

**Understanding the Local Media Environment and International Media as
Source for Local News: Five Ethiopian Newspapers in Focus**

Zewge Abate Assefa



Faculty of Humanities

Department of Media and Communication

University of Oslo

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Acronyms

AAU – Addis Ababa University

AFP – Agence France Press

ArabSat – Arab Satellite Communications Organization

BSP – Broadcasting Service Proclamation

CUD – Coalition for Unity and Democracy

DStv – Digital Satellite Television

DW – Deutsche Welle

EFFORT – Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray

ENA – Ethiopian News Agency

EPO – Ethiopian Press Organization

EPRDF – Ethiopian People Revolutionary Front

HRW – Human Rights Watch

IMF – International Monetary Fund

MCC – Media and Communication Center

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

ONLF – Ogaden National Liberation Front

PIAL – Press and Information Access Law

PMC – Population and Media Center

UEDF – United Ethiopian Democratic Front

VOA – Voice of America

WIC – Walta Information Center

ZANIS – Zambian News and Information Service

Abstract

Ethiopia's media environment is primarily Government owned and controlled with some private news media struggling to survive the limitations of a small market base and political pressure. The current Government has allowed the operations of the private press and political opposition for the first time in the country's history. However, the challenge for these entities to enjoy a genuinely free political space is formidable particularly following the hugely disputed general elections in 2005. The media in general and the private press in particular seem to have faced difficulties related to gaining access to official information and generally enjoying a free political space to communicate their news and views. Self-censorship seems to have become a common practice among journalists.

The research attempts to look into these challenges and the place of international media as alternative sources of information on local affairs reporting of the Ethiopian press as perceived by local reporters and editors. Its main objective, therefore, is to explore situations that lead the Ethiopian press to utilize international media outlets as sources of news on local state of affairs. Employing various techniques with the qualitative research paradigm, data was gathered through in-depth interviews, qualitative document and newspaper content analyses.

Findings indicate that the private press operates under challenges such as lack of access to official information and a climate of fear of Government harassment and persecution. As a consequence, the private press tends to use more international media sources for locally available information that it would not be able to obtain itself. The generally critical reporting of the international media on Ethiopia also seems to suit the tendency of the private press to focus more on criticizing Government activities. The Government press, on the other hand, largely praises and promotes the Government in such a way that it finds little relevance in international media sources except to launch attacks against their coverage of Ethiopia.

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Chapter One

Background

1.1 Ethiopia and Global Politics

Little has been studied about the development of media in Ethiopia, and this makes it not so easy to compile comprehensive information in the area. However, reports of international institutions as well as even the scant research inform this research. Some MA theses in the Faculty of Journalism and Communication, Addis Abba University, have also been directly or indirectly relevant to this work. It is hoped that these materials provide a glimpse of the context in which the Ethiopian press functions.

While the political history of Ethiopia significantly differs in some ways from other parts of Africa, the latter years of its modern history faced similar challenges as many other African countries. In relation to Ethiopia's convergence with the rest of Africa in its recent political development, Harbeson (1998:62) writes the following.

Notwithstanding the uniqueness of its earlier history, Ethiopia has been changing, in some respects rapidly and in others glacially, in ways that are leading it toward greater convergence with the rest of Africa. Ethiopia, too, suffered brutal military rule, as well as the elusive quest for radical transformation along Marxist-Leninist lines. The demonic Mengistu regime (1974-91) also undermined the country's deep-rooted quasi-feudal institutions and established an unprecedented level of national-Government dominance in political life. Any visitor to Ethiopia over the last quarter-century will also have noticed the many ways in which Ethiopian popular culture, particularly in the cities, has been influenced by the West.

Ethiopia's increasing convergence with the rest of Africa and other parts of the world has been most evident after the EPRDF Government took power in 1991. In its quick response to the post-cold war politics at a global level, the ruling party essentially dropped its Marxist/Leninist

ideology. The new leaders seemed to be committed towards creating an open political environment with the state television and radio allowing diverse views and the private press

flourishing for the first time in the country's history (Henze, 1998). The 1995 Constitution of Ethiopia has made important provisions for freedom of expression and the right to assembly and demonstration. Not only has the local media environment begun to enjoy relative expansion, but access to international media has also intensified with transnational media such as the South African Digital Satellite Television (DStv) launching subscription services to urbanites. Free-to-air television services such as ArabSat have enabled even a far cheaper access to international media packages for a wider range of society.

However, the historical legacy of authoritarian political culture still seems to have defined Ethiopia's media exercise more than the recent advances in the level of press freedom. In fact, the traverse towards creating a free media environment and open society has suffered significant setbacks. One of these setbacks came in the aftermath of the highly controversial general elections in May 2005. Dozens of journalists of the private press were put in jail together with opposition leaders with charges ranging from public incitement to violence to attempts of stimulating genocide filed against them. These events have led to the exercise of less freedom and more tendencies of self-censorship. Many in the opposition camp and those working in the media currently argue that the overall political space in Ethiopia has significantly narrowed ever since. One may argue that the 2005 elections which saw the freest of debates with equitable use of state media by the opposition and the ruling parties had ironical consequences in that the Government seemed to strictly limit free speech henceforth.

1.2 The Media and Politics in Ethiopia

There has always been a close relationship between Ethiopian politics and the country's media system. Ever since the first Amharic newspaper, *Aimero*, came into being in 1902 to enjoy a very small circulation among palace dignitaries, the media have largely served the Government.

Ethiopian rulers well recognized the power of the media in their service as a Government mouthpieces that when, for instance, the other Amharic weekly, *Berehanena Selam*, was launched in 1921, it was Emperor Haileselassie's (who reigned from 1930 to 1974) own initiative that indeed stood in the praise of His Majesty. Nothing less can be said about radio that came in 1935 and television that actually kick-started by televising the 33rd anniversary of Emperor Haileselassie's coronation. The era of Derg, the military dictatorship (1974-1991), was a period when state control and repression of media operations mounted with official censorship introduced against all forms of media products, and private media were not allowed to exist. The Marxist regime owned the entire media to utilize them as its propaganda machinery.

Post 1991 Ethiopia under the current Government, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF), has arguably exhibited a double face. On the one hand, it responded positively to the new global political development following the end of the cold war. When former socialist countries of the world adopted capitalism, the EPRDF-led transitional Government followed suite despite its Marxist ideology during its years of armed struggle. Accordingly, it opened the political space "...for parties and other organizations which had long opposed Mengistu [leader of the military junta, Derg] to become legitimate and recognized players in the political arena" (Joireman, 1997: 387). The open political space allowed for the unprecedented flourishing of the free press. The Transitional Government formulated a Constitution which has made clear provisions, among other tenets of democracy, for freedom of thought and expression. Article 29/2 of the Constitution declared that:

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression without interference. The right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any media of his choice (page 89).

The EPRDF Government was, in fact, founded on its promises of enshrining democratic standards in its policy reforms and respecting human rights. This was followed by extensive constitutional embracement of human and democratic rights which, according to Article 13/2 of

the Constitution, "...shall be interpreted conforming to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenants on Human Rights and international instruments adopted by Ethiopia".

The Constitution abolished censorship of any form. The first few years of the new rule by EPRDF actually tolerated a 'wild' private media environment with massive defamatory reporting devoid of facts and sources. According to Price et. al (2009:4), tolerating media freedoms at the beginning of his leadership, "...helped the image of Meles as one of Africa's New Leaders presiding over a democratically inclined developmental state."

However, despite its promising start, the development of Ethiopia's private press has suffered significant setbacks. Government hostility has been expressed through strong media denunciation of the allegedly irresponsible behavior of the private press as well as the detention of journalists. According to Haberson (1998:148), the EPRDF has led a *de facto* one party state after the transitional period and it "...has responded in heavy-handed fashion to criticism from the opposition and the fledgling private media." In their report on the media policy, peace and state reconstruction in crisis states, Allen & Stremlau (2005: 8) write:

The conflict between the Ethiopian state under Meles Zenawi and the Ethiopian press has sometimes been intense. Certainly the Government is not above persecuting individual journalists and newspapers. It has generally failed to cooperate with the independent media, normally excluding their journalists from official events – within the last ten years the private press has yet to be invited to one of Meles's press conferences. In 2000, Ethiopia had more imprisoned journalists than any other African country (an achievement that has subsequently been eclipsed by its neighbour Eritrea).

(It should be noted, however, as allegations of Government control of information still persist, the Government has recently started to invite private journalists to the PM's press conferences.)

Despite criticisms from rights groups such as Amnesty International, Article 19 and Human Rights Watch, Allen & Stremlau (2005: 9), assert that it is possible to give a positive light to

what has occurred in Ethiopia. The country could be said to be "...pursuing a path of media development" with combined elements of "...aggressive constraint procedures with provision of relatively considerable space for dissent". The writers attempt to justify the measures of some African Governments including that of Ethiopia against the private press by, among other things, the need to go beyond the common and simplistic dichotomy of free/unfree media environment to address complex situations and ensure eventual peace and order (ibid).

Some positive observations of democratization in Ethiopia notwithstanding, sharp criticisms by Western Governments and rights groups of the Ethiopian Government's behavior towards political dissent and the media have, nevertheless, been increasingly prevalent. In its 2008 Human Rights Report, the US State Department expressed concern on Government harassment and threatening of both local and international journalists for critical reporting. It also reported incidents of harassment and arrest over a controversial hit-and-run trial of a pop artist famous for his political lyrics. Freedom House reported in 2007 that "...the Government monitored e-mail, and starting in 2006, access to some websites and blogs was blocked, including news websites run by members of the Ethiopian Diaspora who were critical of the Government." <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4871f602c.html>

For Human Rights Watch, "Ethiopia is on a deteriorating human rights trajectory as parliamentary elections approach in 2010." The playing field for civil society activity "...shrank dramatically in 2009" following the restrictive legislation passed recently, a law the Rights Group described as "...the most restrictive of any comparable law anywhere in the world." (http://www.ifex.org/international/2010/01/21/hrw_world_report_2010.pdf). The report acknowledges the improvement of the new press law that was passed in 2008 from its draft stage. It, nevertheless, posits that "The space for independent media activity in Ethiopia remains severely constrained" (ibid). Furthermore Ethiopia now passed Anti-Terror law with provisions that "...will impact the media by making journalists and editors potential accomplices in acts of terrorism if they publish statements seen as encouraging or supporting terrorist acts, or even, simply, political protest" (ibid).

The Ethiopian Government has persistently denied such allegations, and it has recently started to argue against international criticisms including the ones by the US, its strong ally in the fight against terrorism. The press release issued by the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs against The US State Department Human Rights Report on Ethiopia starts its report sarcastically by saying; “The US State Department’s 2008 Human Rights Reports... cover human rights situations in virtually every country in the world, including Ethiopia of course. There is one exception, the United States”. It further states:

This report, deliberately and consistently, minimizes and denigrates any advances. It is carefully written to disparage. The aim is to find fault, and that is never difficult to do. No one is perfect; Guantanamo Bay springs to mind. The litany of allegations in this report doesn’t represent reality. It does not show any pattern of violation or policy direction. It is no more than a collection of unsubstantiated accusations from groups seeking to undermine Ethiopia’s process of democratization.

(http://www.mfa.gov.et/Press_Section/Press_Statement_4_March_2009.htm)

The Government has particularly been very critical of reports compiled by Human Rights Watch. The Rights Group’s claim of findings that the Ethiopian Government committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Ethiopia’s Somali region was, for instance, counter attacked by strong Government responses with counter claims of disproving the allegations through detailed investigations. The report accused HRW of being a propaganda tool for political dissents such as the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) which the Government labels as terrorist groups.

(http://www.mfa.gov.et/Press_Section/Press_Statement_26_November_2008.htm).

1.3 The 2005 Elections

Although post-1991 Ethiopia conducted quite a few elections at various levels, the first fully contested being the 2000 national elections (Pausewang, et.al, 2002), no election in Ethiopia appeared as free and fair as the 2005 parliamentary elections. All international observers on the ground, albeit with significant disparities, reported that the elections were generally free and fair until Election Day. The Carter Center, for instance, gave its testimony that “...the pre-election

campaign provided sufficient conditions for a credible and competitive electoral process” (The Carter Center, 2005:61).

http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/Ethiopia-2005-Finalrpt.pdf.

For the first time in the country’s history, opposition parties enjoyed fair allocation of time to use Government media for their campaign. Also on Election Day (May 15, 2005), the Center observed that situations were “...peaceful and calm and voter turnout was overwhelming”. However, there were some minor as well as major irregularities particularly in the regions while flaws were rather minimal in Addis Ababa. Despite its details of disappointing post-election harassment and intimidation and flaws in re-elections conducted for disputed constituencies, the Report concluded “The Carter Center’s assessment of the elections suggests that the majority of the constituency results based on the May 15 polling and tabulation are credible and reflect competitive conditions (ibid: 68).

The European Union Elections Observers Mission (EU-EOM), on its part, appreciated the positive developments in the pre-election period, the huge turnout and peaceful Election Day. It was, however, much more vocally critical of the vote counting process and lamented that it was “...marred by irregular practices, confusion and a lack of transparency” (EU-EOM, 2005:1). Despite freedom enjoyed by the private press in the pre-election period, the immediate post-election days saw a brief detention of journalists to be asked “...to release their sources of some of their recent reports” (ibid: 23). Similarly, the Government revoked the licenses of some local journalists reporting for international media (ibid).

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/election_observation/ethiopia/final_report_en.pdf).

Until the post election saga, however, the media, both Government and private, played a significant role not just in being channels through which the electorate had access to the views of candidates, but they also expressed themselves as supporters of one or another party. According to the EU-EOM report, the reports by the private media were largely in favor the opposition. The

Government media, however, allowed for the coverage of election campaign events for both Government and opposition campaigners with a negative tone towards the latter. The report singled out two important developments with regard to the media:

First, unprecedented debate among the main political parties, broadcast live through the state radio and television from the beginning of 2005, allowed a genuine exchange of views and were followed with great interest by a mostly urban audience not previously used to such a free exchange of points of view in the public domain. Second, the signing, by the main private and state-owned media outlets (with the only prominent exception of *The Reporter*), of a code of conduct for the campaign was welcome in an environment in which consensus is not the rule (EU-EOM, 2005:17).

The aftermath of the 2005 elections did a huge damage to the overall process of democratization and specifically to the media exercise in Ethiopia. Although “deeply polarized,” Ethiopia’s press was “...vibrant....until the aftermath of the contentious elections” (Price et. al, 2009:4). The ironic end to the elections resulted in the imprisonment of “...dozens of journalists [and] a substantial part of the leadership of the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) party” and the private press “...has largely been silenced” and is no longer able to serve as a forum for divergent views as it once did (ibid: 4).

1.4 The Size and Circulation of the Press in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian press reaches a much smaller public than the broadcast media (Population Media Center, 2006:29). Information obtained from the Ethiopian Broadcast Authority indicates that the Authority documented a total of 47 legally registered newspapers and 24 magazines which are already in the market. This is against the staggering 603 newspapers and 130 magazines that have taken press license, “...from which 430 newspapers and 130 magazines have been published and circulated in the period after the press proclamation [1991] and February 2005” (PMC, 2006:32). The post-2005 period again has exhibited a dramatic decline of particularly political oriented press. Private Amharic weekly newspapers with politics as one of their main areas of focus altogether have a total average weekly circulation of about 61.000. We should, however, exclude the circulation for *Addis Neger*, an Amharic weekly, which in its two-year presence in the market enjoyed an average weekly circulation of 20.000 copies. It had to close

down in December, 2009 after its editors and journalists all fled their country claiming Government harassment and intimidation. The editor-in-chief of the paper, Tamirat Negera, told VOA that the Government daily, *Addis Zemen*, published a number of articles accusing their paper of "...violating Ethiopia's tough anti-terrorism law."

