadian and Western consciousness, then and later.[8]

The Ethiopian famine was one of the first foreign policy crises encountered by Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government, elected in early September 1984.[9] Responding to Stewart's CBC newscast, Foreign Minister Joe Clark told his party's caucus on 7 November that it "is our duty as a people to respond." He continued: "We will treat Ethiopia as an all-party matter. . . . We want support from all Canadians. . . . MPs should contact service clubs and local mayors and ask them to lend their efforts to provide aid. . . . One of the faults in past Canadian foreign policy was that the Canadian people were shut out."[10] Clark and his compatriots were doubtless influenced by lessons learned from Canada's mishandling of the Biafran crisis in Nigeria nearly two decades earlier. While Biafra quickly faded from popular memory in the aftermath of the Nigerian civil war, historian Stephanie Bangarth argues that "the lessons learned, the tactics employed by mainstream churches, NGOs, and individuals, and the pressure brought to bear on the federal government would serve both as a foundation on which to build future humanitarian relief operations in Africa and as an example of the importance of public mobilization."[11]

The prime minister too was moved by the "tragedy of vast starvation and death," and a desire not to repeat errors of governments past, when he promised the House of Commons to "provide leadership and assistance in this grave crisis" despite a towering national deficit, the prospect of a tough budget, and campaign promises to create more jobs.[12] Opposition members echoed the prime minister's sentiments because, as Liberal MP Jean Chrétien explained, "no one wants to be partisan about this issue."[13] The national consensus in November 1984 held that "although Canada has

its problems, we are fat compared with those countries."[14] Ever the canny populist, Chrétien was right in noting that all Canadians wanted the government to do more and that this was "not the time to cut foreign aid."

From the outset of concerted relief efforts, Progressive Conservative leaders were convinced that the crisis was a concern not only for the government but also "for the people of Canada."[15] Hence, Clark asked "the help of Members of Parliament throughout the House of Commons, and of citizens across the country to ensure that the Government acts and that the people act to do what we can to stop the starving in Ethiopia." The foreign minister's call to action was met with resounding chants of "*Hear, Hear!*"

Official enthusiasm was echoed by the Canadian public. An ad hoc group of Canadian musical stars and celebrities, Northern Lights, repeated the government's call to action in an iconic charity pop song, "Tears Are Not Enough," that topped the charts for 1985.[16] Featuring news stories like

"Artisans donate work to aid famine victims"[17] and "Canucks pledge $1.5 M,"[18] press headlines illustrated the public's engagement with the issue. The entire country was moved by the televised images of refugee camps and mass starvation, resulting in an outpouring of support typically characterized as "magnificent," with more than 500,000 Canadians donating about $35 million to Africa by May 1986.[19]

The optimism and determination that marked popular humanitarianism in Canada was infectious and far reaching. Over the course of four years, acts of relief were carried out by a variety of state and non-state actors, including churches, community groups, and schools as well as individual professionals from a range of fields with different levels of expertise.[20] Heightened public awareness and engagement with the issue of famine in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia, widened the space in Canada for a proliferation of discourses on the global duties and obligations of the state and its citizens, culminating in acts of "humanitarian internationalism."[21] University of Toronto political scientist Cranford Pratt defined "humane internationalism" as "an acceptance that citizens and governments of the industrialized world have ethical responsibilities towards those beyond their borders who are suffering severely and who live in abject poverty."[22]

In their collective response to the famine, Canadians demonstrated their commitment to this philosophy in spades. As early as 13 November 1984, Progressive Conservative MP Jim Edwards captured the national mood when he recounted how the Kiwanis Club of Edmonton was "recommending to its board of directors an expenditure of $10,000 for Ethiopian and African relief."[23] Edwards described how he had received a call from an Edmonton doctor, who volunteered to spend his six-week vacation in Ethiopia at his own expense. That, Edwards insisted, was "the true spirit of Canadian internationalism."[24]

The national feeling persisted. Early in the second year of the relief effort, a survey conducted by the government's chief pollster, Allan Gregg, found that the majority of Canadians surveyed "were more concerned about global problems of hunger and starvation than [domestic] economic problems."[25] Gregg characterized this finding as the prevalent attitude among Canadians and not just "a passing fad."[26] In March 1986, Gregg's final report, entitled *Canadians and Africa: What Was Said,* highlighted the fact that in alignment with previous surveys, one in five Canadians

continued "to cite world hunger and poverty as their second major issue of concern."[27]

During the peak famine relief effort, the Canadian government was truly in tune with the national mood. Indeed, political scientist Kim Nossal later asserted that if populism in politics is measured by a willingness to involve as many "ordinary people in the policy process as possible or practicable," then the "Mulroney government had an evident populist streak."[28] In recent years, foreign affairs critics have cited this period as exemplary, contrasting it with the apathetic attitude of successive governments in their responses to other subsequent African crises.[29]

Impassioned by a visit to the drought and famine–ravaged East African nation in December 1984, Clark several times underscored the Mulroney government's commitment to taking leadership in this cause. Instead of relying on established mechanisms in the Department of External Affairs or CIDA, the Mulroney government appointed David MacDonald as its Emergency Coordinator for African Famine, effectively creating "a new *ad hoc* layer of political administration."[30] MacDonald was given the resources to develop a separate office to oversee all the relief activities of the government, NGOs, and private citizens, enabling Canadians to respond to the ensuing "human crisis in the most effective way possible."[31] MacDonald was effectively granted an implicit form of "super ministerial role and access," allowing him to overcome bureaucratic barriers and to request immediate action directly from departments, powers that he credits as key to the successes of his team and its mission.[32]

