

New, Bold and Tenuous: Ethiopian Journalism Education

Aksum University launches its Department of Journalism and Communication

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Abstract—

In Ethiopia, Aksum University professors, staff and administrators are building a brand-new journalism department, one that teaches core literacy skills, but also stresses responsible journalism, based on independence, accuracy, and verification. They are grappling with a rapidly changing landscape, desperately trying to keep up. They face political, environmental and technology challenges, plus a freshly imposed state of emergency, because of widespread civil unrest.

This paper is baseline research measuring the student experience of the new Journalism and Communications Department at Aksum University, in Axum Ethiopia. The first year of the roll out of the Department was the 2015-16 academic year. I had the privilege to be the first, foreign, visiting professor. I taught an Introduction to Journalism and Communication course in December 2015. This work is based on those experiences and uses a well-tested survey template, customized to the task. The survey sample included all of the 1st year students. The result is an uncommon glimpse, into the nascent phase of journalism instruction at Aksum University, Axum Ethiopia.

Keywords- Ethiopian journalism, Ethiopian curriculum development, developing world journalism, Aksum University, Axum, Ethiopia

I. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

Aksum University is located in Axum, Ethiopia, a town on the highland plateau, in the far north of Ethiopia, in the region called Tigray. It lies 1,020 kilometers north of Addis Ababa, the capital city, near the northern border with Eritrea. About 5.1 million people live in Tigray. Axum is home to roughly 70 thousand people. The population of Ethiopia, located in the Horn of Africa, bounded by Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan and Sudan, is 84.9 million. It is a multi-ethnic society where some 80 different languages are spoken. The primary languages are Amharic, Oromo and Tigrye. It's a big country of some 437,794 square miles, roughly two-times the size of Texas. Ethiopia has a unique topography with one of the lowest and hottest places on earth, the Dallol Depression, at some 328 feet below sea level, to Mount Ras Dashen (the

Devil's Wrath) at 15,157 feet high, regularly snow covered in winter (Mesfin, 2014).

Axum is the cradle of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Ethiopia is primarily (and enthusiastically) Christian, but also has a long-standing Islamic tradition, in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the country. Both religions co-exist peacefully in Ethiopia. Axum itself is ancient, the oldest continuously human inhabited site on the African Continent. Axum is a UNESCO World Heritage site, one of the most impressive archaeological and historical sites in the world (Banda, 2009). It's notable for its Obelisk of Axum, some 27 meters tall, carved and erected around the beginning of the 4th century from a single piece of stone (Assefa, 2010).

Axum's human occupation extends backwards at least 5,000 years. In fact, one could argue that we are all Ethiopians. Several of the oldest hominid fossils ever discovered, dating back some 3.2 million years, were found in 1974, in Ethiopia's Afar region. This discovery was "Lucy" the first Australopithecus afarensis skeleton ever found. Recent finds, in the same area, may extent that date back to 4.4 million years (Mesfin, 2014).

Ethiopia is the focus of international attention in the Horn of Africa due to its strategic location and for its continuing problems with widespread drought, overgrazing, hunger and poverty. The nation is also significant for being among the most dependent in the world on foreign aid. Often topping the worldwide list of countries receiving food aid from the US, UK, and the World Bank, billions of dollars' worth of aid from international donors' flow into the country every year, representing 50 to 60 percent of the national budget (Ilyin, 2013).

This combination of desperate humanitarian need and the Ethiopian government's receptiveness to foreign investment (and Western strategic interests) has made Ethiopia a magnet for donors (Waugh, 2003).

Hunger has never left Ethiopia following the devastating 1984-85 famine, which was responsible for the death of an estimated one million Ethiopians (Harris, 1987). Nowadays, 34 million Ethiopians, about 40 percent of the population, are considered chronically hungry. Every single year, an estimated

10 to 15 million Ethiopians depend on food aid for their survival. In 2010, Ethiopia was the world's largest recipient of food aid, with nearly \$1.2 billion in aid given to the Ethiopian starving poor.