(<http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/africa/Ethiopian-Newspaper-Shuts-Down-Editors-Flee---78646927.html>).

The following table summarizes the ownership and size of circulation for all the newspapers with political, social and economic affairs as their focus of reporting. This list does not include press products published by regional states.

Table 1. List of newspapers combining coverage of political, social and economic affairs*Source: Ethiopian Broadcast Authority*

No.	Name	Language	Period	Ownership	One-time Average Circulation
1	Addis Zemen	Amharic	Daily	Government	10.700
2	The Ethiopian Herald	English	Daily	Government	8000
3	Barissa	Oromifa	Daily	Government	17.200
4	Al-Alem	Arabic	Daily	Government	5.000
5	Reporter	Amharic	Bi-weekly	Private	11.900
6	The Reporter	English	Weekly	Private	2.500
7	Addis Admas	Amharic	Weekly	Private	23.000
8	Addis Neger ¹	Amharic	Weekly	Private	20.000
9	Awramba Times	Amharic	Weekly	Private	6.500
10	Mesenazeria	Amharic	Weekly	Private	4.000
11	Google	Amharic	Weekly	Private	2.000
12	Negadras	Amharic	Weekly	Private	2.000
13	Fitih	Amharic	Weekly	Private	2.000
14	Sendek	Amharic	Weekly	Private	1.700
15	Ethio Channel	Amharic	Bi-weekly	Private	4.000
16	Hidassie	Amharic	Bi-monthly	Government	20.500
17	Haleta	Amharic	Bi-monthly	A.A.U, Mass Media Training Institute	1.300
18	The Daily Monitor	English	Daily	Private	1.715
19	The Sub Saharan Informer	English	Weekly	Private	1.400
20	Seven Days Up-Date	English	Weekly	Private	300
21	Press Digest	English	Weekly	Private	282

¹ Ceased publication after its December 6, 2009 issue

1.5 Professionalism in Ethiopia's Press

The issue of professional journalism does not necessarily correspond to journalism education. Hallin and Mancini (2004), for instance, see professionalism in the field of journalism in terms of the degree of *autonomy* of journalists, distinct *professional norms* pursued and commitment to the ethics of *public service*. Needless to say, however, professional training potentially helps journalists engage in generally better quality journalism.

Journalism as a professional training is a very recent phenomenon in Ethiopia. Most working journalists have been serving the public "...just by common sense, case judgment and news sense" and lack of training in the field has "...exacerbated the pitfalls of the media in the country" (PMC, 2006:51/2). The first media school, Ethiopian Mass Media Training Institute, was established by the Ethiopian Government only in 1996 and started to offer diploma courses. In 2004, it has been integrated to the Addis Ababa University, Faculty of Journalism and Communication, which was launched the same year under the financing of the Norwegian Government. The Institute, now under the Addis Ababa University, Faculty of Journalism and Communication, started a BA program in 2004, and up until 2006, it had graduated 639 middle level journalists of whom 227 were trained in broadcast media and 203 in print (ibid).

The Addis Ababa University's Graduate School of Journalism and Communication has graduated a few hundreds of post graduate students as well. However, very few would actually practice journalism. A team of mid-term performance evaluators for the Norwegian Government, a major partner with the graduate school which provided full funding for five years, for instance, indicated in its report that a larger number of the graduates from the school do not practice journalism after they left school. The report partly attributes this lack of interest to "...the worsening of the media situation since the inception of the programme" (2007:27). It summarized:

The students are satisfied with the academic input, but the political situation currently restricting Ethiopian media has considerably limited the framework of operation for an institution whose goals are to improve democracy and

support independent and critical journalism. The students, who graduate may, due to a lack of independent and critical media, not be able freely and fully to practice what they have learnt. A good number of them become lecturers in journalism and related topics at institutions of higher learning (ibid).

This is in line with Hallin and Mancini's broader view of professionalism in that professional training is never a guarantee particularly for journalism to entertain autonomy, pursue code of ethics and/or render genuine public service. There is little doubt, however, that in a freer media context, the knowledge and skills in the field contribute to better quality journalism. Hence the expansion of journalism education entails a brighter future.

1.6 News Sources in the Ethiopian Press

The Government media in Ethiopia generally locate their news in news agencies which are owned by or/and affiliated to the Government. The Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) stands out as "...a major source of information for the Ethiopian Government media, but also for foreign media outlets" (Skjerdal, 2008:3). Apart from its information exchange agreements with African news organizations such as the Zambia News and Information Service (ZANIS), ENA claims to have "...good relations and cooperation with Reuters, AFP, and with the respective news agencies of China, Iran, Turkey, and Yemen."

(<http://www.ena.gov.et/EnglishNews/2009/Mar/14Mar09/82840.htm>).

Established in 1942, ENA still avails a daily dispatch of news as well as information on events to be considered for coverage by Government media. Information obtained from interviews reveal that Walta Information Center, a pro-Government private news agency², also provides about 25 percent of news and articles for Government newspapers. The Government newspapers also

² Regarded by some as one of the endowment businesses founded by the ruling party, its ownership status is still unclear; but the Agency claims to be a private business.

share news among themselves. It is particularly common for *The Ethiopian Herald* to rerun news published in *Addis Zemen*.

The practice is different within the private press. As there is no such thing as a structured system of communication with news agencies, private press reporters, often a small number, have to engage in what Bonga in Zewde & Pausewang (2002: 187) calls “functional duplication” to do their reporting as well as assist in managerial undertakings. Information accessibility depends on how loyal the private media can be to Government. Bonga broadly categorizes the private press into three in relation to the attitudes of officials towards them which in turn imply the proximity for access to information. The first ones have smooth relationship with Government and access is hardly difficult for them. The second category of the private press includes those with an “...attitude of head-on collision” with Government which, as a result, are often remote to sources of Government information. The third category includes those that have historical “love-hate” relationships and have fluctuating access depending on their changing positions at a given time (Bonga in Zewde & Pausewang, 2002: 190). While enduring antipathy between Government and weak financial capacity of the latter make it difficult for it to use the national news agency as a source, the private press still utilizes Government owned electronic and print media sources. Also some Government journalists establish a “...dubious relationship with the private press” to ‘sell’ information (ibid). Other sources include freelance journalists, friends of the private press, foreign periodicals, the Internet, and radio and television monitoring (ibid). In fact, foreign media could be useful for the private press sources in cases where access to information for the latter is difficult and when the Government press may not be seen credible (at least in the views of private press journalists) in its coverage of local politics, etc.

1.7 Conclusion

Ethiopia undoubtedly responded positively in 1991 to the global political changes after the cold war. The Transitional Government worked out a Constitution with impressive provisions for freedom of expression, the rights to assembly and demonstration, etc. The country made an impressive start with practical exercise of these rights by political parties and the private press.

Recent developments, notably after the 2005 elections, seem hardly encouraging as various forms of repression of political dissent and violation of human and democratic rights have recurrently been reported by international rights groups and other observers. While global communication has indeed made it possible to scrutinize the relationship between local politics and the media, its significance to influence situations in Ethiopia seems to be minimal.

Under the circumstances, the profession of journalism, though it is showing significant progress in terms of training facilities, has not achieved autonomy to engage in critical and investigative reporting. The Government and private presses are both liable to the practice of self-censorship. Government's hostility to the private press particularly has led to difficulty of gaining access to sources of official information. In some ways, the position of the international media outlets may relatively be better to access official information on Ethiopia's socio-political issues. Whether they are a vital source of information for the local press will be discussed in the latter chapters.

1.8 The Project

The objects of the study are Government and private newspapers (2 Government dailies, 2 private weeklies and 1 private bi-weekly). The thesis puts its main interest in the examination of the differences between Government and private newspapers in the perception and experiences as regards their interaction with their working environment. It is within the scope of this project to also explore the overall understanding of local journalists about the relevance of international media to their coverage of local events and situations. At a hypothetical level, it may be assumed that Government journalists may have more access to locally available information owing to their ties with the state while at the same time they work in a less free environment to allude to international media for critical reporting. However, it needs a systematic study to find out the real explanation of their behavior as there can be other factors that may define journalists' relations with their sources. Similarly, while it seems easier to speculate that the private press, due to its antagonistic relation with the Government, seeks to put more pressure on Government by referring to critical reporting from the international media, one can only study how much this is the reality. In fact, factors related to the economic capacity of the private press as well as those

related to the degree of freedom and information access to practice a wide coverage of local events and situations need to be examined.

1.8.1 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to explore the challenges for local newspapers in dealing with local politics and examine situations leading journalists to the use of international media sources while reporting on and analyzing local affairs. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Analyze the working environment for local newspaper journalists and editors in particular in relation to access to information, freedom of the press and conditions leading to the practice of self-censorship.
2. Examine situations in which international media are used as sources for local news by the newspapers under study.
3. Describe which particular international media prevail in local affairs reporting of Ethiopian newspapers

1.8.2 Research questions

In order to be able to meet the above set objectives, the following questions will be answered in the study.

1. How do local newspaper editors and journalists in Ethiopia perceive the challenges of reporting on and analyzing the socio-political affairs of the country?
2. How and in what situations are international media important as sources of information for the local press?

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

The news media, while different in their capacity and areas of coverage, have increasingly exhibited a measure of general similarities in their format and the order in which they present various news items. Television news casting kicks off in the background of a revolving globe, the studio anchor runs the news with the map of the world widely stretching behind. National television stations and newspapers devote space and time for international news, at least the big ones that make global headlines. The broadcast media generally emulate the chronology of their presentation from the main headlines to news analysis, business news, sports and weather forecasts. By the same token, newspapers generally follow similar orders of news presentation and page allocations for the main headlines and their accompanying pictures and illustrations upfront, op-ed, feature stories and analyses in the inside pages, sports in the back and so on.

The news media also consider, to a varying degree, values which define news. National and local media as well as global ones subscribe to values such as objectivity, immediacy, accuracy, timeliness, proximity and so on. They can also be liable to bridging these ideals due to practical difficulties and special interests. Apart from examining the local milieu of journalism in Ethiopia, this study is interested in understanding the interplay between the international and local media in relation to one using the other as a source. It is, therefore, important to discuss the relationship in the theoretical framework of what makes news and what role the news media play in society and what in general terms governs their news selection from their world full of events and situations.

Moreover, the news flow theory is found relevant to this study in order to reflect on the seemingly paradoxical phenomenon of the emergence of 'global media' against the practical imbalance between the coverage of events and situations in what are commonly known as North (rich) and South (poor), a division based on the power incongruities, among others, of economic

and political nature. I will also attempt to mirror the perception of journalists regarding the use of sources in general and international media sources in particular within the theories of agenda-setting and framing. The assumption is that journalists seek to influence public opinion through their reporting or to at least provide the audience with issues to think about. This makes the agenda-setting theory relevant to the study. I shall discuss the theory of framing in particular in relation to journalists' overall assumptions, if any, of the frame in which international media outlets cover Ethiopia. Finally, the theory of Globalization will be touched upon to briefly overview the difficulties for the 'globalizing' world to actually affect change in national frontiers in specific relation to the doings of the media.

2.2 The Nature of News

News is a product that carries a set of values. For instance, the unusual makes news as opposed to the common event or situation (Fought, 1999). Likewise, the traditional qualities of news such as *conflict*, as it sells better than stability, the *proximity* of the character in the news to the audience and the *timeliness* (newness) of the event still hold true in contemporary news making. And so does *prominence* matter that it makes better news if a victim of an accident were a celebrity than a regular fellow (ibid). News is also traditionally preoccupied with stories which are dramatic and immediate from the point of view of the reader; "they do not require detailed explanation or interpretation- they are easy to understand and absorb" (Pape & Featherstone, 2005:20). That makes murder more newsworthy, for instance, than economic and cultural trends which are complex and lack the *immediacy* and *drama* often associated with news (ibid). News is also about what is *interesting* and *factual* (McQuail, 2005:377).

However, the world nowadays, argues Fought (1999:7):

...is more complicated than whatever deviates from the norm close to home in the recent past or whatever smacks of celebrity. People expect the news to help them make sense of their lives to learn more about the world, to help them make decision.

In addition to the traditional measures of news, which surely make stories appeal to the audience, people nowadays need news they can use or "...information the audience act on directly" (ibid:7). Information on a city's traffic situation, tourist sites, profile of an election candidate, to mention but a few, will help readers or viewers make decisions on which street to drive through, whether to visit a given destination and whether to vote for the candidate respectively. Therefore, it can fairly be argued that news is not just a luxury good we come into contact with for mere pastime but it has increasingly become important to understand the ever converging world full of information influencing our conditions.

Not only do the news media take into account what the audience is interested in so as to provide it with the stories and information it demands, they also influence the public opinion through the dominant stories and views they entertain. At a very simple level, Pape and Featherstone (2005:18) write: "...journalists select and interpret 'news' so that it fits and influences the culture of understanding of its readership." Although we lack evidence to claim that the news media change people's perceptions and behavior through their influential position as news and opinion providers to the public, thereby making it difficult to show a direct effect of the media on public opinion, studies indicate that the public still gets influenced by the dominant accounts in the news media. The media are therefore sometimes regarded as agenda setters, a theory that will be briefly discussed below.

2.3 Setting the Agenda

'Agenda Setting', as a theory, was forwarded by McCombs and Shaw in 1972 to describe "...a phenomenon which has long been noticed and studied in the context of election campaigns" (McQuail, 2005:512). The core idea, according to McQuail (ibid) "...is that the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues". For McCombs (2004:2), it is indeed true that "...through their day-to-day selection and display of the news, news editors and directors focus our attention and influence our perceptions of what are the most important issues of the day." He further states:

The public uses [the] salience cues from the media to organize their own agendas and decide which issues are most important. Over time, the issues emphasized in news reports become the issues regarded as most important among the public. The agenda of the news media becomes, to a considerable degree, the agenda of the public. In other words, the news media set the public agenda. Establishing this salience among the public, placing an issue or topic on the public agenda so that it becomes the focus of public attention and thought – and, possibly action – is the initial stage in the formation of public opinion (ibid:2).

The agenda-setting theory does not always claim a direct effect of mass media messages on the public agenda as though other factors would not contribute to influencing perception and attitude. Instead, it “...assigns a central role to the news media in initiating items for the public agenda” and media messages become influential inasmuch as they are compatible “...with an individual’s existing attitudes and opinions” (McCombs, 2004:6). While it is difficult to use the agenda-setting theory for finding evidence for claims of ultimate influence of the media agenda on the public, it still plays a significant role in reflecting on issues that people think about. It further implies hints at, to the extent that the media texts appeal to the existing attitudes and perceptions of the audience, how they influence public agenda.

In fact, despite variations in the degree to which the media agenda influences the public agenda in the studies reviewed by McCombs, the relationship between the two is often regarded as one of cause-and-effect. This is because the initial condition for causality is a significant degree of *correlation* between the cause and its effect, a condition fulfilled by most of the agenda-setting studies. Agenda-setting, McCombs, states, “...directs our attention to the early formative stages of public opinion when issues emerge and first engage public attention” (McCombs, 2004:20). The second condition for causality, namely *time-order* in which the cause must precede the effect in time and that was also the case with these studies. Even further, studies were conducted in a laboratory environment and they demonstrated strong cause-and-effect relationships between the

salience of issues in the media and that in the public sphere as changes in the salience of the manipulated issue came as a result of exposure to the news media (ibid:16).