MacDonald was clearly the right man for the job. Over the course of his term as relief coordinator, MacDonald won the hearts and trust of the Canadian public, often using quiet diplomacy to "defuse criticism of Canadian food aid operations during a critical period."[33] First elected to Parliament from Prince Edward Island in 1965, he was a skilled political operative, who served as a cabinet minister in Joe Clark's short-lived Progressive Conservative government in 1979 before losing his seat in 1984. An ordained United Church minister, MacDonald enjoyed a sterling reputation in Ottawa as a man of conscience. He championed aid to the breakaway Nigerian province of Biafra in 1968–69 and opposed the imposition of the War Measures Act to crush the radical Front de libération du Québec in October 1970.[34] Happy to rise above partisan

differences, as an opposition MP MacDonald joined Liberal prime minister Pierre Trudeau's "Futures Secretariat," a group of national opinion leaders promoting "public interest in Third World issues."[35] MacDonald's appointment reflected the Mulroney government's bipartisan approach to famine relief. MacDonald surmises that he was asked by the government because they needed someone who could tackle bureaucratic impediments, as well as "somebody they knew really well and trusted."[36] "There was a lot of spontaneous combustion" he recalled, "of people who wanted to do something meaningful."[37] In his report *Africa's Famine and Canada's Response,* MacDonald outlines in great detail the ways in which Canadians from coast to coast responded in what he characterizes as both traditional and "new and imaginative ways."[38]

Relief Across The Spectrum

One of the earliest public initiatives that MacDonald highlights was a Halifax-based "adopt-a-village" airlift on Christmas Eve organized by Haligonians working with John Godfrey, president of Kings College University, and the Ottawa-based World University Service of Canada (WUSC). "I see it as an alliance of people in the community of all ages," commented Godfrey. "What makes this thing great is that we've got 19 year olds with 69 and 42 year olds who are working together on it, each bringing his own skills and patience. It's been a real trip for students in the Maritimes who have been talking to air force Colonels and helping to order planes around."[39] The effort, MacDonald emphasized, quickly led to the "twinning" of Canadian communities in the Maritime provinces with a number of Ethiopian villages. Through twinning, Canadians from coast-to-coast became invested in helping individual Ethiopian communities. Canadians were seeking long term change, and the practice of twinning came to be seen as a sustainable strategy to ensure that a humanitarian crisis of this magnitude would not reoccur.[40]

The experience with Gode, one of six Ethiopian villages in WUSC's four-month-old Ogaden-wide emergency program that was matched up with a Canadian city, was not unusual. Inspired by Godfrey's effort, a small group of students at the University of Toronto secured their school's backing, obtained space in the International Student Centre, and began fundraising. Students, staff, and faculty were challenged to support a community

with a $12 donation, or a dollar per month, the price of a cup of coffee.[41] Barbara Treviranus, one of the Toronto villagers, recalls her involvement in the start of this initiative as empowering to a fourth-year undergraduate interested in international development.[42]

When twinning was "adopted" as an International Youth Year activity by local broadcaster City TV, plenty of media coverage followed.[43] Dubbed the "*village twinners*," the organizers ensured widespread participation in their effort by publicizing it across the city's subway system and by engaging Mayor Art Eggleton, who attached an appeal on Gode's behalf to the city's July tax bill.[44] Rallying the city of Toronto proved to be a cinch, with almost twenty Toronto "Villagers" schools cooperating "to aid Gode with awareness weeks, all night dances and popcorn sales."[45] By the time activist Dawn Mac-Donald visited Gode in February 1986, this Toronto group had raised over "$60,000 with an estimated further $40,000 coming from various school and church campaigns in progress."[46] Canadian youth were once again emblems of the nation's commitment to a worthy international cause.[47]

Citizens in more rural settings were also engaged in agitating for long-term change through cooperative action. In the summer of 1986, for instance, Susan James of the Guelph African Relief Network (GAFRN) wrote Ontario premier David Peterson, petitioning the provincial government to focus on "community-to-community" action between the province and Africa.[48] GAFRN, characterized as "an informal grouping of . . . agencies and organizations working either in development assistance or in education in international development," was a typical small-scale Canadian initiative. It aimed to bolster "sustained individual personal involvement by both Canadians and Africans" and wanted more done by Canadian governments to rally their public into greater displays of international humanitarianism. "We believe," said James, urging the premier to action, "that the response we have observed here to the challenge of the African drought and famine, has opened a door to much higher levels of engagements of Ontario people and their communities with Africans and development actions in Africa."[49]

GAFRN members believed that deeper ties between Guelph and Africa would have a long-lasting impact, and were consequently seeking the support of their provincial government in bringing their efforts at local city council to fruition. The group hoped that the province would support an exchange of health care providers, broaden the existing activities of colleges

and universities in sharing both students and teachers, create more opportunities for African students to come to Ontario schools and universities through a revised fee structure, and initiate the sharing of provincial and municipal methods of planning natural resource and agricultural resource assessment and development. All of these suggestions were indicative of the fact that Canadian relief efforts would inevitably veer into activities that might be considered as foreign policy initiatives embedded in conceptualizations of development emerging from the Mulroney government's willingness to engage its citizens in participatory forms of politics.