The United Nations Environmental Program funded the International Soil Reference and Information Centre (ISRIC) to produce the world's first global survey of soil degradation from 1902-1988 (most recent data available). The study, entitled Global Assessment of Human-induced Soil Degradation (GLASOD), cited overgrazing as the cause of nearly 50% of soil degradation in Africa (Shanahan, 2013). Currently, over one-third of the continent is threatened by desertification due to soil erosion. Soil erosion, overgrazing and drought are significant challenges in Ethiopia, particularly Tigray, the region of Aksum University (Ilyin, 2013).

Higher education is exploding all across the developing world as governments race to develop their human resources. Ethiopia is definitely part of the trend. Ethiopia's public university system now numbers 34 institutions. A generation ago, they had only three public universities. (Mesfin, 2014)

Addis Ababa University (AAU) was the first university, established in 1950. Seven of the 34 universities have new Journalism and Communications Departments (Beer, 2010). Aksum University (AkU), itself, is only nine years old. Starting from nothing, in 2006, its enrollment now is 15,000 students, with plans to grow to 25,000 students by 2020. AkU has six colleges: Agriculture (five programs), Business and Economics (nine programs), Engineering and Technology (ten programs), Health Sciences (four programs) Natural and Computational Sciences (seven programs) and Social Sciences (seven programs). It's academic staff numbers about 564.

Comparison of the Journalism and Communications Department at Aksum University with the other six universities that teach journalism is not feasible at this time because they are so new and there is nothing in the literature yet. The exception is Addis Ababa University's journalism department which opened in 1950s. Aksum University's department is modeled on Addis Ababa University's department and curriculum in every respect. (Mesfin, 2014).

At Aksum University, the Journalism and Communication Department is part of the Social Sciences College. It existed for its first two years as a limited program within the Social Sciences College. 2015/16 is the first academic year of the program maturing to become its own department. It is in the nascent stage, beginning with just seven academic staff members, six of which hold BA/BS degrees. Yaregal Mekuria, Head of Department Journalism and Communication, holds the only graduate degree, a Master's Degree from Addis Ababa University. He is single and in his mid-twenties. The faculty is young, ranging from 25-29 years of age. The Department has about 90 students total, 70% of which are female. The students are divided into three years, each with about thirty students. The students range in age from 18-22 years old. They come from all over Ethiopia, but primarily from the Amharic, Oromo and Tigrye ethnic groups. There are no other foreign students. The Journalism Department students differ from the larger university student population significantly, because they skew

female. About 40 percent of students at Aksum University are studying engineering, which tends to be male dominated.



(Image above: Yaregal Mekuria Head of the Department of Journalism and Communications, Aksum University, 2015)

In Ethiopia, higher-education admission is based on the scores from national exams. These exams are given upon graduation from Preparatory School. Only a tiny fraction of students matriculate onwards to higher education. Strong scores will admit a student into college. Superb scores are required for university admission. A university education in Ethiopia is completely funded by the government, including housing and food. Graduates are expected to pay the government back after graduation based on a percentage of their income. Those rates range from 7%-10%.

To graduate from the Department of Journalism and Communications at AkU, students have to take and pass 36 courses over three years. Twelve classes a year. Examples of classes offered in the Fall 2015 include:

- Introduction to Journalism and Mass Communication
- Intercultural Communication
- Developmental Journalism
- Reporting and News Writing
- Introduction to Public Relations
- Theory and Practice of Public Relations
- Photojournalism
- Publication Layout and Design
- 2nd Internship
- Investigative Journalism
- Featuring Writing
- Online Journalism
- Newspaper Production
- Magazine Production
- Media Communication

- Research Methods
- Senior Essay I
- Senior Essay II
- Broadcast News Writing and Reporting
- Introduction to Broadcast Journalism
- Radio News Production
- TV News Production
- Radio Documentary Production
- TV Documentary Production (Mekuria, 2015).

The curriculum is copied from University’s Journalism and Communications Department, as I previously mentioned, and is comparable to other African countries. (Mesfin, 2014). Curriculum assessment at Aksum University itself, is problematic because it is so new. Most of the courses were being taught for the very first time while I was there. The biggest challenges I noticed were the profound lack of resources, like textbooks, cameras, software, internet access, power and computers.