In short, the agenda-setting theory emphasizes that the mass media play a significant role in the construction of our perceptions of reality. Particularly when media texts maintain relevance to the needs and experiences of an individual or the society at large, the salience of the media agenda become important among the public.

2.4 Framing

The concept of framing, despite its omnipresence in various branches of social science, is loosely defined. Entman (1993) argues that framing as a theory of communication is fractured like many other concepts in the field. He captures a common feature in the definitions of framing that:

Whatever its specific use, the concept of framing consistently offers a way to describe a communicating text. Analysis of frames illuminates the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location-such as a speech, utterance, news report, or novel-to that consciousness (Entman, 1993: 51/2).

In a more precise context of journalism, framing is a way of providing some general interpretation to isolated items of fact (McQuail, 2005). The exercise of framing stories within a certain context makes it inevitable for journalists to introduce bias (ibid). According to Entman (1993:52), “Framing essentially involves *selection* and *salience*” and the process entails defining problems, provide causal interpretation, make moral judgments and forward recommendations (Entman, 1993, McQuail, 2005).

Framing, like other media effect theories, has undergone a number of paradigm shifts. According to McQuail, the first stage of conceptualizing framing was dominated by the assumption that

mediated propaganda during World War I influenced attitudes. The second stage, which ended in the late 1960s, assumed that personal experience as opposed to media messages has the main influence on attitude change. With regard to the media effects, the thesis established that the media messages rather influenced existing attitudes. The issue of strong media effects came again onto the research scene in the early 1970s when focus shifted from attitudes to cognitive effects of the media (McQuail, 2005, Scheufele, 1999, McCombs, 2004). The fourth and present stage is characterized by 'social constructivism' in which "The description of media and recipients ...combines elements of both strong and limited effects of mass media" (Sheufele, 1999: 105). While the media, on the one hand, have a strong impact by constructing social reality, their effects, on the other hand, are "...limited by an interaction between mass media and recipients" (ibid: 105). Defined and operationalized within the realm of social constructivism, the mass media provide a frame of reference within which the audience interpret and discuss public events. At the same time, "...people's information processing and interpretation are influenced by preexisting meaning structures and schemas" (ibid: 105). One can easily notice how this assertion very much tallies with the argumentation that characterizes agenda setting theory which also describes the media as providing the public with frames of information, thereby influencing not directly people's thinking and attitudes but their choice of what to think about.

In a nutshell, it is a common position for both theories of agenda-setting and framing that the effects of media on people emerge not by mere reception of the media message by the audience but as a result of active interaction between the media messages and the audience in order for the audience to make meanings out of the messages received. By selecting items or salient issues for their reporting (agenda-setting) and putting them in perspective (framing), journalists strive to draw public attention and influence opinion.

2.5 News Flow: Global Trends and Implications

Notwithstanding the gradual emergence of media structures along geo-cultural and regional interests, the US-led dominance of the global flow of news and entertainment material is still evident. Thussu (2007:12) writes: "From news to current affairs (CNN, Discovery) through

youth programming (MTV), Children's television (Disney), feature films (Hollywood), Sport (ESPN), to the Internet (Google), the United States is a global behemoth." The Western media in general and American media in particular are global in their reach that, if not always in their originality, they are globally consumed in their "...dubbed and indigenized versions" (ibid: 12).

While acknowledging the Western media dominance, Thussu, however, maps the global flow and counter-flow of media products in the current global media landscape into three major categories. The first category of course is the US-led Western media with their increasing inclination towards regionalizing and localizing content. With the emergence of conversion of television and broadband, Western media content is hugely globalized in such a manner that these media intensify their reach and create a 'global popular' (2007:12). In the process, some Southern media organizations achieved a global conglomerate position with the required technological and professional expertise, and they have managed to become global operators. India, for instance, is a beneficiary of this process of what Thussu calls 'glocalisation' that "...it had emerged as a key destination for outsourcing media content" (Thussu, 2007:13).

The second layer of international media players include such flows represented by Bollywood, the South African based M-Net and other state-supported flows like Euronews and Al Jazeera, among others. As transnational media, these outlets primarily "...have a strong regional presence but are also aimed at audiences outside their primary constituency" (ibid: 13). As a result, media content mainly dealing with regional interest become global.

The third category of media players target a given 'cultural-linguistic audiences' around the world. Media organizations catering content to audiences having cultural or/and linguistic proximity fall within this group. Thussu labels what these media may represent as 'geo-cultural flows' and they are "...aimed at diasporic populations, which may not necessarily be defined solely by language" because these populations may identify themselves with a given culture without necessarily having competency in the language as in the case with some second-generation British-Asians watching India's Zee TV (ibid: 13).

Vividly enough, there is an emerging flow and contra-flow of news and entertainment with local and regional interests entailing a more global dimension. However, if one considers the dominance of imported media products including news in the transnational as well as global media, there is still a huge imbalance between the coverage of events and situations in what are commonly known as the North (rich) and the South (poor).

2.6 Simple Perception Psychology as Determinant of News Flow

One of the earliest studies on what governed the international flow of news and information was conducted by Galtung and Ruge (1965). They problematized the international flow of news in relation to a number of factors influencing it. Their point of departure is that the international community of nations is structured by a number of variables and highly stratified into ‘topdog’ and ‘underdog’ nations and international news and communication greatly responds to this perception of the world (1965:64). Their theory mainly offers the perspective of *simple perception psychology* as a basis of the criteria to what can be run as news.

Galtung and Ruge presented their theory by way of a metaphor that imagines the world as “...an enormous set of broadcasting stations, each one emitting its signal or its program at its proper wave length” (1965: 65). This emission, they consider, is a continuous phenomenon which corresponds to the truism that something is happening to any person in the world. Since we cannot scan for all signals at the same time, we have to choose among them. However, it may not be always easy to do that particularly if one wants to do it quickly. As Galtung and Ruge would posit:

The set of world events then is like the cacophony of sound one gets by scanning the dial of one’s radio receiver, and particularly confusing if this is done quickly on the medium-wave or short wave dials. Obviously this cacophony does not make sense, it may become meaningful only if one station is turned in and listened to for some time before one switches on to the next one (ibid: 65).

The issue of selection and salience that we discussed under the theory of framing is clearly relevant to this proposition as we consume media messages framed within a perceived range of qualities and relevance to a given audience. The factors described in the news flow analysis of Galtung and Ruge also link up to the values we attach to news and determine newsworthiness. Extending their metaphor of the world full of signals, they assert that the chance for one signal to be chosen over a multiple of others depends on the degree to which the frequency of the signal is inside the dial, it has stronger signal, greater amplitude and that it is clearer and unambiguous, meaningful, consonant and more unexpected.

These conditions for the probability of a given signal to be recorded as worth listening to constitute the seven theses of the Galtung and Ruge theory of international news flow. The first one is *frequency*. By *frequency* they mean "...the time-span needed for the event to unfold itself and acquire meaning" (1965:66). Their basic line of argument therefore is that "...the more similar the frequency of the event is to the frequency of the news medium, the more probable that it will be recorded as news by that news medium" (ibid: 66). Accordingly, a murder takes little time to happen and would obviously fit into the frequency of news production. On the contrary, the building of a dam would naturally take a longer time span and that explains why it goes unrecorded until it reaches a dramatic climax such as its inauguration (ibid).

The *amplitude* metaphor, their second thesis, has it that "...the bigger the dam, the more will its inauguration be reported...the more violent the murder, the bigger the headlines it will make" (1965: 66).

The third thesis is that an event is more likely to be noticed if it gives way for "...a clear interpretation, free from ambiguities in its meaning" (1965: 66) and if it is less likely that it leads to many and inconsistent implications (ibid).

In their fourth hypothesis, Galtung and Ruge discuss meaning not in relation to *ambiguity* but in terms of two dimensions of its interpretations. Firstly, meaning is made in relevance to the cultural framework of the audience. Therefore, there operates “...some measure of *ethnocentrism* [and] there has to be *cultural proximity*” (1965: 66-67) for the event scanner to record an event as worth paying attention to (emphasis original). The other dimension of meaningfulness is that relevance can be sought even from a distance. An event taking place in a distant geography “...may still be loaded with meaning in terms of what it may imply for the reader or listener” (ibid: 67).

The fifth hypothesis is termed as the hypothesis of *consonance* in which the mental pre-image of events plays a part in news reception. The argument here is that a person predicts something is happening or he/she wants it to happen and if his/her expectations have materialized, it creates a mental matrix for easy reception. In fact, “...the matrix is even more prepared, so much so that [one] may distort perceptions...and provide himself with images consonant with what he has wanted” (ibid: 67).

The sixth hypothesis in a way throws a corrective to its fourth and fifth counterparts. Meaningfulness and consonance are not all that matter for newsworthiness. They just define a vast set of possible news candidates. Within this set “...the more unexpected have the highest chances of being included as news.” *Unexpected* is to mean two things here: unexpected and rare and they are more attractive than what is “...regular and institutionalized, continuing and repetitive at regular and short intervals” (ibid: 67).

The seventh thesis emphasizes that by the very virtue that something has once hit the headlines, it continues to be news for some time even when its amplitude is reduced. This is justified partly by the inertia of the news and partly “...because what was unexpected has now also become familiar” (ibid: 67).

Finally, the *composition* hypothesis has it that if, for instance, a news editor has all news from abroad and of similar type on the table, and if, a few minutes before the news is on the air, he gets foreign and another domestic news of a different type, "...the threshold value for these news items would be much lower because of the desire to present a 'balanced' whole" (ibid" 67).

Summarizing the implications of their metaphorical theses in the international flow of news, Galtung and Ruge (1965) argue that:

- The more the event concerns elite nations, the more probable that it will become a news item.
- The more the event concerns elite people, the more probable that it will become a news item.
- The more the event can be seen in personal terms, as due to the action of specific individuals, the more probable that it will become a news item.
- The more negative the event in its consequences, the more probable that it will become a news item (1965: 65).

In the face of our present world with the rampancy of disaster reporting in the international media with the dominance of the Western media at a global level, and in the domination of Western themes and cultural products, the argument by the two scholars, despite its oldness in time, still appears to be relevant in application.

2.7 'Global Media' and 'Network Society

Mention was already made about the notion of 'global popular', an assumption that through the technological advancement enabling global flow of news and other cultural products, the media reach a huge global audience. Particularly the US dominates the global media market through its cultural products and its 'soft power' in this regard is helping it "...to promote its national

economic and political interests” (Thussu, 2007:19). The flow of particularly television programs from the West to the rest of the world is “...more pronounced in the era of multi-channel television” in which there is “...small but significant contra-flow from the non-Western world” (ibid: 19-20).

The increasingly networked world may indeed have the potential to create a networked society. However, in practical terms the Western media can only go global in due consideration of economic guides that regions like the Sub-Saharan Africa have “...more or less been cut off from the global network economy” which in turn has contributed to the poor flow of information to the region as well as to the rest of the continent (Hjarvard, 2003:29). As a result, there is little evidence to claim that we are in an era of globalized society targeted and covered comprehensively by the international media actors. However, it can still be argued, as Hjarvard (2003:49) does, that “...the media system to date is better described as a loosely integrated, multi layered system within which we see differentiation of media, their content, but also increased interconnectedness on different...levels: local, national, regional and global.”

The potential for the emergence of a global popular enjoying pluralism and openness is limited by factors such as access disparities, cultural differences and profit-driven performance of the media, among others. Although dramatic interconnectedness and information flow with the emergence of the new media are undeniable, the new media have not diminished the role of international reporting by the traditional media. According to Hafez (2007), the world still exhibits major disparities in technological capacities to access media products, thereby witnessing the digital divide. Moreover, the number of people who use the information technology even in the developed world “...lies beyond the technologically possible use” (ibid: 11). Hafez also underlines that the *linguistic and cultural competence* of people to communicate with other people in other states and cultural areas or to use their media is hugely limited. Therefore, global media communication is to the main enjoyed by minorities (ibid).

Under the circumstances, the national media, albeit still reaching a minority of national populations, remain very important actors particularly in the ‘underdog’ nations to reach nationally-bound audience. However, they “...are also subject to globalization; they are influenced by global media trends as regards both technology, content, genres etc” (Hjarvard, 2003:49).

2.8 Globalization and the Media

2.8.1 The Concept of Globalization: A Brief Overview

Globalization as a concept has not gained in precision. Its definition, nonetheless, has always emphasized the ever interconnecting world with growing interdependence of the people of today’s world. Held (2000) hammers out four basic features out of most definitions of globalization. First, it emphasizes the *stretched social relations* across national boundaries in which “...events and decisions taking place on one side of the world have a significant impact on the other” (2000: 15). The stretching of social relations enables wider network of connections to the extent that individual decisions entail global consequences. The second feature relates to *intensification of flows* and networks of interaction that transcend nation states. The huge advancement of information and communication technologies has greatly contributed to this flow. The communication networks have an immense potential to “...connect people, previously distanced from what went on elsewhere” (ibid: 16). Held calls the third feature *increasing interpretation* to represent the change in the geography of the relationship between the Global and the Local. Interpretation in this case is to mean “...the extent to which apparently distant cultures and societies come face-to-face with each other at local level, creating increased diversity” (ibid: 16). McDonald’s, Hollywood Movies, Coca-Cola are typical examples of how one culture’s expressions influence another (ibid). The fourth feature is “...the underlying formal and informal institutional arrangements that are required for globalized networks to operate,” which otherwise can be termed as *global infrastructure*. The World Bank and IMF, for instance, regulate global finance while WTO regulates global trade (ibid: 17).

However, in the globalizing world, some places are global as financial ‘megapolises’ as in the case of Tokyo, Mexico, London, New York, Singapore, etc while other countries and cities “...are experiencing stagnation” (Hjarvard, 2003: 16). However, in more general terms, “...the last couple of decades of the twentieth century have witnessed a serious of fundamental changes in human society- locally, nationally and internationally” and this change arguably justifies a new social order which can fairly be referred to as globalization (ibid: 17). In the processes of this overall change, “...media and communication are ascribed a significant part in the process of change” (ibid: 17).

2.8.2 Critical Assessment of Globalization

Skeptics of globalization, however, find it uneasy to accept these features as novel phenomena. As Hjarvard (2003) indicates, people may even wonder if earlier civilizations such as the Roman Empire have not fulfilled the criteria set out for globalization. Even those who seem to accept its happening fast now have seen globalization as none other than Americanization and a threat to local cultures. Wiseman in Held (2000: 12), for instance, cautions that globalization is dangerous because “...too often it is used as a powerful and simplistic justification for endless and unregulated capitalist relations.” Giddens’ (1999) summary of outstanding skepticisms on globalization also suggests that globalization, while existent, is perceived by some as a phenomenon that has created a world of winners and losers in such a manner that a few prosper in the face of the majority “...condemned to a life of misery and despair” (in Held 2000:12).

