

PITFALLS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA: A CASE OF BAHIR DAR TOWN AND ITS SURROUNDINGS, A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: *The history of tourism is one of the neglected themes in Ethiopian history which has received less scholarly attention. In Ethiopia, the development of modern tourism as an important economic sector traced back to the imperial regime. This was when the Ethiopian Tourist Organization (ETO) was founded in 1961. Since that period, until the overthrow of the regime in 1974, the development of tourism has shown a remarkable and smooth upward trend in the arrival of tourists. However, shortly after the military government assumed power in 1974, the growth of tourism was highly subjected to adverse political and socio-economic crises. This became evident when the tourism sector experienced a downward trend in its history, whereby the number of tourists steadily decreased from 1,267 in 1974 to 141 in 1977 in Bahir Dar and its surroundings and from 50,220 to 28,984 in 1977 at the national level. However, the seizure of power by a new government in 1991 brought about a relatively conducive environment for the growth of tourism which is evident in the adoption of free market, relative stability, and infrastructural development. Thus, this paper sheds light on the history of tourism and its challenges throughout the three consecutive Ethiopian regimes: the imperial, Derg, and EPRDF. This was done in the context of the changing political regimes in light of the political, economic, and ideological shifts. In order to realize the intended objectives, primary sources of information were collected through interviews and focus group discussions with tourists, experts, hotel managers, and tour guides. In addition, government reports from published and un-published sources were also consulted.*

KEYWORDS: Tourism, History, Challenges, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the fastest growing industries in the world; and has been widely acknowledged due to its highly rewarding nature of job creation, foreign exchange earnings, and economic growth.¹ Between the period 1950 and 1995, the flow of international tourists increased more than 20 fold and 922 million in arrivals and 944 billion dollars in receipts was generated in 2008. The same is true in Africa, whereby the arrival of international tourists showed a remarkable growth from 500,000 in 1950 to 24,000,000 in 2000.²

Ethiopia, located in the Horn of Africa, have long enjoyed international prominence with a home of varied natural, historical, and cultural attractions. Ten of its heritages have been registered by UNESCO as world cultural heritages. It was reported that between 1964 and 2008, 19,836 and 383,399 international tourists visited the area and the tourism sector registered 5.6 percent average annual growth between 1990-2000 and grew to 15.4 percent between 2000-2008.³ However, Ethiopia's tourism has gone through a number of inter-related challenges. The outbreak of wars, political unrest, famine, and un-favorable economic policy were, perhaps, among the major factors that hindered the growth of tourism in Ethiopia.

Despite this, there are only few but growing scholars⁴ across different disciplines that tend to documenting the study of tourism from historical perspective. With few exceptions,⁵ little emphasis has been given to the incorporation of historical concepts, facts, and evidences in tourism studies which would be an opportunity for making comparisons of tourism development over time. What prompts this discussion is the fact that the history of tourism remains relatively unexplored, and within this context, the issue of how political instability, frequent and periodic drought/famine, and unfavorable economic policy in the framework of the changing political regimes meant for tourism, has not been adequately researched. Thus, did such factors affected tourism development in Bahir Dar and its surroundings differently, how could such factors be responsible for the downward trend of tourism in some exceptional periods of the three regimes mainly 1973-1974, 1974-1991 and 1998-2000, and do such factors affect tourism development in the same way throughout the three successive regimes, are the most important research questions that this paper addresses. Thus, this paper attempts to fill this gap which tends to focus on the development of tourism and its challenges by making a simple historical re-construction of the arrivals and receipts across periods, so that this paper can contribute to the hardly existing literature and provides an insight for policy makers in developing the appropriate tourism policy which meets the demand of both domestic and international market. Accordingly, the forthcoming section highlights a brief overview of change and continuity in the development of tourism and the major factors that seriously hampered the tourism industry in Ethiopia, and more specifically in Bahir Dar town and its surroundings across the three consecutive governments.

METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this research is to analyze the challenges of tourism development in Ethiopia in general and in Bahir Dar and its surroundings in particular from a historical point of view. To obtain the necessary data, both primary and secondary sources were used. Primary data was collected from interview and focus group discussion with stakeholders, both domestic and foreign tourists, and tour guides. For this purpose, open-ended or un-structured questions were prepared. Besides, secondary sources of data namely: government reports, policy documents, published and un-published historical sources were also consulted. The data collected from various sources were analyzed textually using descriptions and quotations and represented in tables and charts.