Tsigabu Mikoros is a typical faculty member. He is a Lecturer. He worked for the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) for two years before coming to Aksum University. He holds a BA in Journalism from Addis Ababa University. He teaches the Reporting and Developmental Journalism courses. He dreams of getting his Master’s Degree from an American university, but may complete it back at Addis Ababa University. Addis Ababa University has the oldest Journalism and Communications program in the country, and is the most prestigious.

Lecturer Mikoros is in his mid-twenties. He loved working for the ENA. His was on the economic and political affairs beat. All the instructors in the department were former working professional journalists.

Lecturer Mikoros reports that Ethiopia is on the rise economically. The GNP is estimated to grow by 8.5% in 2016. Per capita GDP is up to about \$597 (2015 estimate) per person per year. That’s much better than previous data but it’s still dreadfully low and makes Ethiopia the 9th poorest country in the world, based on their GDP per capita.

Lecturer Mikoros also had interesting observations about corruption. Ethiopia as a whole is quite corrupt. Ethiopia ranks 103 out of 168 countries on the Corruption Perceptions Index (2015) of Transparency International, a global civil society coalition that encourages accountability. The country has lost close to \$12 billion, since 2000, to illicit financial outflows, according to Global Financial Integrity (GFI), whose statistics are based on official data provided by the Ethiopian government, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). That is a stunning amount of money for a country with a Gross Domestic Product – GDP of \$56 billion (2015 estimate) (Transparency, 2016).

Lecturer Mikoros said that he didn’t experience corruption at the ENA. Researchers report that corruption is common at Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency (ERTA) however

(Lodamo, 2009). Tsigabu says that the privately-owned press is free in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government does control and financially support the official press. Governmental media ownership guarantees its messages get out and its image is managed. There is a robust, privately-owned media presence in Addis Ababa and they operate freely according to Tsigabu. He said the private press tends to be politically polarized and outspoken in support of ethnic groups and special interests. He reports the demand for journalism content is ravenous.

The wider university faculty is similar to the Journalism and Communications Department faculty. Of the academic staff members, numbering about 564 university wide, almost all hold only undergraduate BA/BS degrees. Masters degrees are uncommon, and only a few of the faculty hold PhDs. The most senior administration staff often do hold PhDs as well. The faculty at Aksum University’s Journalism and Communications Department were comparable to the other six Ethiopian universities conferring journalism degrees, I was told by Yaregal Mekuria.

Other faculty members include Fekadu Alemu, Berhan Meldegebriel and Daniel Zemikael (see image below picture).



II. CHALLENGES/ OPPORTUNITIES

Journalism, as an academic discipline, is relatively resource intensive. It’s a professional discipline, a tradecraft if you will. If one wants to teach mathematics, one needs outstanding instructors, textbooks, computers, some blackboards and a lot of chalk (not to mention the infrastructure of a university). But, relatively speaking, mathematics, as an academic discipline, doesn’t require lots of additional resources. However, if you want to educate qualified journalism graduates, students need to actually practice journalism in school. And then practice it some more. Practicing journalism takes resources (Claussen, 2008).

Yes, journalism students need textbooks, chalk and classrooms with blackboards, but they also need computer labs and newsrooms. They need to create newspapers, broadcasts and websites. They need cameras to shoot still photographs and video equipment and all the gear that goes with it. They need video and audio editing software, layout and design packages,

all kinds of digital technology for building and maintaining websites (Huang, 2006). They need high-speed internet access. They need campus radio and television stations with up-to-date technology, to actually practice broadcasting. The technology is changing so quickly, that everything needs to be continuously updated to be useful in the workplace (Boczkowski, 2004).

It's malpractice to graduate journalism students without lots of practice in the application of all these tools in the classroom, and in the field, as well. Instructors have to teach journalism theory, ethics and techniques simultaneously, on top of a solid base of university-level core curriculum (Ogundimu, 2007). Graduates with journalism degrees should have multiple sets of skills, like news writing, editing, TV and radio production, digital photography, both video and still, computer-based layout and design, and web publishing.