There are more systematic disparities in the world that put the process of globalization to test. In his book, *The Myth of Globalization*, Hafez (2007) thrusts into the elements of globalization by challenging claims of *connectivity*, *change* and *interdependence* at a system level. Accordingly, he argues that *system connectivity*, which is sometimes called *interconnectedness*, over exaggerates the contributions of the ‘new media’ (Internet, direct satellite broadcasts, special television and radio services in foreign language broadcast to other countries) over traditional practices of journalism in the ‘old media’ (Hafez, 2007: 9). Highly dependent on a range of technological, socio-economic and cultural parameters, the new media and particularly online

information, if at all it does, "...can replace the international reporting provided by national media only among small informational elites" (ibid:10). Nations are widely varied in their technological capacities for transmission and reception that 'digital divide' makes global communication at stake (ibid). Moreover, Hafez criticizes that the debate on globalization "...fails to distinguish between *technological reach* and *user reach*. The number of people who use technology *per se* lies below the technologically possible use" (2007: 11, emphasis mine), and the Internet may possibly be intensifying local connections more than cross-border communication (ibid). The other argument against claims of globalization emphasizes the language barriers for the majority of cross-border users to make meaning out of cultural products which are largely available in the English language (Hafez, 2007).

With regard to *system change*, Hafez questions whether cross-border communication, which he sees as being constrained by disparities of access, user reach and linguistic and cultural competence, is significant enough to change "...political, social and cultural systems of countries involved" (2007:14). He specifically objects with the of 'glocalized' hybrid cultures which are believed to emerge as a result of the influence of both global and local elements because it is literally difficult to measure the influence and determine internal and external influences (ibid).

With his last analysis of *system interdependence*, Hafez acknowledges the intensification of communication across nations, thereby enabling publics to act transnationally, and politics and the media to function at the same level. As a result, "Alongside each national media, there ...arises a second global system [with] potential to change the content of national media landscapes" (Hafez, 2007: 22). However, these elements may not be sufficient to claim strong system interdependence, and one has to analyze deeper features, before rushing to talk of a communicative world system, and inquire whether foreign political systems are as influential as domestic ones, and whether foreign public is of as much importance as domestic audience to the extent that journalistic products change in accordance, etc. (ibid).

As the debate on globalization continues, claims are strong that cultural products, notably news, are becoming "...global in content, but in most versions of globalization there is recognition of the persistence of differences: (Sparks, 2007:135). As Hjarvard (2003) indicates, it is very important to note the greater degree of change in contemporary world in the *extent* of global networks (as in distances covered), the *intensity* of the links, the *speed* of global flows, and the *impact* or influence of the global links (how much they affect the linked societies).

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide the theoretical ground within which this study is framed. First, the main elements of news have been highlighted as they determine the selection of news to a great degree. Despite possible variations in types and interests of journalism across the board, the consideration of the news values discussed, I believe, is a universal practice of news making. I have also found the theory of *agenda-setting* relevant in that newspapers strive to influence public opinion in such a way that the agenda of the news media becomes the agenda of the public and to an extent, the local reporting as well as the use of international media sources by the local newspapers is determined by this desire to influence public opinion. In fact, the editorial meetings I attended, as will be discussed at some length later, were an important setting in which, in the case of the Government press, participants clearly worked towards selecting issues and perspectives in a manner they favor Government policies and activities. Private newspapers, on the other hand, emphasized issues generally lending themselves to the criticism of Government.

With regard to *framing*, the interpretation of a given communication text is made within a context which leads the journalist to introduce bias. As a result, both international reporting and local reproduction of news can be subject to the process of *framing* contents or isolated facts within a certain context of interest. *Framing* is also an important theory in connection to the analysis of local journalists' presumption of a sustained frame within which the international media sources cover Ethiopian affairs. The ultimate argument lies in the view that global news

and its flow involve a subjective process of putting facts in perspective and setting agendas in order to affect public opinion.

The discussion of the *globalization* thesis is also important to understand how the practice of journalism has benefitted from the advancement of information and communication technologies to gain access to information and to sharpen social interactions. However, the globalization antithesis is equally important to note as global communication has not become that effective to pressure authorities at a national level to transform the journalism in their frontier into one that enjoys freedom of expression and access to information. With the system disparities prevailing among nations, the nation state seems to be still much more important for countries like Ethiopia in determining the fate of the local milieu for journalism.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Methodological appropriateness is essential in order to answer a research question. Although there exists no mechanism to just assign a given method or specific methods as the only suitable way to address a given research inquiry, the appropriateness of a methodological choice can still be made in a manner that one considers the extent to which the distinct qualities of the method enable the collection of relevant information.

My investigation pursues the qualitative research tradition with data collected through different techniques within the same paradigm. The research questions mainly focus on how journalists in Ethiopia perceive their local working environment, and the international media they use as their sources of information. I, therefore, believe my search for how my respondents perceive the environment within which they function can only be properly addressed through the qualitative method.

Within the qualitative paradigm, I employed various techniques of data collection such as observation, in-depth interviews, and qualitative content and document analyses. In effect, the use of different techniques is meant to triangulate data. Huettman (1993:42) writes: “In qualitative research, one procedure that almost always produces better data is triangulation: using multiple methods to view a single object.” This chapter first discusses the qualitative research in general and its suitability to my own thesis together with the various specific methods I employed to collect relevant data. In the process, I hope to justify my choice through the discussion of contributions each data gathering technique, namely observation, document analysis, interviews, qualitative content analysis made to enrich my data and analysis. While I have made various allusions to relevant books and articles in the area, I have found Jensen’s *Handbook of Media and Communication Research* (2002) particularly important because of not

only its useful insights into the qualitative research process in general but also in its specificity to the field of media and communication.

3.2 Qualitative Research

Although qualitative research is a rather heterogeneous area increasingly informed by variously approached reference works, Jensen argues that there are at least three common concepts attached to it. It is fairly reasonable to start with these features that are said to define qualitative research regardless of possible differences among various schools of thought. The first relates to the concept of meaning, "...its embedding in and orientation of social action" (Jensen, 2002:236). Specific to the media, he states that the media contents as well as "...their materiality, scheduling, and social uses, are studied by qualitative research in order to explore empirically how the media generate meaning" (ibid: 236). Through the qualitative approach to the study of the use of international media sources in Ethiopia, I sought as much to explore what meaning journalists make of these sources as I also attempted to highlight the overall rationale behind references, and preferences, if any, of international media outlets for local news. The method was also useful to assess the press environment and understand situations that provide opportunities or/and pose challenges to journalists in the country.

The second common feature Jensen has identified is the assumption that social actions "...should be studied, as far as possible, *in their naturalistic contexts*" (Jensen, 2002: 236; emphasis original). The issue of context is of course problematic for a number of reasons. In the first place, it is not always feasible to conduct studies within the naturalistic context for such an extended period due at least to time and financial constraints (ibid). Even if one manages to study it for so long, it is still epistemologically questionable if a given culture or context can ever be known fully or if it is after all ethically appropriate "...to impose oneself on the people that make up cultures or contexts" (ibid:236). However, the natural environment will still remain vital inasmuch as one can come into contact with the interpretation of the phenomenon of interest (ibid). My consideration for observation as one of my data collecting methods was partly driven by the desire to understand the context in which decisions were made to guide journalistic

activities in the media houses under study. In this regard, the editorial meetings I attended as an observer as well as the newsroom activities I overviewed helped to get a gist of what issues were at stake in the process of news production and the overall institutional interactions.

The third common feature of qualitative research has to do with the role of the researcher as an *interpretive subject*. Unlike quantitative studies in which interpretations involve phases of operationalization and “...delegating certain moments of study to collaborators as well as machines,...” qualitative studies rather lend themselves to a single researcher to interpret ‘meaning in action’ (Jenson, 2006: 236). My take is that this research got more informed through my interactions with respondents than it did through my reflections and analysis of relevant documents. Data obtained through the interviews provide practical information on how journalists do their job in the face of limits relating to access to information, freedom of the press, and self-censorship although, in principle, these limits are legally abolished. In addition, the use of various methods under the qualitative research paradigm, which are discussed below, helped to triangulate my data.

3.2.1 Observation

Attempt was made in this study to picture the interactions among journalists and their editors in the process of working out their story plan as well as evaluating their newspapers issued the previous weeks or days as the case may be. These activities were believed to be encountered during weekly or biweekly editorial meetings and could generally be documented through observational research. I attended three editorial meetings with the Government dailies (twice with *The Ethiopian Herald*, once with *Addis Zemen*). Due to mainly recurrent cancellations of editorial meetings by the private weeklies, I was only able to attend one editorial meeting with *Addis Neger* and one with *Addis Admas* (private Amharic weeklies). I did not get a chance to attend any such meetings with the *Reporter* (a private bi-weekly), which was at the time moved to a new location and in the process of reorganizing its meeting arrangements into small groups. I played as little role as a participant and took field notes of the interaction among the journalists.

However, I asked for clarifications of decisions made or any ambiguities that arose in the process and tried to assure the interactants that I indeed attended the discussions with interest.

The observations were also vital to get an overall sense of organizational activities and structures which in turn contributed to further enhancing the interview guides designed before coming into contact with the context of the research.

Observational research, while useful to study a natural setting, has its own limits. Silverman (2006:82) points out observers may alter the natural setting "...just by their presence and so the decision about what role to adopt will be fateful." It is clearly impossible to totally avoid the influence of presence in a given setting if one opts to observe a given phenomenon. It is however possible to minimize such influences by the kind of role one decides to play in observational research. Silverman (2006:82-3) further writes:

Alternatively, observers may 'go native' identifying so much with participants that, like a child learning to talk, they cannot remember how they found something out or articulate principles underlying what they are doing. More frequently, faced with moving between your identity in the field and your other identities at home and at work, you have to make difficult choices.

It is also important to note at this juncture that engaging in observation requires a careful documentation of the phenomenon being observed in order to ensure accurate data collection and analysis and make "...transparent the steps from the initial observation to a later conclusion" (Jensen, 2002:242). Jensen cautions "...unless documentation is presented in an explicit, reflexive, and intersubjective manner, a fieldworker may become akin to an artist" (ibid: 242).

3.2.2 In-depth Interviews

Interviewing, if well done, can generate an essential set of data that informs a research undertaking most. In-depth interviews, with their "...affinities to conversation, may be well suited to tap social agents' perspective on the media, since spoken language remains a primary and familiar mode of social interaction" (Jensen, 2002:240). In-depth interviews are popular in the field of research for their effectiveness in giving a human face to research problems. One has to consider, however, some practical concerns in using interviews. The difficulty with interviewing is that "people do not always say what they think, or mean what they say" (ibid: 240). Therefore, the researcher should, from the outset, understand that interviews are not "...simple representations, true or false, of what people think." They are, instead, "...sources of information only through analysis and interpretation." It is common for people to 'discursify' things of practical consciousness and that they are not aware of their performance in interviews. It is, therefore, the duty of the researcher to 'disambiguate' accounts of interviews from which he/she attempts to make an inference (ibid: 240).

Useful for learning about individual perspectives, in-depth interviews are effective for getting people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions, perceptions and experiences. Although it is difficult to attach a single meaning to respondents' experiences from their responses in a given interview session as there may be "...multiple meanings of a situation," the responses can still be treated as "...constructed narratives involving activities which themselves demand analysis" (Silverman, 2006:48).

In direct relation to my research, in-depth interviews were deemed appropriate to elicit journalists' perceptions of the international media sources they utilize in their reporting. Along the line of this interplay between the local and international media, the interviews were also very important to also get a sense of what position the international media seem to acquire in being used as a source to local stories.

The combined data collected through in-depth interviews and other methods provided important evidences in the final analysis. They helped to work out findings on how limiting or free journalists think is their working environment and whether international media sources exist within local journalism as a matter of importance, and if so, what sort of significance journalists attach to them.

It is not easy to understand such perceptions and use of international media sources through direct observation as in, for example, a classroom situation because the interaction of journalists with their working environment and their experiences with international media sources are not observable at editorial meetings. Neither is it possible to comprehend the process through some kind of a content or text analysis as content is an outcome, not a process by itself. The choice and use of sources involves individual decision making that can be understood through questions put to the decision makers on their considerations of situations at hand while making these decisions. In this sense, even the commonsensical justification Jensen borrows from Bower (1973), "...the best way to find out what people think about something is to ask them," (Jensen, 2002:240) is reason enough to employ interviews as an essential instrument of data collection. Even more, in-depth interviews help the researcher to gain insight into how people interpret and order the world. This can be achieved "...by being attentive to the causal explanations participants provide for what they have experienced and believe and by actively probing them about the connections and relationships they see between particular events, phenomena, and beliefs" (Natasha, 2005:29).

Out of the three types of interviews in media research that Jensen (2002) has identified, namely *respondent interviews*, *constituted group interviews*, and *naturalistic group interviews*, I initially intended to use the first two. For practical reasons that relate to the great difficulty I faced in trying to gather busy journalists for focus group discussions, I, however, was only able to conduct respondent interviews. In *respondent interviews*, the interviewee is "...conceived as a representative of one or more social and cultural categories." It is, therefore, assumed that "...these categories are inscribed, and can be recovered from the respondent's discourses with

reference to media” (ibid, 2002:240). I conducted respondent interviews or individual in-depth interviews with editors of the newspapers under study, reporters for these papers and a correspondent reporting for Newsweek and Bloomberg. While the interviews with local editors and reporters were important to understand perceptions, challenges, opportunities, decisions, etc involved in relation to journalists’ working environment and the use of international media sources, the interview with the foreign correspondent was mainly meant to find out his perspectives on the overall media performance in the country and their contribution, if they claim any, to the local media in general and newspapers in particular.

Note: I have used codes instead of names of my respondents from the local papers in the analysis of my interview data. Letters are assigned to represent my interviewees and II is used to mean In-depth Interview. Hence, IIA, for instance, would mean In-depth Interview with Mr./M.s A and it is written within parenthesis in each and every interview account taken from the interviews with the person.

3.2.3 Qualitative Textual Analysis

Mention was already made about the centrality of meaning in this study. Qualitative content/text analysis, as defined by Hsieh & Shannon (2005: 1278) is “...a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns.” In its choice of the qualitative tradition in general and the specific methods of interviewing and observation, among others, in particular, the study takes on an interpretive approach with due consideration of contexts in which media content is produced. The choice of qualitative textual analysis over quantitative content analysis, therefore, goes in agreement with the purpose of the study as textual analysis is “...usually interpretive, aiming at what is sometimes termed latent meaning” (Jensen, 2002:119). Qualitative content or text analysis “...focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1278). The question we ask in doing such analyses is ‘qualitative’ because we need to understand what the text *really* means and how its meanings are organized. Analyses of content in this regard “...may be concerned

with either particulars or generalities” and they often emphasize “...features that are characteristic of a single work or a small group of works” (Jensen, 2002:120). While textual analyses have been widely used in film studies to look into aesthetic values, they are employed in other media researches with the aim of studying “...prototypes, regularities, repeated patterns and features which are shared by masses of texts” (ibid: 120). As quantitative content analyses are descriptive in nature aiming at “the manifest content of communication”, qualitative textual analyses are interpretive aiming to find the meaning of a given content (ibid: 119).

I analyzed a set of newspapers taking a dedicated sample of issues from each media house. There was a practical challenge of making the selection of issues because it should mainly be made on the basis of the news items which, if not directly translated, contain a significant element of sourcing from international media. In effect, it was difficult to obtain such data by merely taking issues in a given number of weeks or months. However, the selection of the 2005 election period helped to get relatively more sources from international media for almost consecutive weeks. Conflicts, as discussed earlier, generally call the attention of the media (be it local or international) that a roughly three months sample frame (between September and November of 2005) for four of the papers was considered. For *Addis Neger*, a private Amharic weekly that came into being in 2007, the sample was taken for three months between September and November of 2009³. Sometimes, some editions outside these frames were purposively taken if found revealing with regard to the use of international media sources.