Tourism Development and its Challenges

The Imperial Era (r.1930-1974)

Tourism in a broader sense has existed since ancient times, though it did not receive considerable attention in the development strategy of Ethiopia prior to the 1960s.⁶

In the second half of the 20th century, the opposition from the noble classes and few educated elites, who associated tourism as a way of exposing the country's poverty and backwardness to the international community, did not prohibit Emperor Haile Sellasie (r.1930-1974) in providing legal support for the development of the tourism sector. Sooner, the Ethiopian Tourist Organization (ETO) under the supervision of the Prime Minister, which was later transferred to the Ministry of Information and Ministry of Commerce in 1966 and 1969, respectively, was founded by order No.36 of 1964. This had become a landmark in the

attempt to develop modern tourism as an important sector of economic growth. The ETO gained official recognition having the responsibility of offering tour and travel services to foreign tourists, government envoys and diplomats, and the establishment of branch offices in Ethiopia and abroad.⁸

Moreover, the central government had an ambition to make Ethiopia one of the major tourist attraction destination in the continent of Africa. In order to materialize such a dream, the government resorted towards collecting funds from the World Bank, International Finance Corporation (IFC), and the International Development Agency (IDA).⁹ Consequently, some international consulting companies and individuals such as C. Angeline and S. Moudine from UNESCO, the Italian Tourism Consultancy Firm (IANUS), and Arthur d. Little Ltd had been requested to study the feasibility of Ethiopia's tourist potentials. UNESCO in its feasibility study, entitled "*proposals for the development of sites and monuments in Ethiopia as a contribution to the growth of tourism*" recommended the potentiality of historical sites in northern Ethiopia for tourism development. IANUS, identified six major potential areas of tourism namely; Addis Ababa, Lake Tana, Massawa and the Dahlak Islands, Harar, Diredwa, and Arba minchi areas in 1965.¹⁰ Three years later, Addis Ababa and the Historic Route (Bahir Dar, Gondar semen mountains national park, Lalibela, Aksum) and the Rift Valley were recommended by Arthur d. Little Ltd as an important potential areas of tourism. The plan to build big and standardized hotels in these tourist attraction sites have also been envisaged by the consultant groups. This offered the government an opportunity to build hotels namely; Wabe Shebelle (1968), D' Afrique (1966), Blue Nile (1968), Ethiopia Hotel (1963), and Hilton Hotel (Five Star, 1969),¹¹ in spite of the fact that all these hotels were spatially concentrated in the capital city of Addis Ababa and privately owned by foreign companies.¹² The involvement of foreign companies to initiate and manage tourism and hospitality facilities was as a result of the lack of skills and financial constraints that the government was experiencing.¹³ From this one can argue that the major reforms undertaken by the Ethiopian government would probably been impossible without external assistance.

This historical episode was followed by an increase in the number of tourist arrivals from 19,215 in 1963 to 73,662 in 1973, which grew approximately four times within ten solid years,¹⁷ as it is depicted in Figure 1. Furthermore, the country collected an estimated amount of 25,655,000 Ethiopian birr from the international tourists in 1973.¹⁸ The largest number of international tourists in this period came from Europe, followed by America which as a result, accounted for more than 67% of the total international tourist arrivals. Africa took the third largest visitor in Ethiopia in the period under discussion.¹⁹

This growth might probably linked to the achievements made by the government and The selection of Addis Ababa as headquarter of the UNCA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa) in 1958, and the OAU (Organization for African Union) in 1963 which in turn has received considerable attention from an increasing number of western diplomats, envoys, members of the organizations, and leisure seekers.¹⁶ Here, modernization scheme such as the introduction of communication lines such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway, telephone networks, post offices, modern roads, and the building of hotels (Taytu Hotel in 1907), Ethiopia's victory over the fascist Italian troops in 1896, during the reign of Emperor Menelik II (r.1889-1913) should be given due consideration for the later emergence of modern tourism in the the 1960s.⁷

Table 1- International tourist arrivals in Ethiopia by country of origin 1961-1973

Origin of tourists	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1973
Europe	7346	9537	11482	13564	10666	21227	23200	22200	32000
America	4426	4371	8209	8872	5222	10077	11200	11000	18100
Africa	3953	2856	2643	4653	1517	3900	3900	4500	11800
Others	3490	2722	3278	6607	3116	2500	2900	3200	6400
Total	19215	19836	25412	33696	20521	37704	41200	40900	68300

Source: Ethiopian Tourism Commission, Statistical Bulletin 1987 as cited in Ayalew (2009)

Among the Ethiopian tourist attraction centers, the Lake Tana region particularly Bahir Dar, the capital city of the Amhara region, and its surroundings received considerable attention from the central government, due to its proximity to the historic route. Among others, Lake Tana is the largest freshwater lake in Ethiopia with 3,673 sq km, and has an estimated water body of 1,800 meter above sea level.²⁰ The Blue Nile River along with its Falls, which contributes 86% of its water to the main Nile, i.e. the longest river in the World shared by the ten riparian African states, is also one of the main attraction sites of Bahir Dar.