That's a challenge for resource-starved Ethiopian universities (Schiffirin, 2011). An argument could be made to limit the universities offering Journalism and Communications degrees in the Ethiopian public university system to just a few, which have adequate resources, technology and systems to provide the education students will need to be competent journalists on graduation.

An even bigger challenge to the success, (or even just the survival) of the Journalism and Communication Department at Aksum University, is sustained funding. When I was teaching at Aksum University, I had a one-on-one meeting with Dr. Mekomen Aregai, Vice President for Academic Affairs, the university's most senior academic officer, at his request, Friday December 12, 2015. Our conversation was fascinating in its candor, depth and breadth.

Drought was on his mind. Drought is a slow-moving natural disaster. Ethiopia is currently experiencing a disastrous drought cycle. The rains largely failed in 2015-16. Climate change has a particularly sharp edge in Africa and affects the poorest in Ethiopia gravely.

Dr. Aregai reported that 10.3 million Ethiopians are at risk of starvation and that the highest priority of the country was to feed its citizens. Since 100% of the funding for the university (and therefore the department) comes from the Ethiopian government, he feared all the funding could be diverted for emergency food aid. He was keen to secure a post-doc placement in Environmental Science, for himself, at a university in America. He is particularly interested in pursuing climate change research and its effects on Ethiopia.

Dr. Aregai wants to work on research to shift agriculture away from relying on rain, towards irrigation. There is a virtually no irrigated agriculture currently in Ethiopia.

On an encouraging note, there is a newly opened Chinese-built, Chinese-funded rail link between Djibouti and Addis Ababa, which is very important for landlocked Ethiopia. The rail link gives Ethiopia access to the deep-water sea port in Djibouti.

The manager of the Sabeen Hotel, where I stayed, Seble Kirbrom, confirmed the mass starvation threat. Mr. Kirbrom said the new rail link allows the government to move food aid

in huge quantities, so he doesn't think there will be mass death like in 1980s, but that the drought is worse now, than it was then, according to him.

Another drought related risk is the potential for increased social instability. Historically, in Ethiopia change in government occurs during times of drought. Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn is from Tigray, as is most of the government. Tigray is the region where Aksum University is located. A new government might choose to reallocate funds to a different ethnic group or political base (Harris, 1987).

Finally, public disorder is the biggest current challenge. On October 6, 2016, the Ethiopian government announced a six-month state of emergency because of widespread civil unrest. Aljazeera, on November 12, 2016, reported that the Ethiopian government, using state of emergency authority, had arrested 11,607 people, including 347 women. Many hundreds of other people have been killed in protests.

Ethiopia is currently unstable. As part of the state of emergency, internet traffic in and out of the country has been blocked. I have not had any communication with my colleagues at Aksum University since the emergency declaration. The university website has gone dark. Recently, I heard that Aksum University's president, Dr. Mebrahtom Mesfin, has been replaced. Frankly, I fear for Aksum University's continued existence.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic literature about emerging Ethiopia journalism instruction in higher education is quite limited because it's such a nascent activity. For example, this paper is the first ever about Aksum University. Much of my research utilized primary source reporting, like interviews with students, staff and administrators, conducted, in the field, at Aksum University in Ethiopia.

Terje Skjerdal is the best and most prolific Ethiopian academic author on journalism and has published several papers, often about the post-graduate program at Addis Ababa University, the oldest and most prestigious in the country. Skjerdal is an advocate for a 'universal' set of journalistic standards while balancing the need for culturally sensitive journalism practices. He talks about the necessity to identify an 'African journalism' philosophy that is normatively different from its Western counterpart.

Much of sub-Saharan African journalism education is so severely constrained by lack of resources, government pressure, the influence of governmental media ownership, the quality of secondary education and professional education, that the literature is full of laments about the lack of progress. South Africa is the notable exception. Rhodes University is highlighted in several papers, particularly in relation to its agenda of social equality and justice (Steenveld, 2012).