The findings of the data collected are only indicative of situations that seem to lend themselves to the use of international sources at best, and not very much of definitive trends of overall media exercise in the country. While front page news were selected for four newspapers, namely *Addis Zemen* (Government Amharic Daily), *The Ethiopian Herald* (Government English Daily), *Addis Admas* (Private Amharic Weekly) and *The Reporter* (Private Amharic Bi-Weekly), the second

³ I am aware of the methodological problems involved in choosing text from another period for one of the papers under investigation. However, *Addis Neger* is such an important object of study in relation to the main issues in this research that I found it necessary to include in my source material.

page of the issues were taken from *Addis Neger* (Private Amharic weekly) because this newspaper was mainly feature-oriented with minimal treatment of news.

3.2.4 Document Analysis

The data we obtain from documents are different from those we get from interviews and observations in the sense that the former are ‘found’ rather than ‘made’ through the researcher’s intervention in the field (Jensen, 2002:243). The implication is that documents have “...more limited or indirect explanatory value for the research question” (ibid: 243). Still, documents such as editorial policies, media regulations and other relevant proclamations play a significant role one way or another in affecting both individual decisions of the journalist and organizational positions of the media in question. This is particularly so when journalists discharge their duties under limiting circumstances provided for by law.

I, therefore, reviewed the regulatory framework of the media landscape in Ethiopia for which recent periods are more interesting because of a series of legislations made in relation to press and civil society operations. A major case in point is the December, 2008 *Proclamation to Provide for Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information*. Other ensuing legislations such as the NGO and Anti-Terrorism Proclamations also have some connections with media operations as will be discussed in the document analysis part of the thesis. However, the interest in analyzing these documents lies only in describing the present legal environment for the media in Ethiopia, and these legislations did not exist in the 2005 election period. Still, the electoral disputes that led to public unrest in 2005 have arguably contributed to the tightening, through these legal documents, of control over media operations and civil society involvement in the process democratization. This justifies the presentation of relevant elements of the regulatory environment at a national level as well as working policies at an institutional level.

Overall, the sampling procedure in this study more or less falls under what Jensen identifies as *convenient sampling*, which, if well-documented, “...can generate both valid and reliable insight into a social setting or event” (Jensen, 2002:239). Generally, qualitative studies, Jensen (ibid: 238) states, “...sample in two or more steps, first determining the relevant context of certain

meaningful events, which, next, are singled out for detailed study.” This procedure is justified by the centrality of context in qualitative research which implies that “...statements and actions must always be interpreted with reference to their context(s)” (ibid: 238).

3.3 Methodological Limitations

I had to make basically two difficult decisions while selecting the objects of the study. The first one has to do with the inclusion of *Addis Neger* newspaper, a late appearance (2007) which did not exist during the period of the 2005 elections. On the one hand, it makes comparison difficult as it stands outside the sampling frame. Besides, as arguably the first ever feature-oriented paper, its page-2 analyses were selected as opposed to front page stories for the other papers under study. On the other hand, I found *Addis Neger* useful for highlighting the recent practice of using international sources including the international mass media and other foreign research publications. The paper’s common practice of using such sources extensively came by the time the other newspapers I analyzed seemed to show less and less use of international media sources after the elections.

The other methodological problem arises from my interest to analyze the legal environment for the country’s media systems. The legal documents I analyzed came after the election period in 2005. As a result, they do not reveal the regulatory framework at that time. However, the research also takes interest in connecting the election period with what has developed afterwards with regard to the political space and legislative the legislative provisions and limits put forward arguably as a consequence of the competitive and disputed elections in 2005.

3.4 Conclusion

Within the qualitative research paradigm, the study has employed various techniques of data gathering. Due to its primary interest to probe into the journalists’ perception of their news sources as well as the socio-political context in which they do their work, it is believed that the qualitative approach is appropriately chosen to provide meaningful interpretation of data

obtained through in-depth interviews. Moreover, the research attempted to analyze the interview accounts against actual newspaper content and the policy and legal environment provided for journalism in Ethiopia. Hence triangulation.

Chapter Four

The Legal and Policy Environment of the Ethiopian Press

4.1 Introduction

This section contains a brief presentation and discussion of the principal legal provisions and in-house policies relevant for the operations of the media in Ethiopia. Under legal provisions, the 2008 *Proclamation to Provide for Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information* (Proclamation No. 590/2008), the *Proclamation on Anti-Terrorism* (Proclamation No. 652/2009), the *Proclamation on Broadcasting Services* (Proclamation No.533/2007), and the *Proclamation to Provide for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies* are analyzed in such a way that the articles that are believed to have implications on the exercise of the mass media take prominence. Moreover, the topical elements of the editorial policy for Government media are highlighted. Regarding the editorial policies of the private newspapers, it was difficult to get any such documents despite recurrent requests by the researcher. Although the editors promised to provide their policy documents, they failed to do that no matter how frequently I asked them. Later, most of my journalist respondents reluctantly admitted that there was no active editorial policy that they knew of although my interviewee for one of the papers remembered a “two-page document with a brief list of values we are supposed to stick to”.

4.2 Legal Provisions for the Media: An Overview

4.2.1 A Proclamation to Provide for the Freedom of Mass Media and Access to information (Proclamation No. 590/2008)

The *Proclamation to Provide for the Freedom of Mass Media and Access to Information* (Here after the Press and Information Access Law, or PIAL), was passed in December, 2008 after years of remaining a draft. While generally in line with the 1995 Constitution in its abolition of censorship and provisions for freedom of the mass media, it is not at all free from controversies. Some areas of concern in the document relate to restrictions of cross ownership and severity of penalties on breaches of the law. Regarding cross ownership, the Press and Information Access Law, under its Article 7/1 and 2 stipulates that a person with effective control, direct or indirect, over a nationwide broadcaster or a licensee for an area with a recorded population of more than

100.000 inhabitants “...may not exercise direct or indirect effective control over another company holding such a license and servicing the same or an overlapping market” (Article 7/2). Similarly, any person with direct or indirect control over a nationwide broadcaster or a licensee for an area with 100.000 inhabitants “...may not exercise direct or indirect effective control over a company operating a periodical servicing the same or an overlapping market” (ibid). PIAL further restricts cross ownership by prohibiting a person operating a periodical from having any control over another “...periodical published in the same language and servicing the same or an overlapping market” (Article 7/3).

Apparently, the Government’s rationale behind its limiting multiple ownership of the media are based on perceptions that concentrated media ownership might lead to a public sphere dominated by a few individuals or companies, thereby significantly limiting the extent to which multiple views are entertained.

Nevertheless, it is equally important to be concerned over the seemingly extreme limitations on cross-ownership compared to the very dominant Government control and ownership of the country’s media landscape. In fact, the Government is entitled to exercise cross ownership itself and it owns newspapers, magazines and of course the only television station in the nation. As the law does not imply any possible ease of the State’s massive hand in the sector, it appears that the Ethiopian media environment would continue to be predominantly a Government machinery.

In the mean time, the chance for small private media ventures to maintain real commercial existence would be low owing to inability to diversify their market base under these limiting circumstances. It is particularly controversial that a person is restricted from owning a national or regional broadcasting business only because she/he has a control over a print medium in the same area. There is no private television in Ethiopia. But if there was to be one after this law, it would not be provided by a private national or regional newspaper unless it ceases its publication. The confinement in the media business would even be more rigorous when one comes to know that an effective control over a given media organization, at least until it is

determined by a specific law, would mean holding “...fifteen percent or more of the shares or capital of the entity” (Article 8/4). In effect, this suggests that a newspaper owner in a given area would hardly consider any control over a broadcasting business within the same geography or for the same inhabitants already targeted. Even worse, a newspaper owner cannot run a magazine as a result of which *The Reporter* (Amharc private bi-weekly), for instance, had to cease publishing its monthly magazine to stick only to its newspaper⁴. It seems fair to argue that denying market diversification for media owners to such a great level of confinement within a certain type or/and size of media operations could generate frustration for private media enthusiasts in the context of huge Government dominance in the field of mass media communication. Hence negatively affecting the potential for the sector’s growth and overall process of democratization.

The Press and Information Access Law is also cautious of any involvement of foreigners or/and their companies in the Ethiopian media business. Not only is media ownership forbidden for foreign nationals and organizations but these entities are not allowed to provide financial assistance to media organizations. Article 7/5 promulgates that a company is of Ethiopian nationality if “...its total capital originates from a local source or persons holding its capital or voting rights are Ethiopian nationals and it does not include a company whose capital or voting rights are [held] by a locally registered business organization in which foreign nationals acquired voting rights.”

Journalists in Ethiopia could face criminal liability depending on seriousness of offences committed through or damages caused by their media (Article 41/1). Defamation may be penalized by as long as one year of imprisonment or up to 100,000 Ethiopian birr (app. \$6,130 at current rate), a huge amount for most of the Ethiopian private press which generally have minuscule capital (PIAL, Article 41/2, Penal Code Article 613/1-5). As a result, the tendency for self-censorship would presumably grow not just to shy away from criminal liability but also for

⁴ Amare Aregawi, owner, in his interview with *The Reporter*. Sunday, October 10, 2010.

fear of unbearable fines. Even when criminal allegations are defeated in court or barred by a period of limitation, “A claim for damage caused by the mass media may be made” (Art 41/4).

The Press and Information Access Law bestows great power on the public prosecutor. Article 42/2 states:

[W]here the Federal or Regional public prosecutor, as the case may be, has sufficient reason to believe that a periodical or a book which is about to be disseminated contains illegal matter which would, if disseminated, lead to a grave and present grave danger to the national security which could not otherwise be averted through a subsequent imposition of sanctions, may issue an order to impound the periodical.

In other words, if the public prosecutor believes such an impounding measure needs to be taken immediately due to perceived damage a book or a periodical may cause, she/he does not need to obtain a court order “...provided that he shall notify a court of the order within 48 hours” (Article 42/3). The issue of national security is often one of the foremost reasons to adopt claw back clauses against provisions of freedom of expression. Given Ethiopia’s geopolitical concerns particularly as part of the volatile horn of Africa, we may not rule out the legitimacy of protecting national security through press legislation to maintain responsible media exercise. However, Ethiopia is often criticized for its handling of press freedom that we cannot prove beyond reasonable doubt that the massive power of the public prosecutor may not be used to suppress press freedom and indulge in pre-censoring content. Besides, there may be cases in which press products could be impounded by the public persecutor out of some times mere suspicion. By the time these products are released after the persecutor’s claims have been proven wrong, they may already be irrelevant and outdated in the market. This would cause commercial damage to the media houses. The law seems to underestimate these repercussions in that when a press product is released once proven to cause no security damage; the media organization receives no compensation for the unfair delay made to its products.

The “Access to Information” section of this Proclamation incorporates a set of provisions with a primary object “...to give effect to the right of citizens to access, receive and impart information held by public bodies, subject to justifiable limits” (Article 12/1). Notwithstanding limits of access in relation to information on national security, privacy, confidentiality as provided for by the Proclamation, “All persons have the right to seek, obtain and communicate any information held by public bodies” (Article 12/1). The PIAL generally provides that the mass media can have an immediate access to information when they make “...a request which demonstrates that an action taken or about to be taken by the public body should be released to the public immediately.” Nonetheless, no special provision is made to facilitate swift access to information for journalists.

4.2.2 A Proclamation on Anti-Terrorism (Proclamation No. 652/2009)

Ethiopia has legitimate reasons to take terrorism a serious threat to the peace and security of the country. With grave and present danger posed by, among others, Islamic Somali insurgents and given the country’s difficult dealings with neighboring Eritrea following the 1998/9 border war, acts of terrorism could endanger the stability of the nation. At the same time, many fear that the Ethiopian Government may use this legislation to suppress political dissent. Its labeling of political groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) as terrorist organizations is sometimes debated to be a case in point to indicate the use of terrorism as a pretext to suppress opposition. The Government denies these allegations and defends its position against the groups that are involved in armed struggle to unconstitutionally coerce the state.

The *Anti-Terrorism Proclamation* (Hereafter ATP) states under ‘Terrorist Acts’ that “Whosoever or a group intending to advance a political, religious or ideological cause by coercing the Government, intimidating the public or section of the public, or destabilizing or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional or, economic or social institutions of the country...is punishable with rigorous imprisonment from 15 years to life or with death” (Article 3). The details of these acts include; causing a person’s death or serious bodily injury; creating serious

risk to the safety or health of the public or section of the public; kidnapping or hostage taking; causing serious damage to property, natural resources, environment, historical or cultural heritages; endangering or seizing any public service; threatening to commit one or more of these acts (Article 3/1-7). The provision most relevant to the mass media is provided for under Article 6 as follows.

Whosoever publishes or causes the publication of a statement that is likely to be understood by some or all of the members of the public to whom it is published as a direct or indirect encouragement or other inducement to them to the commission or preparation or instigation of an act of terrorism ... is punishable with rigorous imprisonment from 10 to 20 years.

Rights groups have expressed concern over the ATP on a number of occasions. Human Rights Watch in fact worked out some analysis on the legislation at its draft stage in which it asserted:

In addition to relying on the overly broad definition of “terrorist acts,” this provision is problematic because the provision criminalizes speech ambiguously “encouraging,” “advancing,” or “in support” of terrorist acts even if there is no direct incitement to violence. Individuals who merely speak in favor of any of the “terrorist acts” could be convicted for encouraging terrorism, and sentenced to 10 to 20 years of “rigorous imprisonment.” For example, students participating in a peaceful demonstration seeking to influence Government policy - or even someone merely voicing support for such a demonstration without participating - could be subjected to a 10- to 20-year prison term (HRW, 2009:6).

<http://www.hrw.org/node/84132>

Regarding speech rights, HRW further argued that under the circumstances in which the Ethiopian Government labels political dissents like OLF and ONLF as terrorist groups, “A journalist interviewing an opposition politician or a supporter of an armed opposition group could be deemed to be “encouraging” terrorism merely by publicizing the views of the

interviewee” (ibid: 6). Admissible evidences for charges of terrorist acts may also be a source of concern as these include “...intelligence report prepared in relation to terrorism, even if it does not disclose the source or the method it was gathered; hearsay or indirect evidences” (Article 23/1-2). While such sources of evidence may render useful information, they can also be unreliable accounts meant to bring forth baseless accusations to suppress dissent. The ATP has also adopted the common methods of surveillance, interceptions, sudden and covert searches to prevent acts of terrorism (Articles 16, 17 & 23/4).

4.2.3 The Proclamation on Broadcasting Service (Proclamation No. 533/2007)

Although my primary focus lies in the print media, I still find a point in briefly assessing the broadcast environment to highlight the overall situation of media control and ownership. The new *Broadcasting Service Proclamation* (Proclamation No. 533/2007, hereafter BSP), which has repealed its 1999 counterpart provides for the establishment of national, regional and local transmission programs of public, commercial or community broadcasting (Article 32/1-3). Accordingly, any national, regional and local transmission programs shall allocate at least 60% of their weekly transmissions to national programs. Of the 60% of national programming by a regional broadcaster, “...40% shall be allocated to programmes that relate to the affairs of the region” (Article 32/2). Similarly, of the 60% of national programming, “...20% shall be allocated to programmes that relate to the local affairs” (Article 32/3). The regulator seems to make a careful consideration of possible dominance of foreign media productions over local ones if commercial broadcasting services were allowed to use more percentage of the former. As a result, the profit making entities are made to be treated equally with other types of media in the amount of non-local or/and foreign productions they wish to use.