Getenet Fetene, "Problems in the Development of the Tourism Sector in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia: A case Study," (MSc Thesis, Wageningen University, Netherlands, 2005), 15-23

Bahir Dar is best remembered as a place where over 40 islands with over 21 monasteries are in existence (BOCTPD 2011).²¹ The monasteries were built by the kings of Ethiopia in the medieval period, which later became the most important religious and political hub of the country. Politically, the Lake Tana Island monasteries had played a significant role when the country experienced internal and external crises. The Christian Ethiopian kings used the monasteries as a crucial place for hiding their treasures and as a place of refuge, started from the reign of Amda-Tsion (r.1314-1344) until the late 19th century.²² More so, the Ethiopian kings used the monasteries as a place to pray for the triumph of their military campaigns.²³ It was in these churches and monasteries that the bodies of some medieval Ethiopian kings such as Emperor Dawit I (r.1382-1411), Emperor Zera Yacob (1434-1468), Emperor Susnyos (r.1607-1632), and Emperor Fasildes (r.1632-1687) were obscured. Further, until it was taken by King Ezana (a powerful Aksumite King in the 4th century A.D), to Aksum, is believed that the Ark of the Covenant, was kept in the Island Monasteries of Lake Tana for over 800 years. These ancient historical monasteries and churches also kept wall paintings, church crosses, crowns, and clothes of kings from ages past. Thus, such treasures along with its ancient buildings became a source of attraction for tourists.²⁴

Bahir Dar's proximity to the "Historic Route" such as Lalibela, Gondar, and Aksum increased the importance of the town to be a tourist center of north western Ethiopia. It was in the Second Five Year Plan (1962-1967) that the national government recognized the Lake Tana and the Blue Nile area as important sites to the country's tourism development. ³⁸⁽²⁸⁾ The plan saw "tourism as an important way of increasing foreign exchange earnings and in widening the options of employment opportunities through expansion of major towns and tourist centers, restoring historical monuments, wildlife conservation, and the provision of tourist facilities wherever necessary.³⁷⁽²⁹⁾ To materialize such a dream, however, the government introduced air and land transportation from Asmara (Eritrea) to Addis Ababa and

to Bahir Dar. Bridges, boats, recreational centers, hotels (such as Ghion, Araga, Kahsay, and Abay minch), tourism offices, travel agencies were established followed by the rebuilding of old churches and monasteries.³⁹⁽²⁹⁾ Such internal developments laid the foundation for the growth of tourism and for the latter growth of petty trading such as crafts, pottery making, and basketry.

However, the smooth flow of tourist arrivals and the revenue it generates in Ethiopia was generally appeared to have significantly declined since 1973. This was mainly attributed to the outbreak of famine and change of government in the last years of the imperial regime. In spite of changes in regimes, however, Ethiopia has a long history of famine, which had been a factor for massive deaths, migrations and altering the course of history itself. The 1973/74 famine, the most serious epidemic of the 20th century, affected almost three million Ethiopians who were struggling for survival and total death rate in the country reached approximately 250, 000.⁴⁰ This epidemic casted gloominess on the country's image being called as a country of famine, and poverty, where no infrastructural developments are available. This episode was suddenly followed by political turmoil throughout the country. The famine was responsible for such upheals. It facilitated serious of revolutions against the regime, in spite of the fact that it was precipitated earlier by the massive Ethiopian student movement of the 1960s. It later became the immediate cause for the downfall and final collapse of the imperial regime. Tom argued that political violence can be short-lived, but the long-term implications for tourism may last for long years. Hence, political instability affects the confidence of tourists and potential investors. Finally, due to the outbreak of frequent revolutions against the regime, the government did not get room to rejuvenate the previous splendor of the tourism sector. This problem was compounded with limited supply of hospitality facilities, under-development of the international air transport, and ignorance of domestic companies as well as potential individuals, absence of any tourism policy and strategy.⁴¹ This was made worse by the unfortunate occupation of the regime palace by the junta in a creeping coup in 1974. Despite these challenges, one should not emphasize that this era was irrelevant in the development of tourism, though tourism was in its infancy stage.