GAFRN, like other relief organizations, participated in the national "Forum Africa" consultation meetings, which invited Canadians to "evaluate the African crisis, learn from it and to reflect on the role they could play in the recovery of those African countries suffering from famine."[50] Forum Africa was initiated by the federal government on 4 September 1985 in the city halls of Ottawa and Hull; by February 1986, more than fifty communities across six regions of the country had held symposium sessions.[51] Though the impetus for these meetings came from the Office of the Canadian Emergency Coordinator, it was intended that community-based organizations, including humanitarian groups, churches, education, business, unions, municipalities, and the media would assume responsibility for the program. Ultimately, "Forum Africa" underlined the federal government's capacity and willingness to leverage existing networks and resources to spearhead Canada-wide engagement on a foreign aid issue.

Overall, the level of public and political engagement with the famine in Ethiopia was impressive, cross-sectional, and yet, also cause for reflection. Based on reports produced by MacDonald and his team, ideas of personal sacrifice to help Ethiopians were palatable to many Canadians, so long as the sacrifice was for the greater good. Perhaps the most poignant and hard-hitting examples of devotion to the cause were the demonstrations of support from Canadians who themselves were faced with economic hardship. John Amagoalik, co-chairman of the Inuit Committee on National Issues, told a news conference that most Inuit of his "generation have all been affected, directly or indirectly, by famine."[52] Inuit representatives were soon scheduled to tour Ethiopia, and they placed an emphasis on the fact that they identified "with others who live in harsh conditions and suffer from famine."[53]

In another example, Nancy Leavitt from Edmonton wrote to Clark offering $125. Leavitt, a full-time student and mother of three teenagers, clearly felt the sacrifice at home was worth the price of helping the "starving children of Ethiopia."[54] "I trust this money will go for food and not arms," she wrote, explaining that she had told her own children that their Christmas will not be an elaborate one, but that they will "all have a clear conscience" knowing that they did their utmost to contribute. Irrefutably, the African famine of this period elicited mass compassion from Canadians from all walks of life.

Channelling Relief

Mass awareness of the African famine ultimately served a twofold purpose as it enabled mass mobilization and ultimately mass consumption of the issues as presented by the media. In addition to the shock value of the footage rendered, representations of the famine were also arguably packaged to elicit moral imperatives to act. Over the course of the four years of sustained famine relief efforts by the Canadian government and its citizens, Ethiopia would receive the most attention of the twenty-one African nations afflicted by famine or in receipt of "abnormally high" international food aid in this period.[55]

Most of Canada's Official Development Assistance (ODA) program was administered by CIDA, and assistance reached Ethiopia in this period through four principal channels: bilateral arrangements, multilateral channels, special Canadian programs, and Canadian businesses supported by CIDA.[56] By the early 1980s, food experts had already deemed that "Africa's population was rapidly outstripping food production."[57] Hence, the main CIDA objective in Ethiopia was food security, and it focused its efforts on providing food aid and investing in bilateral projects through NGOs, the Africa 2000 program, a Business Cooperation Branch's Industrial cooperation program, and a joint CIDA–International Development Research Centre project.[58] It is through assistance from CIDA's Special Programs Branch that the direct participation of Canadians was elicited, in support of the Canadian government's "efforts to promote self-reliance and meet basic human needs in developing countries."[59]

From the outset of the government's relief effort, it was widely recognized that Canada had on "a per capita basis and in terms of absolute figures, contributed the most towards food aid in Ethiopia."[60] In total, through regular CIDA programs and the Special Fund for Africa, set up in response to the 1984–85 drought, Canada supplied Ethiopia with well over 100,000 tons of food in 1984–85, with a value of more than $39 million. This represented almost one-quarter of Canada's total food aid to Africa.[61] In addition to increased food aid and assistance from the bilateral and Special Programs Branch, Ethiopia was the principal recipient of funds from the $65 million Special Fund for Africa and the $20 million African Recovery Fund in 1984–85.[62]

The Politics of Aid

By the early 1980s, as Ted Cogan points out in his chapter in this volume, foreign aid had already become a politically charged subject in Canada. This was no less true when it came to dealing with the famine-stricken regions in Africa. The efforts of Liberal prime minister Pierre Trudeau to increase aid to Ethiopia in 1983–84 in anticipation of its looming famine had drawn sharp criticism from the Progressive Conservative opposition.[63] In January 1984, for instance, Progressive Conservative MP Ron Stewart had called into question both the nature, and the implications of, Canadian aid to Ethiopia. Stewart was especially concerned by reports from the European Parliament that Western aid to Ethiopia was being sent onward to the Soviet Union, Canada's cold war adversary. Moreover, citing reports that the Ethiopian government was "spending 40% of its budget on its army—instead of feeding its starving citizens," he questioned CIDA's prudence in allocating $10 million in food aid to Ethiopia. While members of his conservative party supported aid when and where it was needed, Stewart insisted that accountability and transparency on the part of the recipient nation should be weighted heavily. The MP further contended that Liberal economic policies had put Canada "in the same league as Mexico, another bankrupt nation." "The taxpayers' hard earned dollars," Stewart concluded, should not be spent "propping up inefficiently run, one-party dictatorships that are politically unfriendly both to us and to the entire notion of democracy and human rights."[64]