One basic addition in the BSP is the provision of distinct definitions for different types of media such as Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), Commercial Broadcasting and Community Broadcasting (Article 2/9-11). Accordingly, Public Broadcasting Service is defined as “...a radio or television transmission service established for the purpose of educating, informing and entertaining the public, in the federal or regional state to which Government budget is allocated and is accountable to the Federal or Regional Peoples Representatives Council” (Article 2/9).

Commercial Broadcasting, on the other hand, is defined to be "...a radio or television transmission service established for profit by a legal entity with the purpose of informing, educating or entertaining the public (Article 2/10). Similarly, Community Broadcasting Service "...means a non-profit radio or television transmission service established by the will and interest of a community living in a specific area or who possess a common interest" (Article 2/11).

Authorities in the media sector would like to call the current Government media as public service entities despite allegations that these media are just Government mouthpieces. Similarly, there appears an interchangeable use of Government and public service broadcasting services. While the BSP provides the definition for public service broadcasting as stated elsewhere in this chapter, it does not define Government broadcasting. However in the Scope of Application under Article 3, it states that the BSP will "...be applicable to *Government*, commercial and community broadcasting" (emphasis mine). Hence interchangeable use of the terms. Gebremedhin (2006:10) also writes: "...the Ethiopian state-owned media system aims to model itself on the British and South African Broadcasting systems and... [these media] are accountable to boards of management appointed by the House of Representatives, and they have their own editorial policies independent from the state". However, he asserts that "...as these stations are financed by, or under the control of the Government, there is still a question about how independent they really are, as they are state broadcasters rather than public-service broadcasters" (ibid: 10)

While significant changes are made in the new broadcast proclamation (Proc. 533/2007), the reasons behind making these changes are not explicitly stated. However, according to Desta Tesfaw, Deputy Director General of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority, the amendment is justified by the need to make a clear definition between the different types of media establishments (The *Reporter* Saturday June 30, 2007, English private weekly.) Indeed, not only the new proclamation defined types of media, it also added public broadcasting service into its scope of application.

Moreover, Proclamation 533/2007 clearly promulgates under Article 44/1-2 that the Ethiopian Broadcast Authority has an unconditional power of inspection which enables it to “...assign inspectors to ensure the compliance of provisions of this proclamation...” and the assigned inspector “...shall have the power to enter and inspect a broadcasting service organization during working hours” when she/he may “...examine any broadcasting instruments, refer to relevant documents and demand a copy thereof.”

4.2.4 The Proclamation to Provide for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies (Proclamation No. 621/2009)

The appearance of charity organizations in Ethiopia is a relatively recent phenomenon. Their coming into the scene was mainly triggered by the great famine in 1973-74 and their role has for long been alleviating human suffering. As a result their role in furthering democratic rights in the country remained minimal (Kassahun in Zewde and Pauswang, 2002:123). The most active participation of civil societies in promoting democratic values came, in relative terms, in 2005 in the form of observing “...election preparations, and sponsoring a series of televised debates on public policy issues between Government officials and opposition leaders.” However, their participation was eventually hampered by a latest decision of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEB) to “...deny some civil society organizations to observe polling day” (Carter Center Final Report, 2005:4). The Ethiopian Supreme Court ruled against this decision only “...days before election day, thereby severely inhibiting domestic groups’ ability to deploy observers throughout the country” (ibid: 4).

http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/Ethiopia-2005-Finalrpt.pdf

When the *Proclamation to Provide for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies* (the NGO Law) came into law in February of 2009, many seemed to have perceived it as a mechanism to stifle civil society participation in promoting democracy. Although many provisions granting the power of control to the Charities and Societies Agency, an institution of the Federal Government, could give rise to contentions, the most important one relates to limits put on the financial sources of local charities. At the same time, foreign charities are denied, by

this very Law, to partake in the process of strengthening human rights (such as women's rights, disability rights, and children's rights), democratization and governance and election related activities such as voter education, and observation of electoral processes (Articles 2/2-5, 57/7). Local charities are not allowed to locate more than 10 percent of their resources from foreign sources and they are the ones allowed to engage in costly ventures of training voters, observing election processes and strengthening human rights and democratic values at large. If Ethiopians form a charity with more than 10 percent of their funds coming from foreign sources, they cannot engage in promoting democracy.

One can see that the Law prohibits foreigners who may have vested interest in involving in the political affairs of the country, which the Government often regards, in justifying its legislation, as meddling with the country's national interest. However, it is also easy to comprehend how difficult it would be for local civic organizations to locate 90 percent of their funding from a largely poor population that they are supposed to stand for. The legitimate fear, therefore, would be if at all civil societies could play any significant role in furthering human rights and democratic values henceforth.

4.3 In-house Policies and Working Documents

4.3.1 The Editorial Policy of Ethiopian Press Organization⁵

The Editorial Policy Document of the State's Press Organization (hereafter EPEPO) has three objectives, namely:

- To guide responsibility bestowed by proclamation up on the Organization with quality service, thereby serving the public effectively;
- To achieve transparent and accountable editorial work and management;
- Enabling performance evaluation mechanism free from individual bias (EPO, 2002:6).

⁵ The Editorial Policy is published in Amharic, and the translations are unofficial.

According to this document, the Organization's press products are presumed to ensure public participation in the process of democratization, fighting poverty and achieving prosperity, setting up the democratic unity of the Ethiopian people on a firm foundation, and ensuring national dignity and freedom (ibid:7-8). The editorial policy emphasizes the need to maintain journalistic values such as fairness, integrity, respect, accountability, etc. As a State entity, the Ethiopian Press Organization apparently expresses commitment to strengthening the relationship between Government and the public. Similarly, it pledges to serve legal political parties by allowing them to use the media and reach the public to introduce their objectives (ibid: 25). Particularly under the coverage of political issues, the policy states that legally registered political parties get media coverage. However, the state media are equally committed to informing the public on any illegal activities carried out by these political parties whether or not they possess legal personality (ibid:45). The question is whether the State media follow suite to possible Government coercion on political parties or they do the shaming and naming in a responsible manner to genuinely prevent threats posed on the public by political groupings.

One can generally say the editorial policy envisages candid public service pursuant to the Government's development policies. The press products in local and foreign languages are meant to serve different purposes.

The press products we publish in local languages (*Addis Zemen*, *Barissaa*, *Zemen* magazine) are development-oriented. They focus not just on economic activities, but are aimed at educating the public on ways of improving the lives of the people through their political, social, cultural and moral endeavors...Our foreign language press products (*Al-Alem*, *The Ethiopian Herald*) target the international community so as to build the country's image by introducing various aspects of the country and its people (EPO, 2002: 27).

EPEPO provides a general list of issues prioritized for news in the following descending order.

- i. Positions of the Federal Government on some objective matters;
- ii. Statements, resolutions and activities of the President, the House of Federation and the House of People's Representatives;

- iii. Statements, resolutions and activities of regional councils;
- iv. Meaningful activities of the public and private investors;
- v. Activities of political and civic organizations;
- vi. Current affairs;
- vii. Other relevant news (EPO, 2002).

4.3.2 The Bases and Future Directives of the Developmental and Democratic Philosophy of Our Media Work (A Working Document)

The issue of development journalism has recently taken prominence in the daily deeds of Government journalists. An important document is now prepared to guide the developmental role Government journalists are required to play. Possible variations between the original Amharic document and the unofficially translated version I have used notwithstanding, development journalism is broadly tasked to five activities described in the document as missions, namely letting developmental thinking grow in the minds of the people, promoting public (community's) participation and ensuring potential benefits, presenting the leading (exemplary) change agents, promoting great success stories, building rational thinking, and continuously building professional and organizational skills of development.

According to this document, Government ownership of the media in Ethiopia is justified by a "widely accepted" notion that in the face of mainly profit-based private media with low quality journalism, the Government has the major responsibility of educating and informing the public. Ethiopia is described as being democratic and as a result of this Government media can serve the public properly. Then it further discusses the transformative role of the Government media (the term is interchangeably used with public media at times) in eradicating poverty, strengthening democratic and human rights values, etc.

While the document is loaded with all sorts of rhetoric on development, democracy and public participation, it shies away from critically looking into the actual contributions of the

Government media in Ethiopia to serving the said causes. However, the document would arguably have a far reaching influence on what journalists of Government media are expected to do or not to do.

4.4 Conclusion

Ethiopia has adopted a legal framework which generally grants freedom of the press and that of expression at large. Censorship has been abolished by law, a step forward from the situation during the period of the military junta or the Derg (1974-1991) when censorship was actually an official practice. However, apart from increasing legal limits to the exercise of freedom of the press, the enabling elements of the legal framework do not seem to be properly institutionalized. The media environment in Ethiopia appears to be impeded by actual limitations related to lack of access to official information, various forms of harassment and exaggerated legal limits to multi-media ownership of the private sector in the face of huge Government control and possession of the media landscape.

Journalists' strive to influence the public debate on the political affairs of the land may have faced not just actual legal challenges but also a good deal of cautiousness to use the rights provided for by law due to possible consequences of their reporting that arise not necessarily from breaches but from the absence of political will to the prevalence of free political discussions. Under the circumstances, the international media reporting on Ethiopia sometimes serves as a good source of information for the local media often strained, among other things, by lack access to official information.

Chapter Five

Observational Notes on the Newspaper Organizations under Study

5.1 Introduction

My observational notes are included in this part of the data analysis. Here, accounts of observations of editorial meetings and newsroom activities are included together with a brief introduction to each of the newspapers. It should be mentioned from the outset that although editorial meetings were to be held generally regularly, cancellations were very common. For instance, I witnessed two cancellations by *Addis Admas* as journalists, according to the senior editor, were “busy with assignments”. Similarly, I was once told by the deputy editor of *Addis Neger* that they cancelled their meeting the same day they were supposed to hold it, and so did the state owned *Addis Zemen*. *The Reporter* actually just changed the way they do meetings. Accordingly, they were meeting in small groups formed on the basis of the pages the journalists were assigned to. Still, it was possible to observe some meetings with the four newspapers and their overall newsroom environments in September and October in 2009, the accounts of which are discussed below.

5.2 An Overview

As indicated at the beginning, this research has considered five newspapers in Ethiopia- two state dailies and two private weeklies and a private bi-weekly. The two state dailies as mentioned earlier *Addis Zemen* (New Era, Amharic) and *The Ethiopian Herald* (English) which have an average daily circulation of 10.700 and 8.000 respectively (information obtained from Ethiopian Broadcast Authority). *Addis Zemen* runs 14to16 pages with about 40 percent space allocated for advertising. *The Ethiopian Herald* is a broadsheet of 8 to10 pages out of which some 33 percent of space goes for advertising. *Addis Admas* (New Horizon, Amharic) is the largest private weekly with an average circulation of 23.000. Roughly 45 percent of its 32 pages is used for adverts. The *Sunday Reporter* consumes over 70 percent of its total 72 to 80 pages for advertising. Its Wednesday edition is 32 pages with about 45 percent of space for advertising. *Reporter* (Amharic) circulates around 24.000 copies a week. *Addis Neger* (New Thing, Amharic weekly), which was the latest appearance of the other four, quickly became popular in its two

years of life to enjoy an average weekly circulation of 20,000. With total pages ranging from 20 to 24, it used about 50 percent of space for advertisement. It ceased publication in December in 2009 for alleged "...Government campaign of intimidation and black propaganda." The editors said they fled their country "...after learning the Government was preparing criminal charges against them based on a new anti-terrorism law".

(<http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/africa/Ethiopian-Newspaper-Shuts-Down-Editors-Flee---78646927.html>).

It looks that because of their relatively large circulations and diversity of content, these five newspapers constitute much of the newspaper discourse on the serious affairs of the political and socio-economic life of the country. Needless to say their perspectives vary to a large degree not just because some are state owned while others are private, but also because of their leanings towards various political actors in the country.

For instance, it is common to generally attach *Reporter* with a level of allegiance to the Government while still remaining significantly critical. In particular, it was not liked by opposition supporters for its position regarding the decision of the opposition leaders who boycotted parliament following the 2005 elections. The paper seriously criticized this decision and it was conversely criticized for largely remaining indifferent to Government's decision to jail the opposition leaders and their supporters. *Addis Neger*, on the other hand, was viewed as pro-opposition at least by pro-Government readers. It often challenged official claims of political and economic successes. Moreover, opposition leaders including Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, who is regarded as the mastermind behind the formation of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy, and Se'eye Abraha, former Minister of Defense under the current Government who has recently joined the opposition after serving 5 years of imprisonment on corruption charges, had published their own articles in *Addis Neger*. The paper's in-depth analysis of a wide variety of sociopolitical issues particularly in its feature pages seemed to have been unprecedented compared to other newspapers in Ethiopia. *Addis Admas* (*New Horizon*, Amharic) has

increasingly tilted towards entertainment and art albeit with some socio-political affairs still covered in news and analyses. A significant space is devoted to literary works (short stories, poems, brief entertainment news), and it has a famous page in which former 'Between You and Me' columnist in *The Ethiopian Herald*, Ephrem Endale, writes satirical and comic articles on social life.

5.3 Government Dailies

Editorial meetings in Government newspapers are held only among what they call Sector/Division heads. *The Ethiopian Herald*, for instance, has three such divisions set up for the major pages of the paper, namely Politics, Society and Economy. The heads of these divisions and the deputy editors participate, and they are chaired by the editor-in-chief. The meetings are being held every morning in the latter's office. These are brief discussions that begin with comments on the day's edition with everyone taking a run through the pages. Some of these journalists did not see the edition beforehand. With *The Ethiopian Herald*, for instance, the impression seemed to be that there was no serious problem with this. They took copies from the meeting place to quickly run over the pages. No serious fault or strong points were raised regarding the newspaper they overviewed. However, some blurred pictures and texts were identified in which case it was agreed that the editors responsible for the fault were to be communicated to take future precautions.

Once the day's edition has been discussed in brief, then follows identifying issues and possible newsworthy matters for the next day's paper. Accordingly, the *Editorial* was decided to be on Ethiopia's roles in international peacekeeping as mirrored by the country's Foreign Minister in his speech at a UN Summit in New York in September in 2009. The journalist to write the editorial was also selected on the spot. For the Politics page, Government reform activities on capacity program in the Southern region were to be reflected on. Livestock development was the issue selected to be written about in the Economy page. The Society page led to a discussion of lack of personnel for the section that one of the meeting participants was to fill in the gap and no further discussion emerged as to what was to be treated in the page for the day. As these state

papers mostly base their news coverage on information dispatches on possible news events and actual news stories from the state's Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) and pro-state private business, Walta Information Center (WIC), they did not need to discuss the news page at all.

As it was held in the beginning month of the Ethiopian new year (September 27, 2009), the meeting briefly overviewed the focal issues for coverage as indicated in the annual plan. Accordingly, the focal areas under Politics included the May 2010 elections, the NEPAD peer review results (on good governance in African countries in which Ethiopia's situation was under investigation), the Copenhagen Environment Summit (in which Ethiopia's PM was to lead the African delegation in December, 2009), and Ethiopia's roles in international peacekeeping. For the Economy section of the paper, issues identified included the seventh round of economic growth (the Ethiopian economy is claimed to have grown by double digit for seven consecutive years), the problem of inflation, the growth of the leather industry and micro financing initiatives.

The plan was viewed as limiting regional coverage because it has not included field trips outside the capital. This was attributed to budget constraints. The suggestion by a participant to open a new page for culture and related issues was not considered practical as the organization was said to be suffering a budget deficit of around 7 million Ethiopian birr already (about half a million US dollars).

The second meeting I attended was of a similar type and, in fact, issues like peacekeeping roles, the UN Summit would be consolidated through more coverage. Other major differences from the previous meeting included the absence of two members and the delay of the paper for review. As a result, plans for the next day's issue preceded the evaluation of the day's edition.