The single biggest resource I found is United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO. Several UNESCO papers suggest models of curricula for journalism education and the efforts to create "centers of excellence", (Berger, 2008) but again, the emphasis was on

South Africa (Berger, 2007). The paper: The Looming Threat of Overgrazing: Effects and Recommendations, by Susan Ilyin, was helpful with the overgrazing and drought analysis. Temesgen Kasahun Assefa's dissertation on: Harmonizing Heritage Tourism and Conservation in the Rock-Hewn Churches of Lalibela, Ethiopia was helpful for my overview section. Oakland Institute's Development Aid to Ethiopia: Overlooking Violence, Marginalization, and Political Repression, was the best resource I could find on development issues.

Finally, my favorite paper was written by Skjerdal and Berhanu on Ethiopian corruption in journalism. Their groundbreaking ethics research addressed the taking of freebies (such as free tickets or dinners) and "brown envelopes" (monetary bribes from sources to journalists) common among journalists at the state-owned Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency (ERTA). The corruption is often justified by low salaries and poor journalistic training. Such practices are all too common in journalism fraternities across the African continent but are rarely studied.

IV. METHODOLOGY AND DISCUSSION

I used a standard, university assessment questionnaire survey. The questions were taken from a template found on surveymonkey.com, customized to Aksum University. I used a seven point "Likert scale". The sample size was 27. The demographics of the sample were as follows: 18 females, 9 males. 100% of the students in the sample were Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. The students ranged in age from 18-22 years old. They came from all over Ethiopia, but primarily from the Amharic, Oromo and Tigrye ethnic groups. All the students spoke at least three languages. There were no foreign students in the sample, all were Ethiopian. All the students were funded by the government to attend AkU.

The questionnaire responses were written and returned on paper. The results were anonymous. It was conducted in the field, on the campus of Aksum University, in Axum, Ethiopia, on 12/18/2015. It was given on the last day of class. The raw data was captured in an Excel spreadsheet where the analysis of the data was completed. Bianey Bermudez, was my student researcher who compiled the primary data.

Michaela S. Clemens, Manager of Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) at MSU Denver was contacted in advance of fielding the research. She stated that no IRB oversight was required.

V. RESULTS

The "Aksum University Student Survey" of all the first-year Journalism students, fielded 12/18/2015, (N) equals 27:

Key findings include:

1. *How well do the professors teach at this university?*

The students generally like their professors and the quality of instruction. 55% percent said professors taught extremely or quite well. Standard deviation: 1.337442

2. *How effective is the teaching outside your major at this university?*

The response to the quality of instruction held up pretty well outside their major as well. 40% percent said teaching was extremely or very effective outside their major. Standard deviation: 1.264694

3. *How well-maintained are the facilities at this university?*

Only 11% rated this question in the top two categories, fully 37% rated it in the lowest "not at all well maintained" category. This is not surprising to me. AkU is a university with 15,000 students and yet it has no running water. Dear reader, let that thought sink in for a moment. For example, there is not a single flushing toilet on the whole campus, including the President's office. Electricity is provided by a generator. If there is fuel to run the generator, they have power. Power is intermittent at best, in my experience. Internet access is spotty on a good day. Cell phones are ubiquitous but cell service is also erratic and unreliable. Standard deviation: 1.469395

4. *How helpful is your academic advisor?*

This question got a bipolar response. 37% rated advising in the top category, 41% in the "not at all helpful" category. Standard deviation: 1.872478

5. *How easy is it to register for courses at this university?*

59% said that it was only slightly easy or not at all easy to register for courses, the bottom two categories. Clearly, Office of the Registrar needs improvement. Standard deviation: 1.448712

6. *How safe do you feel on campus?*

The campus is surrounded by a 12-foot-high fence topped by barbed wire. The front gate is controlled by armed guards. Every 200 meters along the fence line, there is a guard tower. The campus grounds are routinely patrolled by armed men, in dark suits, carrying machine guns. Yet 59% of students responded in the lowest category, namely that they did "not at all feel safe." This is a stunning result.