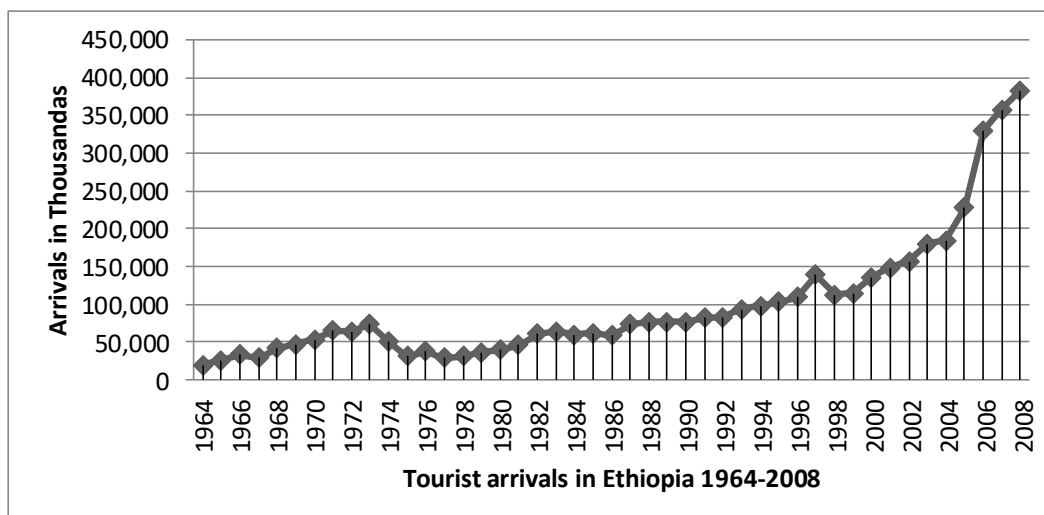


Figure 1-Tourist arrivals in Ethiopia (1962-2008)

Source: Tourism statistic bulletin, 2005, No: 8; ETC, Tourism statistical bulletin, 2002, no, 7. 2003.

The Derg Period (r.1974-1991)

Soon after the imperial regime had been overthrown from power in 1974, a Military Committee (known as the Derg) seized power. Recognizing the importance of tourism in the country's economy, the government has made possible efforts that would enable the enhancement of the sector. In the economic policy of the country, the government underscored its intention of promoting the tourism sector as follows;

*This sector of the economy will continue to receive the government's attentions, and foreign visitors will always be accorded the traditional Ethiopian hospitality. It should, however, be emphasized that the conservation of wild life, etc; particularly of the rare species, and the preservation of antiquities will be viewed primarily as national objectives in their own right. This task of preservation will be given or actively pursued by the government... The hitherto neglected domestic tourism will be given any encouragement so that Ethiopians may have the opportunity of enjoying the attractions of their own country and thereby developing pride in their natural and cultural heritage.*⁴²

This clearly tells us, the regime was certainly keen to see the growth of both domestic and international tourism in the country. In order to realize its dream of promoting domestic tourism, the government introduced “□□□□□ □□□ □□□” (know your country club). A distinct characteristic of domestic tourism was the promotion of tourism locally within the country. All civil servants were strongly encouraged to relax and enjoy the unique beauty of their own country, and they were also provided the opportunity to visit the tourist attractions once in every year.⁵⁵ Equally pertinent to this was the way by which the government attempted to increase public holidays by encouraging workers, children, and ordinary people to enjoy with their families in recreational centers at affordable prices. Spending two days in various tourist attraction sites of the country had already become an engrained habit among employed workers, emanating from the traditions of celebrating weekends.

In this period, one can emphasize that domestic tourism had been given a particular concern and marked the government's full entry into the sector. This was a decisive shift away from the imperial regime (when domestic tourism was targeted at the upper class citizens of the royal families, higher officials, rich aristocracies and foreign residents, while ordinary workers/citizens had remained significantly under-represented). Such achievement contributed for the increase of domestic tourist flows from 16,560 to 31,019 in 1974 and 1986, respectively. There are three assumptions on the purpose of promoting domestic tourism in the period under discussion i) to increase the unity of various ethnic groups of the country,⁵⁶ ii) to undermine the power of the previous aristocracies or noble classes and, iii) due to the government's inclination to socialist countries, whereby domestic tourism was part and parcel of the sector.⁵⁷ However, one of the drawbacks of domestic tourism in this period was the banning of travel to non-socialist countries was not allowed, unless an invitation letter was presented.

However, the government's role to promote both domestic and international tourism was not long lasting due to some inter-related factors. As will become evident in the next section, tourism development in this period has been increasingly challenged by war, strained political and diplomatic relations with the western world, new political and economic reforms, restriction on free entry of tourists, drought/famine, and government change.⁴³ All these factors are equally important and interdependent, and one cannot distinguish the effects

of each of these factors in explaining the downward trend of tourist arrivals in Ethiopia. Therefore, one may raise a question on why a dream of being tourist destination center in the region remained nothing more than a dream in the immediate post-Haile Sellasie period.