Given pre-existing patterns of partisan conflict over aid, it is noteworthy that the overwhelming public and political response to the Ethiopian crisis after November 1984 swept away concerns regarding the Ethiopian government and the efficacy of the CIDA's aid delivery system. Yet, as political scientist Mark W. Charlton argues in *The Making of Canadian Food Aid Policy*, the Ethiopian famine remained a contentious affair. In his book, Charlton outlines the heated debates over the morality of providing aid to a government with a clear track record of human rights abuses. In particular, Charlton underscores how the resettlement programs of the Ethiopian government were perceived to be "genocidal and coercive" policies by many aid agencies and government critics, some of whom wanted to withhold aid as an appropriate response.[65]

At least initially, Foreign Minister Clark easily quelled fears that either the brutal civil war or a corrupt Ethiopian government might disrupt aid. "The Government and authorities of Ethiopia," he confidently asserted, "are doing everything that is possible in very difficult circumstances to ensure that aid that comes from the rest of the world to help starving people in Ethiopia, will get to those people."[66] MacDonald insisted that the "quiet diplomacy approach" adopted by him and his team was effective at getting aid to where it was needed the most.[67] While publicly reassuring Canadians that the Ethiopian government was allocating Canadian aid responsibly, MacDonald channelled some aid through NGOs, which were able to funnel it to the severely afflicted provinces of Eritrea and Tigray, rebel strongholds.[68] Anxious to help, most Canadians trusted Clark and MacDonald to bring their hopes for Ethiopia to fruition.

However, by early 1988, it was increasingly difficult to deny the evidence of gross misconduct. Eyewitness accounts and official reports documented villages being burned and food being stored until rotten or sold to the highest bidders. Instead of sending cheques to their MPs, Canadians were soon sending petitions demanding an "end to the hostilities in Ethiopia."[69] With the easing of the drought in 1986, many donors were also increasingly aware of the need to include long-term rehabilitation with relief assistance.

Consequently, by April 1988, the focus of discourse within both the Canadian government and the public sphere shifted from celebratory support for relief assistance to more pointed expressions of concern and criticism over the political and moral implications of providing aid to Ethiopia.
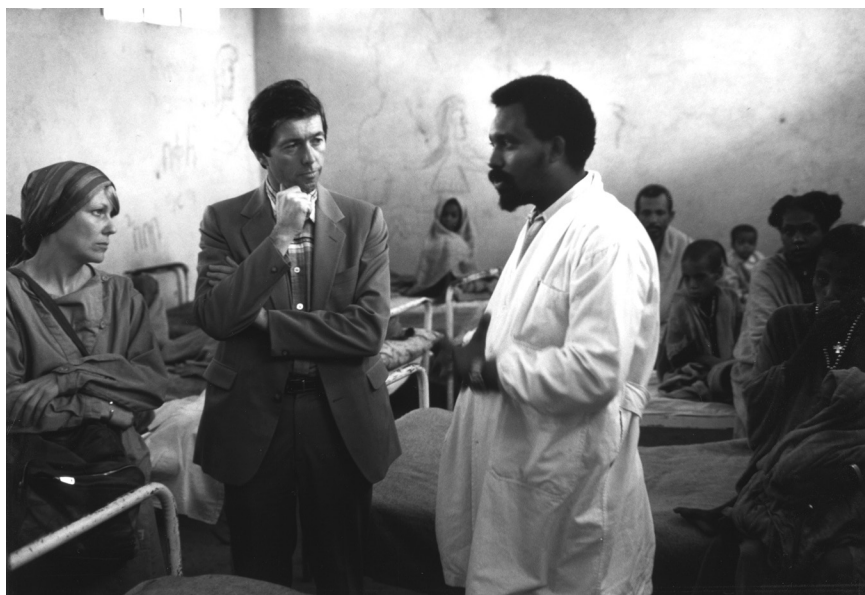
A typical petition delivered by Liberal opposition leader John Turner, with "1,200 signatures from Vancouver and across the country," called on the government to lead "an international development and peace initiative for the immediate cessation of hostilities and internal violence in Ethiopia."[70] Four years into the nationwide famine relief campaign, Canadians were arguably seeking more systemic change to deal with the circumstances in East Africa.

Winnipeg MP Bill Blaikie, the NDP's foreign policy spokesperson, became an especially trenchant critic of the government's relationship with the Ethiopian state. When inquiring about Ottawa's ability to get food through to the Ethiopian provinces of Tigray and Eritrea, often described by parliamentarians as "rebel territories," Blaikie insisted that Clark assure the House of Commons "and through this house to the Government of Ethiopia and to others that are concerned, that there is a place where Canada will draw the line." Blaikie demanded to know when Canada would

"say that the humanitarian need for food to get to starving people, regardless of the political circumstances is paramount in Canadian policy."[71] Blaikie's criticisms would signal the end of the popular campaign, as Ethiopian famine relief became too complicated for the general public and the government to remain as fervently engaged as they were in November 1984.