I understand their dread. On April 2, 2015 in Kenya, Ethiopia's neighbor to the south, a massacre killed 147 students and wounded scores of others at Garissa University, in north-eastern Kenya. The Somalia-based Islamist extremist group called Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the assault. The militants singled out Christians and shot them dead. Ethiopia is, largely, a Christian country.

Ethiopia shares a long eastern border with Somalia. Sudan and South Sudan are fighting a vicious civil war on Ethiopia's western border. Eritrea, which recently fought a twenty-year civil war with Ethiopia, forms the nearby northern border. Security is a significant issue in all of Africa, but particularly in the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia is geographically located in volatile neighborhood.

The students live in dormitories on campus, segregated by gender, and supervised by resident staff. Ethiopia is a

conservative country. It is common to see same sex students, both men and women, holding hands walking along together on campus. Physical affection between same sex friends in Ethiopia is common. Outward expression of affection between heterosexual couples is more uncommon. I do not think the students' safety concerns are related to worries about student-on-student sexual or physical assault or violence. I think they fear exogenous threats.

Further research is needed to pin down this safety issue, but it's clear from my research that safety is a top concern. Standard deviation: 1.655518

7. *How happy are you with the Journalism and Communications Department?*

One of the strongest responses came from this question. 88% said they were extremely or quite satisfied with the Department, most in the top category. Standard deviation: 0.87489

8. *Are you satisfied with your experience with this Introduction to Journalism and Communication class?*



Response to this question was gratifying to me in particular. 85% said they were either extremely or quite satisfied with their experience in my class. Standard deviation: 1.74978 (See above graph.)

9. *How easy is it to obtain the resources you need from the university library system?*

74% said they found obtaining resources from the library to be slightly or not at all easy, most in the bottom category. Not surprising given the poor state of the University library. Standard deviation: 1.563472

10. *How healthy is the food served at this university?*

Like the security question, this was the lowest score, 74% of respondents said the food was not at all healthy. I have eaten at the University. I agree with them. It's amazing, but the University kitchen feeds 15,000 students plus faculty and staff, serving three meals every day, yet they have no running water. Consider that for a moment. Standard deviation: 1.251611

11. *How crowded are the dormitory facilities at this university?*

44% of students said dorms were slightly or not at all crowded. I was surprised. Students have to leave campus

to shower, because the dorms have no running water. All the rooms have at least three students sharing the facilities. Standard deviation: 1.714939

12. *How happy are you with the choice of university-sponsored extracurricular activities at this university?*

66% of students said that they were extremely or quite happy with extracurricular activities. Standard deviation: 1.422916

13. *How fair are the administrative procedures at this university?*

Responses to this question looked like a bell curve. 77% of students said quite fair, moderately fair or slightly fair when it came to administrative procedures. Standard deviation: 1.186342

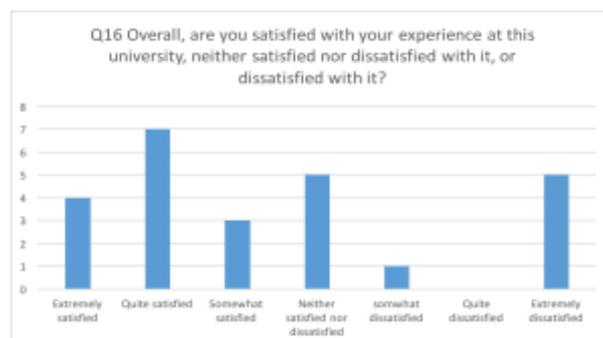
14. *How likely are you to continue attending this university next year?*

70% of respondents said they were extremely or quite likely to continue attending AkU next year with 44% falling into the extremely likely category. A strong vote of confidence in the University. Standard deviation: 1.20128

15. *How likely are you to recommend this university to others?*

This is a telling question, 63% of respondents said they were extremely likely or quite likely to recommend AkU. With 44% falling into the extremely likely category. Standard deviation: 1.580054

16. *Overall, are you satisfied with your experience at this university?*



As you can see from the graph above, it's a mixed bag on this final question. 40% of respondents are either extremely satisfied or quite satisfied. But 19% said they were extremely dissatisfied. Standard deviation: 2.182987

My overall impression from the survey is that Aksum University 1st Year Journalism and Communications students are generally happy with the quality of their education, disappointed with the University facilities, hate the food and are downright dubious about their physical safety.

V. LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH / FUTURE STUDY

The biggest limitation of the research is its sample size, namely the students pursuing the Journalism and Communications degree at Aksum University. Because they were all students from my class and because the sample size was small, the research should be seen as directional and not statistically significant.

Another limitation of the research is that the language of instruction at Aksum University is English. For most students, English is their third or fourth language. Journalism content may be difficult for them to fully understand.

A larger sample size, with multiple journalism classes participating, plus faculty and staff feedback, would enhance future research. This study would also benefit from longitudinal research that measures changes over time.

There are exogenous factors as well. The cold truth is this: Ethiopian journalism itself is quite limited. About 85% of the population is rural and employed in subsistence agriculture. According to UNICEF, total adult literacy rate is only 39%. Roughly, 6 in 10 citizens can't read a newspaper. Radio is the most common medium for journalism (Linde, 2011).

Yet despite Ethiopia being such a poor country, the demand for regular, informative journalism content is rapidly growing. Satellite TV dishes beam in national and international broadcast journalism programs and are common on the roof tops in Axum, if primarily to watch soccer. Ethiopian journalism educators are racing to supply the growing demand for educated, competent journalism graduates (McCurdy, 2007).

Another disruptive factor is the expectations of an emerging Ethiopian middle class. Economic development and the lifting up of millions of Ethiopians out of dire poverty, is projected to happen in the next five years, according to a recent Gates Foundation study. Ethiopians are demanding more current, informative journalism than ever before.

I would add that my experience with the Ethiopian telecommunications infrastructure was appalling. It's core telecommunication systems are based on cell phone technology. It's plagued by power outages. High-speed broadband internet access, which is taken for granted in the developed world, is very limited in Ethiopia. Ethiopian journalists are being forced to adapt to the digital evolution of journalism without this basic infrastructure.

Future study also faces other outside-of-the-institution challenges. Will the current Ethiopian government collapse? Will the drought continue? Will there be another cycle of civil war? Will the cost of the drought become such a burden that any government funding evaporates? All these challenges could affect future study.

Finally, as I write this article in the winter of 2017, the Ethiopian drought is getting worse. It's now the worst drought in 50 years, leaving 18 million people in critical need of food aid (Telegraph, 2016). Successive rainy seasons have failed, and with no crops to feed either themselves or their livestock, many million Ethiopians are again in jeopardy of mass starvation and death.

To Western eyes, the scenes of hunger are disturbingly reminiscent of the country's infamous famine of 1984-85, which killed an estimated one million Ethiopians.

John Graham, the country director of *Save the Children*, has worked in Ethiopia since the 1984 famine. He said recently that while the scale of the current drought is the same or worse, the response from the wider world had not been as generous. "The government says if \$600 million is not forthcoming, it will find a way. But that means diverting funding from other areas, like health and education, and that's going to lose critical gains they have made that might guard against future crises."

My fear is that mass famine will destabilize the government, divert higher education funding and, in turn, bankrupt Aksum University.

VI. EVALUATION OF SOURCES

Field reporting played a vital role in this paper. In most cases, interviews with students, faculty and staff were conducted at Aksum University in Axum, Ethiopia. Some of the communications among the Aksum University faculty and myself were online exchanges before and after my stay in Ethiopia. Portions of that conversation, content and argumentation appears here again as well.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Dr. Akbarali Thobhani, Executive Director, Office of International Studies, MSU Denver, and Dr. Mebrahtom Mesfin, President, Aksum University, for giving me the opportunity to teach at AkU. Without their funding, support and insight research on this topic would have been impossible.

Finally, I would like to recognize Nancy Stalf, who helped with my data analysis.



(Image above: The author with his students on the last day of class at Aksum University, 12/21/15, Axum, Ethiopia)

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