In a nutshell, the Government media appear to be preoccupied with heralding the political, economic and development agendas of the Government in a positive light with scant critical

journalism. That can be seen from the issues they choose to cover as well as the generally positive light they approach these issues from. The only ‘negative’ perspective in the meetings I attended was the declining success in Ethiopian international athletics standing, clearly not so much politically sensitive.

The state newspaper journalists often work in partitioned offices they share among three or four people, but also have a small newsroom with a TV set with poor signal despite availability of various news and entertainment channels through a satellite dish. There is no telephone in the newsroom and access to telephone in other offices is very limited. Roughly, they share one connected computer for two.

5.4 *Addis Admas*

Addis Admas, published by *Admas Advertising*, used to be owned by the late Assefa Gosaye. He was a businessman who was interested in investing in art. Currently, the paper is owned by his family’s business, which in addition to the newspaper has interests in music recording and filming. The paper is backed by strong private investment (Gebremedhin, 2006) and seems to always take a moderate position with cautious take on politics. This seems the main reason that the paper has been able to keep running for the last ten years including hard times, notably the 2005 elections when a number of newspapers had to close for financial limitations and state prosecution.

Editorial meetings do not seem to have been strictly scheduled for *Addis Admas* at least from what I observed (on October 5, 2009). Not only did they cancel it twice, but I did not get the impression that meetings commence on time. Moreover, both the editor-in-chief and his deputy were nowhere around during my recurrent visits and in the meeting as well. However, once the journalists met, they discussed details of content. Some journalists questioned the significance of some of the front news items. In other cases comments were given as regards better and extraordinary angles some news items would have been presented from. Issues regarding the

need to make reporting more interesting to the readership were emphasized in the discussions. In a way, news elements such as significance, human interest, context and angle seemed to be understood as so many comments underlined the enhancement of these elements in the news items. The procedures are somehow confusing because sometimes comments on the previous week's issue and plans for next week were discussed together with no clear order. The chairperson, a senior editor, teamed up journalists for some assignments upon the journalists' willingness to work together. As indicated earlier, this newspaper, while still covering politics, is increasingly inclining towards social and artistic issues. The issues they chose to cover during my observation only attest to these, and they included interviewing an Ethiopian-American film producer, copyright problems for artistic works, private and public higher institutions of learning and the recent banning of their distance education programs, poor quality of education in relation to graduating nurses. One major political issue would be an exclusive interview a journalist was scheduled to hold with Se'eye Abraha, an opposition leader who was previously a Defense Minister under the current Government and also one of the founders of the rebel forces against the Derg. Se'eye served a five-year sentence under the current Government on corruption charges while he was the General Manager of the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), which is a consortium of businesses owned by the ruling party. *Addis Admas* is also engaged in court reporting of corruption charges and business scandals.

While journalists share a small office room for two or three, there is no newsroom that could house all the reporters. Still, there is a small room with a tiny TV set (perhaps 14-inch) for everybody. There are three connected computers for all the staff.

5.5 Reporter

Reporter (Amharic bi-weekly) is published by Media and Communication Center (MCC), a media house launched by Amare Aregawi in 1996. The owner was a high level member of the armed struggle under the current Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi. MCC also publishes the English weekly, *The Reporter*. When I went there in October, they were moving into a new building at *Bole Medhanialem*, one of the richest neighborhoods in Addis Ababa. They rented

the whole fourth floor and furnished it with comfortable seats and tables. There was quite a number of telephone sets for reporters to use be it to ask for a piece of information or conduct a lengthy interview. Journalists freely go from one table to another to communicate with their colleagues. When I met the deputy editor-in-chief a couple of times, I noticed reporters freely coming to him at any time for queries or clarifications. The newsroom environment appeared friendly with journalists moving around to their colleagues and starting conversations. I noticed some journalists were interviewing sources over the phone. I did not have the chance to observe their editorial meetings though. Neither did they seem to continue with their previous type of editorial meetings. They plan to counsel within smaller groups along types of pages such as business and economy, politics, art, etc.

5.6 *Addis Neger*

Established by seven friends from diverse backgrounds (political science, theology, law, marketing, etc) in October 2007, *Addis Neger* had a life of two years and could not survive the completion of this work. November 28, 2009 saw the last issue of this paper as the founders and editors fled the country for alleged Government harassment and fear of ensuing terrorism charges. Tamirat Negera, the paper's editor-in-chief told the VOA in December, 2009 that "The Government official daily newspaper, *Addis Zemen*, was publishing repeated articles incriminating us with and associating us as terrorists with an intention to destroy Ethiopia, the entire nation, and as a threat to the stability and democracy of the country."

<http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/africa/Ethiopian-Newspaper-Shuts-Down-Editors-Flee---78646927.html>).

It was a day after they celebrated their two-year anniversary that I attended their editorial meeting (October 16, 2009). So the party mood was still there. The meeting kicked off with general comments on the tone of the previous week's edition. Some, including the editor-in-chief, thought it was too critical of government and comments from readers attested to that. The editor said they got a comment which used a metaphor of a "brakeless car" to describe the

paper's political daring. However, others argued it was weak-toned and they would rather get stronger. The deep concerns of particularly the editor-in-chief and his deputy came out clear throughout the meeting as they had been urging the rest of the journalists to identify softer topics (without suggesting which topics) to avoid confrontation with the Government. It seemed they grew more cautious after the articles against them were published in *Addis Zemen*, the Government weekly. They were particularly fearful to dwell on what one of them called 'High Temperature Issues' such as ethnicity, governance, and elections. The journalists in *Addis Neger* compared their output with other newspapers and identified the areas they did better and those they were outsmarted in.

The meeting involved heated debates on careless mistakes such as failure to double check sources of information, the use of lofty language by the copy editor, lack of novel perspectives to issues covered also by other media, etc. Issues selected in the following edition included the escalating cost of life in the country, education (the increasing number of failing students), interview with a member of the opposition (former member of the incumbent party), etc which were indeed softer than previously treated issues such as problems of governance, ethnic problems and challenges of the then upcoming election.

Addis Neger rented a new building and enjoyed sufficient space for meetings and newsroom activities. The small newsroom often saw informal discussions among colleagues amidst which some journalists could manage to get focused on their writing or reading activities.

It is not that difficult to see a clear divide between Government and private media both in terms of areas of focus and perspectives and engagement of the journalist in these organizations. The Government media would usually serve their owner through positive reporting with little critical reflections on socio-political challenges. In the process, the journalist in the Government media tends to work within the limited space for creativity and ease to do news reporting and analysis.

The private media generally work towards covering issues that could be appealing for the general readership due to the relative ease and freedom they are allowed by their employers and editors to sniff for newsworthy events and situations as well as to criticize political groupings, particularly the Government. In cases like *Addis Neger*, in which friends were the owners and reporters of the paper, consensus on content and the extent of coverage might easily be reached due to communal objectives. The threats, verbatim or perceived, from political powers to which criticism was directed, however, could never be underestimated that private media journalists would eventually fail to live up to their own commitments.

5.7 Conclusion

The preoccupation of the Government press with serving the Government and marginalizing the treatment of varied political views in its platform was evident from issues selected in editorial meetings. In other words, editors mainly direct their decisions towards addressing agendas set by the Government. They promote national policies, development initiatives through coverage generally in favor and uncritical of Government. Journalists are required to do their reporting within those parameters set by the editors. The role of the Government journalists in deciding newspaper content and their freedom to choose news events for coverage are, therefore, very limited because they do not often take part in editorial meetings. Similarly, the private media seem to emphasize a broad agenda of criticizing Government policies and initiatives (not necessarily through critical reporting). In relative terms, the private press journalists enjoyed a better say in choosing content through discussions during editorial meetings.

Journalists' selection of international media sources for local affairs could not of course be observed in editorial meetings because such meetings were not mainly held to discuss what sources to use. Instead, they were meant to discuss already published stories and story plans for upcoming editions for which sources would be identified in the actual process of news writing after areas of coverage were decided upon in editorial meetings.

Chapter 6

Topical Analysis and Discussion of Findings of In-depth Interviews

6.1 Introduction

This section discusses accounts of in-depth interviews conducted with Government and private press journalists and editors in order to demonstrate their perception of the socio-political context in which they do their work and also to understand the role they attach to international media reporting on Ethiopia in relation to their practice of sourcing.

6.2 Overall Working Conditions for the Government Press Editor

Although reporters have a level of accountability to the stories they publish, editors and their deputies are often the most responsible members of a media organization for the contents of news and articles in a given newspaper, Government or private. With that also comes a great decision power regarding what to publish and what not to. The newly passed *Proclamation to Provide for Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information* recognizes this responsibility and gives the editor-in-chief designated by any publisher the mandate "...to supervise the publication of the periodical and to determine the contents thereof in such a way that nothing may be printed against his will" (Article 6/1). The same Proclamation provides under Article 6/3 that the editor-in-chief "...shall have the legal responsibility for the content of the mass media outlet." These entitlements would entail editors' substantial engagement in editing and omitting stories with perceived or literal liability to persecution or sometimes with content causing alarm to powerful entities. Accounts of in-depth interviews conducted with editors of both Government and private newspapers only confirm this massive involvement in making daily or weekly decisions, as the case may be, on what to publish in what detail and what level of prominence to give issues in the papers.

Given the legal responsibility, it is easy to see how sensitive the editor's position could be in the process of running a newspaper. Taking the utmost precautions to avoid any legal liability is an inevitable part of the editors' daily decision making in relation to his work. However, editors of

Government newspapers appear to become cautious not to publish anything undesirable by Government even if it is lawful. They seem to strictly draw their activities not only from a clearly stated editorial policy but also from their perception of Government expectations that the newspapers best promote Government policies and performances. Their cautiousness over their views on the freedom they exercise, for instance, was evident in the interviews conducted in which they avoided overt admission of the lack of freedom in exercising critical journalism. They give the impression that their newspapers' role as primarily a mouthpiece of the Government is acceptable in the norms of the profession of journalism. At a more interpretative level, however, their assertions suggest the cynicism that exists in their assumption of carrying out their responsibilities properly as editors with 'not so much' pressure from the Government. Here is what one of the editors had to say.

I have little challenge to face as an editor. The bureaucracy has remained the same and you only need to know that to carry out your duties. I face no overt pressure from Government, but I can be given some orientation. We are assigned to promote [the Government's] national programs. So you work towards objectives in that line. We are, for instance, often recommended to look into some policy documents to use for our work if need be (IIB).

The views above appear puzzling. On the one hand they suggest the importance of reckoning with the Government bureaucracy which has 'remained the same' and which demands the editor to carry out his duties, let us say, as oriented and directed by his bosses. On the other hand, the respondent would not like to understand such guidance as pressure as, under the circumstances he explained, he still thought he had "...little challenge to face as an editor". Whether one considers such 'directions' a challenge or not may be a personal take of the situations or a result of one's reluctance to reflect on matters that he considers are too sensitive to be blunt about. The pressure these interferences from above exert against the editor's freedom of decision making regarding newspaper content is however undeniable.

The pressure under which Government newspaper editors worked particularly during the election period in 2005 was extra ordinary. Most of the pages of the papers were exclusively used to propagate Government positions of the election saga with extensive counter offences against accusations over Government rigging and abuses of the electoral process.

That was a very challenging period for us. You know you are doing the wrong thing but you have no other option. ..You can imagine how challenging it could be to do balanced reporting when even the PM used our paper to write extensively against the EU Observers' report. So we worked under a political pressure to denounce this report and to propagate in line with the Carter Center's report which was largely positive (IIA).

It appears that Government newspapers serve as channels through which primarily defined sets of Government goals take the centre stage in their coverage. In other words, their decision on content is governed more by the set of goals they receive from the Government and less by their own freedom as media organizations, a position that demands living up to certain professional commitments even while being a Government ownership. Journalistic content published in the Government dailies by reporters working for the newspapers and the Government's Ethiopian News Agency, and the pro-Government Walta Information Centre all promote Government policies and development undertakings. This is probably a path pursued in the premise that the sustained representation of a distinct set of issues would enable the agenda setter, in this case the Government, to eventually make these issues worthwhile for the readership and the general public to discuss and comprehend them. This is even clearly stated in the document promoting 'development journalism' (as highlighted earlier) in which the first mission of the Government media is described to be "letting developmental thinking grow in the minds of the people".

Nevertheless, the credibility readers attach to Government media is arguably so low that the chance for opinions made and issues discussed through these media to draw public attention is questionable for their bias, lack of balance in treating these issues and of course readers' general boredom with political propaganda. According to an audience study conducted in 2008, readers show little interest to political stories in *Addis Zemen* and recommended that the paper treat more

entertainment news and articles, and journalists engage in more balanced journalism and critical reporting (Sahlu, 2008:57). Also a 2007 study on people's trust in their social and political institutions conducted by Gallup, an international public pollster, indicates that only "Twenty-one percent of Ethiopians say they have confidence in the quality and integrity of their media, compared with a sub-Saharan median of 60%" (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/104029/Few-Ethiopians-Confident-Their-Institutions.aspx>). Congruent to these findings is the assertion of one respondent who expressed his belief that *The Ethiopian Herald*, for which he has been working for many years, has lost a significant size of readership particularly following the disputed elections in 2005 due to its inability to provide balanced reporting for the general public victimized by political polarization. He lamented:

The feeling developed against our paper [ever since the elections] is so serious. We are often considered as the Government's mouthpiece. We have lost public trust (IIA).

It is, however, difficult to relate the situation of public trust over the Government newspapers with the size of circulations because the papers are mainly subscribed to by federal and regional Government organizations, thereby showing no picture of how individual readers buy the papers out of interest in content.

6.3 Major Tasks Assigned to the Government Newspaper Journalist

A huge share of the news for the Government dailies is supplied by the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA), and the contribution of Walta Information Center (WIC) is also growing in this regard (IIA). The journalists for the papers often publish fewer stories than those provided by ENA. Pursuant to the primary object of promoting Government agendas of political, social and economic nature, journalists working for Government newspapers, at least those working for *The Ethiopian Herald* (English daily) and *Addis Zemen* (Amharic daily) merely take assignments from their editors for news coverage or at most plan their own article in line with editorial policy demands and areas of focus conveyed to them through overall organizational plans. Owing to the absence of self initiative to search for news worthy events and situations, the average

Government journalist experiences little time pressure and enthusiasm to do his job, mainly writing few news and articles on assignment.

I cover events on assignment, and I, may be, develop it later into a larger article, that is it. It's such a small bit I do for the time being. Perhaps I may be tasked to more work when I become an editor some day" (IIH).

Another young journalist similarly stated that his job is not that demanding.

The bosses assign you and you know you should do the assignment in line with editorial policy. [Accordingly], I cover some political events and write articles for the politics page. Sometimes I do exclusive interviews (IIJ).

In the process of promoting the Government at every front of its engagement, the editor of the Government press plays a principal role of guiding journalists under him to work in line with focal areas identified at a higher level of the institutional decision, which basically assures that the national agendas set by Government get the right type and amount of coverage.

6.4 Overall Working Conditions for the Private Newspaper Editor

Editors of the private newspapers under study generally work under a lot of precaution leading to recurrent tension in their relationship with the Government officials, journalists and owners. On the one hand, they work under situations which do not necessarily pose legal liability but still cause them to fear to deal with in their papers, a situation leading to self-censorship. Reporters want to publish their stories and thus demand editors to avoid over cautious look into content. Despite their freedom of decision granted by law, editors nonetheless find it difficult to ignore even a slight chance of undesirability of their decisions by political powers and also owners.