Implications: The Legacy of a Period of Fanfare

During this intersecting period in Canadian and Ethiopian history, the impetus to act was provided on 1 November 1984, and widespread social action was mobilized by conceptualizations of what it meant to be a Canadian citizen. Consequently, the Ethiopian famine served as a clarion call for global citizenship and altruism for Canadians from coast to coast.

The implications of these relief efforts would be far reaching, with important consequences for Canadian aid policy and foreign relations. In their assessment of this era, political scientists Nelson Michaud and Kim Nossal argue that the Progressive Conservatives did not come into power in 1984 with a clearly articulated foreign policy agenda.[72] Yet, forced to reckon with an international catastrophe within days of its election, this government demonstrated leadership in their handling of this international crisis.

More important, the Progressive Conservative response to the Ethiopian crisis, alongside the coordinating efforts of MacDonald and his team, set a benchmark for increased involvement of NGOs in the policy-making and policy-implementation process.[73] During the course of MacDonald's mandate as emergency coordinator, public concern for the African situation remained constant. According to the Decima poll commissioned in February 1986, Canadians continued to believe that "Canada should continue in its role as one of the more generous nations in assisting African recovery and development."[74] Thus fortified, in March 1986 MacDonald's final report confidently offered a series of recommendations for further Canadian involvement in Africa.

One direct outcome of the ongoing public interest and opposition pressure for the Mulroney government to act was the Africa 2000 operation. Conceived as a long-term policy and program commitment, Africa 2000 would encompass all Canadian ODA involvement in Africa.[75] Described as more than "a financial kitty," Operation Africa 2000 was essentially a

Canadian policy commitment made for fifteen years, allocating an initial $150 million from existing CIDA funds over the course of five fiscal years for special initiatives in Africa. The central focus of the operation was policy, with a particular emphasis on agriculture, reforestation, food security, and women. In the aftermath of the Ethiopian famine, Canada provided more official development assistance to Africa than to any other region every year from 1980 until 2011.[76]

Ultimately, as Charlton points out, the famine also contributed to the reassessment of Canada's handling of aid in conflict-ridden regions. "In circumstances where CIDA lacks confidence in the overall priorities of the recipient government," he explains, CIDA resorted to "alternative [NGO] channels to ensure that the food is reaching the specific populations in need."[77] Critics like Charlton have argued that in spite of the "public relations" successes of the Mulroney government's approach of "quiet diplomacy" during the Ethiopian famine relief efforts, there is lingering uncertainty over the ethics of providing aid to governments with ongoing internal conflicts and poor human rights records, especially when food aid is being utilized as a weapon.

Within the collective Western psyche and memory, the famine year of 1984–85 remains the international benchmark for Ethiopian, and by implicit extension, "African suffering." The horrifying images of emaciated children and adults, as well as deaths en masse, mobilized Canadians to collective acts of humanitarian internationalism in a distant corner of the world afflicted by drought, famine, and brutal civil war.[78] Starving children, argues University of Maryland media scholar Susan D. Moeller, were, and still are, "the famine icon," signifying "a moral clarity to the complex story of famine."[79] Typically, images from Ethiopia rarely "situate[d] the child as a victim or survivor of a particular historic event nor belonging to a family, community, or nation."[80] Consequently, the Ethiopian famine soon became symbolic of and synonymous with all "African suffering."

Cultural historians and economists have characterized the 1980s in both the United States and the United Kingdom as a decade of greed and an era of "conspicuous consumption."[81] The Western culture of excess was stoked by a raging cold war, the conservative politics of American president Ronald Reagan and British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, the boom and bust of housing markets, high interest rates, and strong inflation. Yet

"kids" of the 1980s across the West contended that there was "no excuse for political apathy."[82] The politics of the decade, British journalist and film-maker Sarfraz Manzoor has asserted, "felt like a blood sport and it bled into popular culture."[83] This was the Western political and cultural climate in which the British-led international movement "Band Aid" was born, accelerating into an international singularity/success. Economist Richard B. McKenzie cautions against mischaracterizing the 1980s as simply a decade of greed. Political and social engagement, he argues, also mean that it was a decade of social activism too, when "total private charitable contributions by living individuals, bequests, corporations and foundations, reached record highs."[84] It is within this paradigm of both excess and polarities that Bob Gedolf's "Band Aid" phenomenon took off; embraced by American and Canadian celebrities alike, it fuelled a moment of mass compassion in Canada. "Band Aid" was a larger than life socio-cultural/socio-political phenomenon across the entire Western hemisphere.

The 1984–85 famine relief campaign remains within living memory for many Canadians a lingering beacon of hope for the permanent eradication of famine on the African continent. Deemed a watershed moment in contemporary history, the famine and relief effort continue to be referenced frequently in the nomenclature of African famine news.[85] In early April 2016, for instance, when news of another apocalyptic-scale famine surfaced in international headlines, CBC reporter Margaret Evans reminisced that "Band Aid" was the first concerted response of its kind, raising over $150 million for relief.[86] Discourses surrounding yet another endemic bout of drought and famine had much historical symbolism and resonance. However, in response to criticisms that "history was simply repeating itself," Canadian diplomat Philip Baker stressed that the real story of African famine relief thirty years on ought to focus on the preparedness of the Ethiopian government in averting the kind of human catastrophe that occurred in 1984–86. In addition to providing an opportunity for self-aggrandizing reverence about a period of unparalleled mass compassion displayed by the West, memories of the famine also sealed the fate of Ethiopia, linking it "in the minds of many as forever associated with hunger and death."[87]