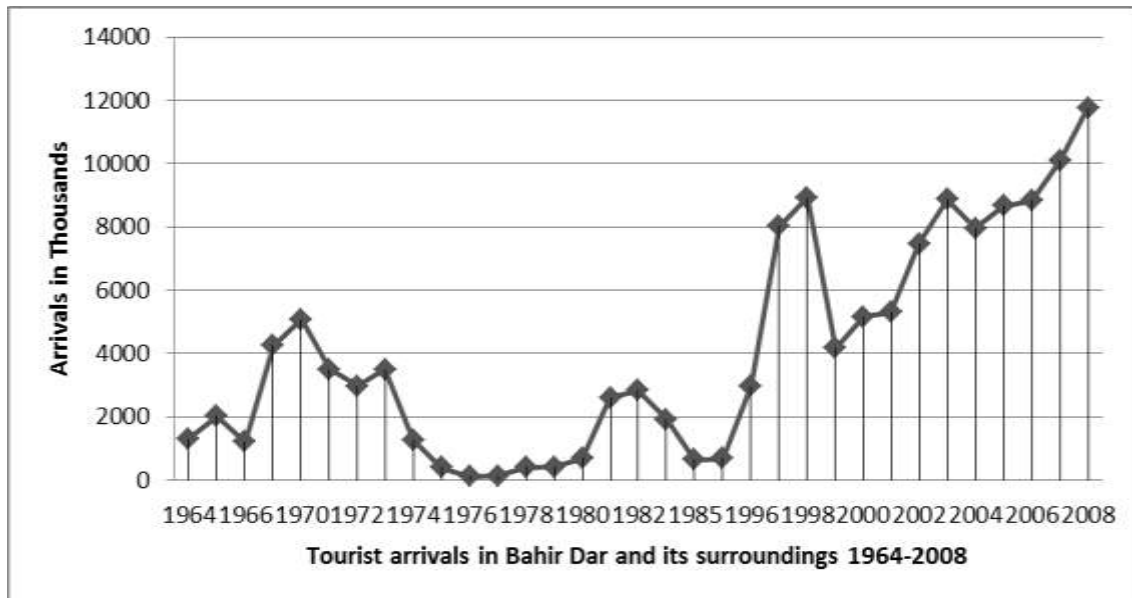


Figure 2- tourist arrivals in Bahir Dar and its surroundings (1964-2011)

Source: Socio-economic plan department, 1977 as cited in Fikirite (2011)

The first sign of crisis occurred when the country's slightly booming tourism industry was getting ready to collapse. This was when the military junta drastically altered economic and tourism policies. This was clearly seen when the Junta nationalized private and foreign companies, banks, foreign travel agencies, insurance companies, and tourist facilities including hotels under Proclamation no.21/1975. Privately owned hotels in Bahir Dar such as Ghion and Wanzaye were nationalized under the supervision of the Ethiopian Hotel and Tourism Commission. The Tana Marine Transport Enterprise in Bahir Dar became the only government organization that provides transportation facilities for tourists.⁴³ The government viewed nationalization as the way of reducing unnecessary profits by foreign companies and bureaucrats. While this measure is often seen as a positive measure for tourism, it became a barrier for further development. Tourists were forced to stay in government owned hotels, which were neither standardized nor well-managed. Tourist facilities remained inadequate, and accommodation shortages and quality became more acute.⁴⁴ Private investors were highly discouraged. Hence, it was in this situation that tourism suffered devastating consequences.

Furthermore, the military government's discriminatory policy towards tourist generating countries and its restriction on entry and free movement of tourists, also severely curtailed tourist's motivation by which many of whom seemed to have had little interests in visiting the country. ⁴⁵ The rationale behind this was all international tourists were suspected as enemies and spies, who believed to have been worked to strengthen imperialism. Also, tourists were seen as a political threat to the regime's power. However, this was intentionally done to avoid the capitalist intervention in the country's ideology. The proclamation of the

Leninist Ideology as the most important philosophy of the country in May 1975, testifies to this fact. Thus, this would have been especially true for the westerners, but certainly not for other socialist countries. The government's policy of hostility against the western world was seen when Americans, who were the third largest visitor in Ethiopia next to Africa and Europe, were forced to leave the country in 1977. The bi-lateral relationship between the two countries became a blow. Therefore, America withdrew from Ethiopia by closing the United States Information Service (USIS), the Military Advisory and Assistant Group (MAAG), the Peace Corps, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and shifted its alliance with Somalia.

In the mean while, the westerners were apprehensive about the government's strategy of non-alignment. The Derg regime's association with the socialist countries had been the source of headaches for the western world. It was widely being perceived by the Ethiopian nobles and few educated elites that the Derg's policy of non-alignment with the western powers would be a danger for Ethiopia. In spite of such belief, however, the radical shift in ideology have paved the way for new areas of co-operation with the new ones.⁴⁶ Since this period, several potential tourists particularly from the west were forced to cancel their bookings in favor of alternative destinations in Africa. Such un-favorable relations are likely to reduce the possibility of joint efforts being designed for the growth of future tourism. This was clearly observed when the number of international tourists from Western Europe and North America showed a sharp decline from 32,000 and 18,000 in 1973 to 9,000 and 3,000 in 1977, respectively.⁴⁷ Thus, these historical episode seems however to largely be a factor for impending the country's tourism competitiveness.

The other factor contributed for the decline of tourism during the military government was war and political instability. Since the advent of military power in 1974 until 1991, there had been increasing civic contention and political instability as different political groups attempts to overthrow the regime from power. With no doubt, the government was increasingly involved in the internal and external wars with the liberation fronts in Tigray, Eritrea, Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP), Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ethio-Somalia war of 1977/1978).⁴⁸ In many occasions, the government made frequent and intermittent physical confrontation with such political contenders. The situation had become worse with the declaration of red terror in major towns of the country in 1977. During this period, Ethiopia entered a new phase of chaos and a state of political disorder. Those who were suspected of supporting rebel groups were imprisoned, killed, while some fled to neighboring countries. The government committed great majority of civilian abuses and actions leading to devastating instability. These civil wars against the rebel groups lasted for over seventy years, in which peaceful compromise were never considered. In addition, the government would never hesitate taking any actions against the contenders that might affect the power of the regime in any case. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that there was a general breakdown of law and order in the country.

In light of the above observation, I will draw an argument that the intermittent wars, perhaps, led to the destruction of tourist infrastructures, since the war was centered in major towns of the country. In periods of intense armed conflicts, the Ethiopian government abandoned leisure activities. Hence, it invested its time and resources on the war effort, giving little emphasis to infrastructural developments including tourist facilities. As a result, tourism in this period was not recovered soon after the war. The long-term implications of political instability could no longer be ignored.

On the other hand, the outbreak of political disorder, civic war, and famine has always been followed by the frequent and instant dissemination of the news in western media which led to any warning on the anticipated incidents and immediate cancellations of trips by international tourists and Due to security reasons, tourists might perhaps forced to abandon their intention of visiting tourist attractions which are unsafe. Such unfavorable environment would not give the kind of pleasure and relaxation that the tourists want and restricts tourists' comfort, who had the choice of travelling to other safe countries. Thus, tourism will only be recovered when the negative image of a country could be erased from the mind of the tourists. Yap and Saha,⁴⁹ noted that politically unstable countries constantly encounter challenges such as the withdrawal of foreign investments and negative public image. The authors also stated that "political stability is an essential prerequisite for attracting international tourists to a destination and a fundamental pre-condition to the successful establishment, growth, and survival of a tourist industry."⁵⁰ Seddighi *et al.* also added that "the impacts and devastating effects of political instability on tourism are something that no tourism policy-maker can afford to ignore."⁵¹

Bloom also added that political instability "can cause irreparable damage to the image of a given area as a tourist destination."⁵² A study conducted in Kenya also shows that the 1990s civil unrest and the subsequent media coverage it received both locally and internationally, had a profound impact on Kenya's tourism industry. "Unstable environment due to politics discourages several potential tourists from coming to Kenya. Violent protests, civil war, the perceived violation of human rights, or even the mere threat of these activities, will cause tourists to cancel their vacations." In Tanzania, Noel noted that the 1998 bombing of the US embassy in Dare es Salaam shattered the country's international image to be a safe and stable destination. However, the industry was affected seriously when the US state department responded by warning Americans against traveling to East Africa. In addition, the economy of Tanzania experienced various adverse shocks, following the cancellation of bookings.(source???)

Such war and instability in Ethiopia hampered the growth of tourism. in this period flow of tourists steadily dropped from 1, 267 in 1974 to 141 in 1977 in Bahir Dar and its surroundings. Nationally, it showed a serious of decline from 50,220 in 1974 to 28,984 in 1977 and a fall from 22.2 million birr in 1974 to 3.3 million birr in 1978.

However, since 1979, the tourism sector was recovered due to relative stability that was prevailed in the country. The Somalia's, for instance, had already begun to wreak fatalities by the Ethiopian armed forces in 1978. The rebel groups had faced a shattering defeat. Using this opportunity, the government established the Ethiopian Tourism Commission (ETC) supervised by the council of ministers, under proclamation No.182, 1980 in 1979. The main purpose of the ETC was "to develop and promote tourism at home and abroad by means of building and expanding accommodation and recreational facilities, to establish and supervise organizations in the business of providing tourist facilities, issue licenses to persons or organizations engaged in the provision of tourist facilities, publicize the tourist attractions of the country, establish administer, expand and control training center for personnel to be engaged in tourist facilities, and prepare and disseminate information concerning tourists."⁵³

This was followed by the invitation of foreign consultants such as the Ethiopia-Kenya Regional Development Program in 1980, a Swiss consulting Firm called Thyssen Rhinstah Technic in 1983 and the Soviet Team of Scientists in 1985. The building of hotels, recreational centers, and tourism offices were suggested. Among others, the Tana Hotel was

built in 1982 in Bahir Dar.⁵⁴ Such achievement attracted large number of international tourists which grew from 36, 400 in 1979 to 64, 240 in 1988.