The pervasive blending of politics and culture made relief efforts during the 1984–86 period unique both internationally and domestically. Some critics have argued that the Band Aid phenomenon was part and parcel

of the Reagan administration's efforts to wage cold war battles through humanitarian assistance."[88] Canada, others have argued, had no obvious political agenda for aiding Ethiopia, aside from improving its own international status by remaining a high-profile donor.[89] As a result, Canadian engagement with the famine crisis of 1984–85 was irrefutably multifaceted and pervasive across the political and social spectrum. Canada's UN Ambassador Stephen Lewis insisted that Canadians effectively demonstrated that they were members of "a generous, caring society."[90] Lewis further argued that the commitment of Canadians to multilateralism was real because, as he explained at one Forum Africa session, "the internationalism which we adhere to is rooted deeply in the psyche of Canadians."[91]

The construction of famine relief as a moral imperative, one widely embraced in the mid-1980s, perhaps gave rise to its own demise. One of the unintended outcomes of the very scale and intensity of the relief fanfare of 1984–86 may be contemporary donor fatigue, also characterized as "compassion fatigue" by Moeller.[92] In 2011, Conservative minister of international development Bev Oda announced that Canadians had given roughly $70 million to registered charities for African drought relief between July 6 and September 16.[93] Yet UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon estimated that at least $700 million in aid would still be required for that year alone. In the 1984–85 period, there was a total of $59.9 million dollars provided to Ethiopia in ODA.[94] In spite of the larger amounts raised and contributed by the government in subsequent years, African famines no longer attract the public attention that they once did.

Donor fatigue also reflects the deeply entrenched challenges of dealing with famine. The ideal of famine eradication, often promoted in mid-1980s, was a far more complex goal than the immediate emotional satisfactions sought by the general donor population. The politics of famine (famine reporting and famine relief efforts), both in 1984–86 and arguably now, illustrate that famine is often embroiled in much more nuanced political, economic, and environmental ecologies than depicted by the reductive media. African famine and its solutions cannot simply be framed as neat binary narratives of nature versus man, or good versus evil, or altruism versus capitalism. Thus, while images of starving women and children continued to elicit the empathy of Canadian and international publics, the

rhetoric surrounding the complexities of the political conundrums within the region were, and still are, off putting.

Enshrouded in the memory of the unprecedented international response to the crisis of the mid-1980s is a peripheral discourse on environmental degradation and future catastrophe prevention. In the immediate aftermath of the 1984–86 famine, frontline aid workers were already predicting that relief efforts would not be enough to abate future catastrophes. Canadian aid agencies warned that even the most immediate and basic challenges faced by Africa's drought-stricken zones were not going to be overcome by 31 March 1986, when Mulroney's government told MacDonald to wind down his office.[95] Indeed, less than a year later, in December 1987, the World Food Program reported that Ethiopia, Mozambique, Malawi, Angola, Somalia, and the Sudan needed 2.3 million tons of food, almost twice as much as pledged by donor countries.[96] Not surprisingly, faith in the value of relief wavered.

Yet the relief efforts of 1984–86 still matter and demand attention. The headlines trumpeting the mass engagement of a Canadian public and its government in efforts to abate the unfolding tragedy in Ethiopia have made the campaign a modern parable for African famine. For many Canadians engaged with relief efforts during this period, 1984 continues to serve as a harbinger of hope—a hope that was the impetus to mobilize citizens around the world into action for positive change, changes that were once thought permanent.

Notes

1   Reg Stackhouse, Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 7 November 1984, 20.

2   Jack Hinde from Owen Sound, Ontario, wrote to Clark to let him know that he had "made an excellent start as Minister of External Affairs. Encouraging relief for Ethiopia was a clarion call that most Canadians will respond to." Cited in David MacDonald, Canadian Emergency Coordinator, *The African Famine and Canada's Response: For the Period from November 1984–March 1985* (Ottawa: Secretary of State, 1985), 52.

3   Tanja R. Muller makes the assertion that the Ethiopian Famine was a watershed event for humanitarian action in "'The Ethiopian Famine' Revisited: Band Aid and The Antipolitics of Celebrity Humanitarian Action," *Disasters* 37, no. 1 (2013): 61. Intimately involved in rallying Canadian public support and the delivery of aid to Ethiopia and other afflicted African nations, David MacDonald characterizes this

period as a "unique" fundraising effort for Africa. Author interview with David MacDonald, 28 March 2017.

4 *Forum Africa: Canadians Working Together*, Report by the Honourable David MacDonald, Canadian Emergency Coordinator/African Famine, on a series of Community Meetings from September 1985–February 1986, published March 1986, 5.

5 Editorial, "Follow The Mulroney Model to Alleviate Africa's Famine," *Globe and Mail*, 4 August 2011, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/follow-the-mulroney-model-to-alleviate-africas-famine/article589484/.

6 Stephen Brown, "Canadian Aid To Africa," in *Canada-Africa Relations: Looking Back, Looking Ahead*, ed. Rohinton Medhora and Yigadeesen Samy (Waterloo, ON: Centre for International Governance Innovation and Carleton University, 2013), 181–82.