However, the promising habit of tourism was interrupted by the outbreak of the 1984/85 famine and the years of post-famine austerity. Exactly after the outbreak of the 1973/74 famine, during the 'Marxist-Leninist' Derg regime, an estimated 7.8 million Ethiopians were starved to death with food shortages, out of which excess mortality was estimated at 700,000.⁵⁸ Mis-management, corruption, and general hostility to the Derg's brutal rule, together with the draining effects of intermittent wars with the nationalist guerilla movements brought about a drastic fall in the general productivity of food and cash crops.⁵⁹ The country has appeared frequently in the worldwide media⁶⁰ which ensured unprecedented international hatred for what was taking place in Ethiopia, in spite of the fact that the support from the "Live Aid Concert" saved the lives of millions.⁶¹ Without the aid from the international community, the country would undoubtedly been in dire economic crises. Indeed, more than 7 million people who were the victims of the famine had been saved. Tourist flows would have been seriously affected if a large number of international humanitarian assistance groups including journalists and higher officials had not come in Ethiopia.

The famine brought about a crippling effect on the country's economy, whereby the tourism sector was disproportionately affected. In the mean time, major emphasis was given on rehabilitation and re-construction of the famine victims, let alone tourism development. The expansion of tourist facilities was forcibly suspended. The problem is aggravated by poor roads networks, bridges, airplane and railways, shortage of electric power, standardized hotels and lodges, poor telecommunication services and so on.⁶² Moreover, the building of bridges had been abandoned in some major areas of the country, used as a strategy to prevent the potential movement of any rebellious armies that might consider challenging the authorities of the regime. The famine and its associated consequences like the outbreak of disease (fears of disease), was the major cause of lack of interest among tourists. This resulted in a decline of tourist arrivals from 1,911 in 1983 to 647 in 1985 in Bahir Dar town and its surroundings, which shows a similar trend at the country level, reduced from 64,240 in 1983 to 59,522 in 1984.⁶³ 2.1% of decline was registered annually in the period 1974-1984.

The last years of the Derg regime saw a serious blow to the government. On one hand, the socialist bloc countries drastically reduced aid to Ethiopia. As a result, the government experienced serious economic hardships. Thus, the government could no longer rely on its former allies in military and other economic assistance, which was a serious blow to the junta. The country's isolation with the outside world provides no hope of foreign assistance, particularly from the western world. Therefore, in order to curb further decline and prevent the tourism sector's downward trend and realizing that its economic policy was a failure, the government seems to have been aware of the necessity to introduce new reforms. To cite an example, one of the decrees issued in the period (though never been successful) was declaration of mixed economy. Under proclamation no. 9/1990, the government provided land to private investors to build hotels and tourist facilities.⁶⁴ On the other hand, the rebellion against the regime became very sever from year to year. Thus, the question that was increasingly posed is whether the government can provide conducive environment for the growth of tourism while the country was engulfed with political chaos, disorder, and decline of interest from both the capitalist and socialist countries. Despite those attempts, however, the fears of unknown environment caused by intermittent economic as well as political crises,

have posed a serious obstacle for foreigners to travel to Ethiopia in this period. The consequent loss of power in bloody war in 1991 made the long-awaited plan of making Ethiopia one of tourism destination in Africa became un-fruitful. This decline have had a devastating impact on other tourism related subsectors, including handicraft, car rental, boating, and other tourism related activities which in turn affected the communities lives and livelihoods. In general, tourism in this period was largely seen as a missed opportunity and the sector has undergone difficult moments.

EPRDF (r. 1991 onwards)

The firm struggle between the Derg and EPRDF (Ethiopian Peoples Republic Democratic Front) for power reached its peak in 1991, when the former was forced to abandon its power. The transition period was not a convenient time for the growth of the tourism sector. The period saw the destruction of parks (built by the Derg), as a reflection of the communities antagonism against the regime. The surrounding community cleared forests and parks and converted it to agricultural fields and settlements.⁶⁵ However, in the years immediately following the transition period, some policy measures were taken, though recovery of economic losses took a little bit longer. Of particular significance was the declaration of new economic policy under proclamation No. 15/1992. This policy measure made radical shift from command economy to free market which further intensified private investments. The establishment of private banks, insurance companies, building of new hotels, establishment of tour operators, travel agencies, and boat hiring organizations became part and parcel of the policy.⁶⁶ Such tourist accommodations became the focal point of commerce, business, and administration in the country.