7 Pauline Jewett, Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 16 November 1984, 307.

8 John Sorensen, "Mass Media and Discourse on Famine in the Horn of Africa," *Discourse and Society* 2, no. 2 (April 1991): 225.

9 Nelson Michaud and Kim Richard Nossal, "The Conservative Era in Canadian Foreign Policy, 1984–93," in their edited collection *Diplomatic Departures: The Conservative Era in Canadian Foreign Policy, 1984–93* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2001),15.

10 Cited in Brian Mulroney, *Memoirs, 1939–93* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2007), 331–32.

11 On lessons learned from the Biafran Tragedy, see Stephanie Bangarth, "The Politics of African Intervention: Canada and Biafra, 1967–70," in *From Kinshasa to Kandahar: Canada and Fragile States in Historical Perspective, ed.* Greg Donaghy and Michael Carroll (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2016), 55.

12 Brian Mulroney, Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 7 November 1984, 39.

13 Jean Chrétien, Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 16 November 1984, 306.

14 Ibid.

15 Joe Clark, Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 7 November 1984, 28.

16 "Tears are Not Enough." *Historica Canada*, http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/tears-are-not-enough-emc/.

17 "Artisans donate work to aid famine victims," *Globe and Mail*, 23 March 1985, E7.

18 "Canucks pledge $1.5 M," *Toronto Sun*, 15 July 1985.

19 Bruce Ward, "Conscience, Faith in Man Propel MacDonald," *Ottawa Citizen*, 24 June 1986.

20 MacDonald's Canadian Emergency Coordinator's Report on *The African Famine and Canada's Response* highlights the fact that the Kinsmen Club of Kingston, Ontario, helped to raise enough funds to send a voluntary medical team to Ethiopia in February 1985, at p. 24.

21   Cranford Pratt, "Middle Power Internationalism and Global Poverty," in his edited collection *Middle Power Internationalism: The North-South Dimension* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 5.

22   Ibid.

23   James Stewart Edwards, Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 13 November 1984, 200.

24   Ibid.

25   The survey by Toronto-based Decima Research found that Canadians surveyed in early February wanted foreign aid to be exempt from government cuts. "Foreign Aid Workers Determine Strong Relief Effort to Continue," *Evening Telegram* (St. John's), 18 February 1986.

26   Ibid.

27   *Canadians and Africa: What Was Said*, A Report for the Honourable David MacDonald, Canadian Emergency Coordinator/African Famine of a Nationwide Survey by Decima Research Ltd. Conducted in February 1986, 7.

28   Kim Richard Nossal, "Opening Up the Policy Preference: Does Party Make A Difference?," in Michaud and Nossal, *Diplomatic Departures*, 283.

29   In particular see Tony Burman, "Ebola: Canada Forgets Its Leadership in Ethiopian Famine," *Toronto Star*, 1 November 2014, https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2014/11/01/ebola_canada_forgets_its_leadership_in_ethiopian_famine.html; and Brian Stewart's "When Brian Mulroney was Great," CBC News, 14 May 2009, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/when-brian-mulroney-was-great-1.859343.

30   Nossal, "Opening Up the Policy Preference," 283.

31   Joe Clark, Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 7 November 1984, 28.

32   Author interview with David MacDonald, 28 March 2017.

33   Mark Charlton, *The Making of Canadian Food Aid Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 170.

34   Bangarth, "The Politics of African Intervention," 53–72. See also Ward, "Conscience, Faith in Man Propel MacDonald."

35   Ken MacQueen, "David MacDonald Excited By Challenge in Ethiopia," *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 December 1984.

36   Ibid.

37   Author interview with David MacDonald, 28 March 2017.

38   *African Famine and Canada's Response*, 24.

39   Cited in *The Varsity*, 6 June 1985, https://archive.org/stream/thevarsity106/thevarsity106_djvu.txt.

40   *Forum Africa*, 9.

41   Author Interview with Barbara Treviranus, one of the original Toronto villagers, 5 December 2017.

42   Ibid.

43   Email exchange with Barbara Treviranus, 10 November 2017.

44   Dawn MacDonald, "Ethiopia," *Toronto Star*, 8 February 1986. WUSC was funded from CIDA through the Special Programs Branch. See "Canadian International Development Agency Program Definition Mission 362/4311 Ethiopia, May 4–24, 1987: Team Notes," David MacDonald Papers, vol. 225, file 1, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

45   Ibid.

46   Ibid.

47   Historian Tamara Myers makes this argument about the powerful symbolism of juxtapositions of the able-bodied and committed Canadian youth in contrast to the "needy third world child" in "Blistered and Bleeding, Tired and Determined: Visual Representations of Children and Youth in the Miles for Millions Walkathon," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 22, no. 1 (2011): 267.

48   Susan James to David Peterson, 14 July 1986, David MacDonald Papers, vol. R12287, file 229-9, LAC.

49   Ibid.

50   David MacDonald to Monique Vezina, in *Forum Africa*, 2.

51   *Forum Africa*, 7.

52   Canadian Press, "Inuit Group off to Ethiopia For Tour of Famine Hit Areas," David MacDonald Papers, vol. R12287, file227, clippings file, December 1984–May 1986, LAC.