Closely linked, Ethiopian Tourism Commission (established by the Derg) was strengthened, to be in charge of tourism investment initiatives, and supervising the establishment and operation of tourism and hospitality facilities, which later transformed into the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Its main objective was to “initiate the country’s tourism policies and laws; publicize the country’s resources of tourist attractions to tourists; encourage the development of tourist facilities; license and supervision of the establishment of tourist facilities...; set the standards for the establishments of tourist facilities; collect, compile, and disseminate information of the country; give assistance and advice to regional governments with matters relating to tourism; undertake studies with a view to enhancing the development of tourism in the country and establishing as many training institutions that is necessary.”⁶⁷ Nevertheless, under this circumstance, one that drew considerable attention was the implementation of decentralization policy, which provides each regional governments of the country an opportunity to develop the tourism potentiality of their respective area. Then after, independently exercised tourism offices in each region was established under proclamation No. 41/1993.⁶⁸ This departure was probably underpinned by an increasing awareness of government on tourism in earning foreign revenue and supporting the country’s economy.

In addition to this, the country’s relative stability, free market economy, and free entry of foreigners despite differences in ideology, religion and race, boosted the international tourism market. The increase in levels of disposable income in the west, improvement in international flight, and expansion of tourist facilities including the introduction of airplanes in large numbers could no longer be ignored. This led to the unprecedented rise in the number of international tourist arrivals from roughly 20,000 in 1997 to over 52,000 in 2011 in Bahir Dar and its surroundings and increased from 81,581 in 1991 to 139,000 in 1997 at national level.

Seen in historical perspective, Ethiopia's tourism in this period was challenged by war. This was largely motivated by the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war in the period 1998-2000. The unresolved border dispute with neighboring Eritrea constitutes the major external threat to security and stability in Ethiopia. It was only in 2000 that the two countries came into cold peace. The war was aggravated by subsequent drought and famine, which added a fuel and appeared to be insufficient enough to undertake any effective development efforts, due to, the diversion of the country's resource on maintaining the country's sovereignty from external aggression and rehabilitation activities. Huge budgets had been invested in the war. As such, the promotion of tourism was almost little-existent. Besides, as it was previously discussed, the media coverage has its own influence on the perception of international tourists. Therefore, the first sharp decline during this period was seen for the past two years (1998-2000), when international tourist arrival figures dropped steadily from 139,000 in 1997 to 112,000 in 1998 at national level and reduced from 24,711 in 1998 to 12, 176 in 1999 in Bahir Dar and its surroundings.

However, in comparative terms, for the period 1998-2000, Bahir Dar's tourist flows surpassed the rate of the country's tourist arrivals, even though the overall numbers remained insufficient at the country level. Since the war centered along the Ethio-Eritrean border, many tourists centered largely in the north western parts of Ethiopia, where the study area forms apart. This location was relatively safer and far away from the center of the war. In 2000, the restoration of peace and order in the country was followed by a decline of Bahir Dar's share from the total international tourist arrivals. This was largely caused by tourist's preference of visiting other areas.⁷² From 324,664 tourists that visited the country in the years 2000-2008, only 38,484 tourists visited Bahir Dar and the surroundings but they made the area the third most visited tourist destination in Ethiopia next to Lalibela and Gondarr.⁷³

In the aftermath of the war, the tourism industry was recovered. The government obtained assistance from the World Bank and IMF, which offered the government an opportunity to strengthen its efforts on the development of the socio-economic sector. It was the most promising route out of economic deprivation.⁷⁴ This laid the foundation for the post-war expansion of tourist travel and the unprecedented rise in the number of tourist arrivals in Ethiopia from 135,954 in 2000 to 148,386 in 2001. In addition, it led to a rise of incoming tourists from 18,021 to 22,121 in Bahir Dar and its surroundings. Therefore, such unforeseen wave of incoming visitors in the post war period, took the country's government by surprise. Such quick economic and political recovery after the war builds favorable international image. Also, it resulted to an increasing number of national and international companies seeking to invest in the country's tourism industry and other development efforts. The tourism industry managed to secure an even and relatively steady flow of both domestic and international tourists, relative to the two previous regimes. Also, the country became one of the tourist destination centers in Africa.

CONCLUSION

The history of modern tourism in Ethiopia traced back to the 1960s with the development of Ethiopian Tourism Organization. However, Ethiopia's tourism has passed through a number of inter-related challenges such as political instability, drought/famine, command economy, restriction of movements and nationalization of private investments. Ethiopia was a classic example, whereby war and famine was endemic which created a bad image among the

international community which adversely affected tourist flows. With the advent of military government to power, however, the development of tourism in Ethiopia remained fairly sluggish. The period was practically unsafe for a foreigner to move out of its home country. Tourism in this period was so sluggish that it took 14 years for the number to come back to its peak of the imperial regime. However, the end of military power in 1991 brought about a relative conducive environment attributed to the political stability and the market liberalization that attracted a large number of business, conference and vacation tourists.

FOOTNOTE

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