53   Ibid.

54   *African Famine and Canada's Response, 22.*

55   Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Botswana, Cape Verde, Chad, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are the other African nations listed in *African Famine and Canada's Response*, 36.

56   Ibid.

57   Brian Jeffries, "Dateline Nairobi: African Tragedy," *Maclean's*, 4 August 1980, 8.

58   CIDA, "Country Profile: Ethiopia," in file folder "Media Kit 1988," David MacDonald Papers, vol. R12287, file 219, LAC, 3.

59   Ibid., 7.

60   Jean Chrétien, Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 7 November 1984, 22.

61   CIDA, "Country Profile: Ethiopia" in file folder "Media Kit 1988," David MacDonald Papers, vol. R12287, file 219, LAC, 3.

62   Ibid.

63   The Trudeau Government had promised to achieve an ODA/GNP ratio of 0.7 per cent by 1990. See David R. Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide: A History of CIDA and Canadian Development Assistance* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), xv.

64   Ron Stewart, Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 26 January 1984, 704.

65   Charlton, *The Making of Canadian Food Aid Policy*, 170.

66   Joe Clark, Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 7 November 1984, 22.

67   Author interview with David MacDonald, 28 March 2017, and also in Charlton, *The Making of Canadian Food Aid Policy*, 170. For press coverage of a Canadian delegation's visit to the Ethiopian Highlands, in particular, see "Canadians, UN reject Ethiopian Abuse Charges," *Ottawa Citizen*, 19 March 1986.

68   Charlton, *The Making of Canadian Food Aid Policy*, 170.

69   John Turner, Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 13 April 1988, 14424–25.

70   Ibid. Other examples include one presented by Howard McCurdy (Windsor Walkersville) with 1,200 signatures, and another from Carole Jacques (Montreal-Mercier) with more than 1,300 names.

71   Bill Blaikie, Canada, House of Commons, *Debates,* 3 May 1988, 15083.

72   Michaud and Nossal, "The Conservative Era in Canadian Foreign Policy," 22.

73   Nossal, "Opening Up the Policy Preference," 281.

74   Africa 2000 Briefing Book, David MacDonald Papers, LAC.

75   Ibid.

76   Brown. "Canadian Aid To Africa," 181. Brown asserts that in 2010–2011, 38 per cent of Canadian international assistance went to Africa and six of the top ten recipients were in sub-Saharan Africa, namely Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Ghana, Mali, Sudan, and Senegal.

77   Charlton, *The Making of Canadian Food Aid Policy*, 87.

78   Drought and famines were a recurring issue on the African continent during the late 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Biafra). In Ethiopia, the famine of 1977 was within living memory for many of its people during the catastrophe of 1984. See Brian Jeffries, "Dateline Nairobi: African Tragedy," *Maclean's*, 4 August 1980, 8.

79   Susan Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

80   Myers, "Blistered and Bleeding," 253.

81   David Oliver Relin, "When Greed Was Good: The 1980s Will Go Down in History as a Decade of Excess," *Scholastic Update* 123, no. 12 (1991): 14, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A10561158/AONE?u=lond95336&sid=AONE&xid=bef1257f.

82   Sarfraz Manzoor, "The Diamond Decades: The 1980s," *Telegraph* (London), 31 May 2012, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturenews/9289961/The-Diamond-Decades-The-1980s.html.

83   Ibid.

84   Richard B. McKenzie, "Was It a Decade of Greed?," *The Public Interest* 106 (Winter 1992): 92.

85 CBC reporter Margaret Evans references the legacy of this period in Canada and beyond in the 20 April 2016 feature news report entitled "Ethiopia on the Edge" for CBC's program *The National*, http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/670401603927; for international comparatives and references see James Jeffrey. "Ethiopia Drought: How Can We Let This Happen Again? This Time Around Ethiopia is Competing With War-Torn Syria and Yemen for International Funds," *Aljazeera*, 25 January 2016. http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/01/ethiopia-drought-happen-160121084103587.html.

86 Evans, "Ethiopia on the Edge." For more information in this regard see Nassisse Solomon, "1984: The Parable of Ethiopian Famine and Foreign Aid," http://activehistory.ca/2016/05/1984-the-parable-of-ethiopian-famine-and-foreign-aid/.

87 Evans, "Ethiopia on the Edge."

88 Alexander Poster, "The Gentle War: Famine Relief, Politics, and Privatization in Ethiopia, 1983–1986," *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 2 (April 2012): 399, 400.

89 Stephen Lewis, as quoted in Brian Stewart's "When Brian Mulroney Was Great," CBC News, 14 May 2009, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/when-brian-mulroney-was-great-1.859343.

90 *Forum Africa*, 36.

91 Ibid.

92 Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue,* 98.

93 Gloria Galloway, "What's Next for the $70-million Canadians Donated to East Africa," *Globe and Mail*, 5 October 2011, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/whats-next-for-the-70-million-canadians-donated-to-east-africa/article559407/.

94 CIDA, *Food Crisis in Africa*, 1985, 7.

95 "Famine Report Key: Keep up the good work," *Ottawa Citizen*, 31 March 1986, David MacDonald Papers, LAC.

96 Canadian Press, "Act before thousands starve, Geldolf Says of Ethiopia Tour," *Vancouver Sun*, 21 December 1987, C5.