One respondent, for instance, revealed that he comes across recurrent disputes with journalists because they wanted their mere speculations and biased political opinions to be qualified as news. He explained:

I often have to tell journalists to revisit their stories because of the political bias they show in them. Sometimes they become very emotional out of their own dissent with little factual evidence [to back it up with]. I often work dearly to resolve these issues through discussions with them and it often works for me.

Often times, I settled disputes with journalists through discussions. With owners, it is not that easy. I can tell you that, at the moment, I allow [a certain] subject to be regularly emphasized in our paper for many weeks now because the owner wanted it so. Seventy five percent, I agree on the worth of the issue and it deserves attention. But I could not stop it when it is too much since the owner still wanted more coverage (IIC).

In the last instance above, it is important to note that owners of private news media sometimes set their agendas, thereby challenging the editor's autonomy to make free choices of what to publish or what not to.

Another editor also said:

Sometimes, journalists refuse to take assignments just because they don't like the issues involved. For example, some don't want to write about political parties they don't support. Others tell you they are not interested in writing on a certain topic. As to me, the media in Ethiopia are perceived by journalists and owners as tools to run one's own opinion more dominantly than other competing views (IIE).

The challenge in relation to fear of persecution is very eminent as well. The *Reporter*, for instance, grumbled in its July 28, 2010 Editorial that the Government has so far taken the paper

to court more than fifteen times since its establishment in 1996. This has forced the editors of the paper to follow the cases by finding themselves in the courts over 600 times⁶. Editors find such charges very frustrating even when often proven wrong in the end. By taking them to court every time it feels unhappy with their reporting, a respondent asserted, the Government means to keep journalists and editors in constant fear of persecution. That indeed “works for it because we engage in too much self-censorship to avoid any chance of confronting them [the Government]” (IID).

Editors normally have the last say in assigning tasks and deciding newspaper content. Their decisions, however, largely take root in discussions in the editorial meetings. For *Addis Neger*, for instance, these meetings, often chaired by the Deputy Editor-in-Chief, involved heated discussions of what the issues of the paper should be as well as what journalists are individually willing or interested to write on. The situation was similar in the editorial meeting I observed in *Addis Admas*.

6.5 Government vs Private Press Editors

The data obtained along the line of editors’ responsibilities generally reveal that both editors of Government and private newspapers, at least those selected for this study, oversee daily journalistic activities with a great deal of cautious look into content. The relations between Government newspaper editors and the journalists seem to have been defined by evaluating journalistic contents in terms of their allegiance to Government demands and expectations. The process does not give a wide range of freedom to the journalists to influence decisions on the stories they are assigned to write.

⁶ Amare Aregawi, owner, in his interview with *The Reporter*. Sunday, October 10, 2010. He did not mention examples of charges filed against his paper

Editors of private newspapers also appear to be cautious of content but the journalist participates in the decision making process of news selection and evaluation of content with the last deciding voice still being the editor. Editorial meetings facilitate a venue whereby the journalist expresses himself/herself, attempts to influence decisions and to air dissenting views. Observations made in editorial meetings revealed that sometimes the editor had to reverse his position on a given issue under discussion because of the journalists' opposition to it. Hence the private journalist is in a relatively better position to influence decisions on content.

6.6 Major Tasks of the Private Press Journalist

One major difference between Government and private newspapers in Ethiopia, in as far as journalistic practice is taken, is that private newspaper journalists involve themselves in searching for news as opposed to Government press reporters who often work on assignments set by the editors. Accordingly, private press journalists present their story plans for what to cover in the news and articles that they write each week. In the process, they find their own means to find sources, team up for background research on the assigned topic and so on. A reporter for one of the private newspapers describes her usual activities as follows.

Basically, I don't take a direct route to write my news stories. You can find information on a news event. It's also good that the recently established Ministry of Communication Affairs started to send dispatches of announcement on news events. However, I prefer to go my own way. If I cover court cases on corruption, [for example], I will work hard to find out issues involved behind the scene. I have established insider sources for my interest in Government offices, then I substantiate the official information I get through interviews and press releases...

As private press journalists, no one dictates us seriously to work for an agenda. At least I never faced that challenge as a news reporter (IHK).

6.7 News Sources

6.7.1 Local Sources for the Government Press

Findings regarding news sources revealed some similarities with earlier studies by, for instance, Bonsa (in Zewde & Pausewang, 2002), and Skjerdal (2008), both cited elsewhere in this work, particularly in relation to the Government press. Both *Addis Zemen* and *The Ethiopian Herald* use the Government's *Ethiopian News Agency (ENA)* and the pro-Government *Walta Information Center (WIC)* as their major news sources. *ENA* also dispatches a daily menu of events for these papers to cover. According to one of the editors, most regional news is sent through the *Ethiopian News Agency*, which has “deployed around forty correspondents in different regions of the country.” The newspapers also heavily rely on *Walta Information Center* for articles particularly on politics. The editor said they prefer *Walta's* “expertise in politics...because they outsource articles to find [pundits] to write to them and then sell the articles to us” (IIB). In a way, the promotion of Government agendas are assigned not just to the newspapers but also to the *Ethiopian News Agency* where the Governments press locates most of its news, and the contribution of *Walta Information Center* specially for political reporting and analyses has grown significantly as evidenced by respondents.

As mentioned elsewhere, the immense reliance of the Government newspapers on these news agencies means that journalists working for the papers hardly face time constraints to carry out their menu-based journalism and neither do they seem actively involved in the hassle and bustle of the profession in the complete sense of it.

6.7.2 Local Sources for the Private Press

Private newspapers very much depend on their own journalistic effort to do their job. As a result, their activities necessitate establishing sources in civil service institutions, and the different branches of Government including the legislative, executive and judiciary, as well as civil societies, diplomats, higher institutions of learning, and so on. This generally makes it difficult for them to find essential information in a country where people can be reluctant to express

themselves freely and also where access to particularly Government information is limited. Most of the journalists interviewed for this study maintained that they endeavor to access information by establishing linkage with insiders and Government officials to initiate critical reporting. However, given the daunting task to establish sources of this nature, most agree that their news reporting is often event-based whereby they go to events to which they are invited to cover. Some, however, boast of using these invitations only as a starter which they investigate more to come up with critical reporting. The private media journalists also positively commended the recently established Government Ministry of Communication Affairs for its electronic dispatches of possible events for the media to follow up to.

The private media do not have regional correspondents. Therefore, they lack comprehensive coverage of regional affairs although their coverage of national state of affairs still relate to regions. In cases of major events such as incidents of human suffering from natural calamities, ethnic clashes, or huge cultural festivities, however, they sometimes send their journalists for first hand information.

6.7.3 Commonalities in the Use of Sources by the Government and Private Press

Despite its slow speed, the Internet has been vital for both types of press to browse basic factual and statistical information from official websites of Government organizations, civil society organizations and international agencies like the UN, IMF, and the World Bank as well as to access international media resources.

It is very important to note at this stage that the editors and journalists of Government and private media organizations would not regard each other as vital sources of news and information. For one private newspaper editor, this is mainly because of the “different approaches we have to follow in our journalistic engagement”. He further argued:

For the Government media, news is about all the good things the Government has done. They even have a name for it. They call it development journalism. We prefer to be more critical while still acknowledging good things achieved by the Government. Besides, it is very hard to trust most of the positive things said in the Government media as they often tend to be mere propaganda with little back up with facts on the ground (IIF).

One Government newspaper junior editor on his part labels the private media as generally “pathetic and obsessed with negative reporting.”

We attend the same meeting and they take a tiny negative spot against very broad positive image you would make out of the event, and then they make noise about it. While we can still criticize the Government, we are mainly a development media. So there is little relevance in the negative private press for us to use them as a source.

The last two accounts above, one by a private media journalist and another by a Government press journalist, generally represent the polarized views that journalists in the two categories (Government vs. private) entertain to cancel out each other. The private press journalists in Ethiopia are generally of the opinion that the Government press is a mere propaganda tool preoccupied with uncritically lobbying for the Government agendas by always adopting a positive frame for stories devoid of critical assertions. The Government media journalists, on their part, seem to perceive the private media journalism as none other than one that is deliberately framed into destructive and negative reporting on even positive political developments in the country. The sharp divisions in the media landscape provide practical as well as potential power to contribute to the existing polarized political context.

6.7.4 International Media Sources

6.7.4.1 Hostile Attitudes of the Government Press

There is a common understanding among journalists and editors I interviewed that international media, particularly Western media, largely cover Ethiopia in a negative light. They all concur that nothing defines Western media coverage on Ethiopia more than famine and draught. Despite this common position regarding demeaning coverage of the country by the Western media, Government and private media journalists entertain differing views on whether Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular is specifically targeted for negative coverage by the Western media outlets. Government media editors and journalists tend to view Western media as having a persistently negative frame within which they mirror the continent and Ethiopia in particular. Let us see some views of such respondents starting with seemingly the most hostile attitude toward the Western media which suggests the respondents' assumption that Western media work towards a destructive agenda of weakening Africa by creating public mistrust against African states.

I don't know why but I believe the Western media are obsessed with negative news on Ethiopia. The country is developing and changing for the better, but they don't want to see that face of reality. I don't think it is because the media focuses on the negative. I believe they want Africa to remain weak... They seem to want Africa to sleep forever. They have a tendency to erode the trust and unity between the State and the people because they know the magic unity does if it materializes. So I don't take these media seriously (IIL).

It is true the international media like the BBC are very good at identifying newsworthy issues in Ethiopia. However, they focus much more on negative state of affairs. I always wonder why they do not care about positive developments in Ethiopia (IIH).

I used to trust international media like Aljazeera before I was a journalist myself. But now I can see they exaggerate things when they report on Ethiopia. Still, they can be a good source of information although we do not use them that much because we tend to focus on mirroring Ethiopia positively (IIJ).

Their (the international media) angle on Ethiopia is always negative, and this is deliberate. (IIM).

Findings, therefore, reveal that the Government media generally tend to regard the international media coverage on Ethiopia as destructive and out of context. Here, we notice that although they do not give clear reasons for their beliefs, particularly Government press journalists perceive most of the Western media as deliberately mirroring Ethiopia within a persistently negative frame of coverage. As a result, they engage in counteroffensive argumentation against international reporting. A respondent from one of the Government dailies, for instance, stated, “We always launch counter attacks against major negative reporting by the Western media. That is I think a fair thing to do. If you just remain indifferent to their bad coverage, it is almost like conforming to their claims” (IIM). The extent to which they use international media outlets for their factual importance can generally be regarded as minimal. However, most of the interviewees concurred that in rare cases of positive coverage of Ethiopia by these media in relation to economic progress, boom in a certain sector of the economy, poverty reduction, etc, the Government media resonate it to substantiate their own position with what they refer to as development journalism.

Government media journalists also attach very little importance to international correspondents in Ethiopia. “Why do I use them as a source, what do they get that I don’t?” said one journalist respondent (IIM). The scenario should instead have been that “we become the major news source for the international media” reporting on Ethiopia (IIA). Even more, IIA maintained:

There is a sense of rivalry between some of the media these correspondents work for and the Government particularly following the aftermath of the 2005 elections. The Government was not happy at all with their reporting...All in all...our use of international media and the reporting of their correspondents is very minimal.

6.7.4.2 International Media as Source for the Private Press to Substantiate Criticism of Government

The often 'negative' news that international media run on Ethiopia seem to suit the local private press. Journalists do not generally see a problem in emphasizing the negative as long as it is factual. Besides, the private media themselves focus more on problems associated with Government activities, and, more often than not, the international media accounts substantiate their reporting in that aspect. In other words, international media and other foreign sources usually have relevance to the discourse in the private press which can generally be characterized by criticizing the Government and spotting institutional weaknesses and malpractices.

For me the profession of journalism should be focused on providing accurate and relevant information. If there is famine, you should report it. If there is war you still should say there is war. It's better to make sure the information is accurate and relevant instead of worrying about being negative or positive (IIG).

I know the Western media have been criticized for having negative perspectives on their coverage of Africa. It still holds true. I would say...by its professional nature, the media [journalism] is tuned into the negative, wherever you go (IIF).

There were also critical comments from some private journalists as well as regards the indifference of the international media on possible local consequences of their reporting on matters like ethnic conflicts and religious tensions.

I don't underestimate the usefulness of international media sources. What worries me with the international media is their interpretation of facts....They care little for possible adversary effects of their reporting on sensitive issues such as ethnic clashes, religious tensions and the like. As a responsible local medium, we should evaluate their reporting against our own local realities before we use it (IIC).

The private media, in fact, use the international media and other transnational sources for more purposes than strengthening criticism of Government. They sometimes take refuge in international media reporting and reports of various transnational organizations by using them as source for what they would have reported themselves. The international media are used to avoid any risk of liability to Government accusations and intimidation. As one put it, “you sometimes want to say it is not me who said it. It’s somebody else” (IID). Another Editor elaborates on situations dictating the use of international media sources despite available information at local level.

There is not so much information that the international media reporters know and we don’t. However, we don’t dare to publish all that we know. We didn’t say anything about the presence of [notorious and terrible] prisons in Ethiopia until an international journalist wrote about it. We prefer to use international media sources in such situations. Another case in point is the situation in the the Ogaden region [Where Ethiopian Somali rebels fight for independence] which we would have liked to investigate ourselves. Given its sensitivity, however, we used a New York Times story as a source. Sometimes you cannot take even the international media as an excuse to publish some valuable information. Knowing the terrible relationships between Human Rights Watch and the Ethiopian Government, we avoid publishing the Rights Group’s serious allegations of war crimes in the Ogaden region (IIF).

According to most interviewees from the private press, international media sources are also useful for the private media for their better access to some official information through their recurrent interviews with Ethiopian high officials including Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. The PM is yet to hold any exclusive interview with locally operating private media, but has been holding such interviews with international media such as the *BBC* (for instance, he held the first exclusive interview with the *BBC*’s Hard Talk host, Stephen Sacker, regarding the post election unrest in 2005), *Financial Times* (to which he told last year that he would like to leave office in 2010), *Al Jazeera*, the *New York Times*, and so on. My respondents, however, acknowledge that particularly the Prime Minister has recently made himself available for periodical press conferences in which the local private media are also invited to attend.

Perhaps due to the better access of local journalists to those press conferences and better communication with the Government's Ministry of Communication Affairs, there appears to be a declining significance of the international media correspondents deployed in Ethiopia for the private media to use them as sources. Still, some off-the record information on affairs related to international relations can be of some use for local journalists (mainly because the international correspondents from, for instance, VOA and the BBC may have more proximity to their respective embassy sources). One editor, however, finds international correspondents even more useful for their coverage of regional affairs because they have better means to travel around the country (IIF).

6.7.5 Access to Information

Interview findings generally show that Government media have understandably few difficulties in getting access to Government information because of the type of information they need to promote Government policies and activities and the sense of belonging and trust their official sources attach to these media. However, even Government journalists and editors complain about the commonly suspicious mindset in the country in terms of availing information in the civil service organizations. The new press law with extensive provisions for access to information may not change this tradition because change comes as a result of *“transformation of the country, not because of legal provisions. People are very suspicious in this country even if you ask them for something positive for themselves...They fear for consequences”* (IIB).

The situation appears much more complicated for the private media. Most of the interviewees complained about their big troubles accessing information from Government organizations and their officials. One editor from a private press described the challenges in this regard as follows.

I remember what a British journalist said. International media can access African leaders more easily than the presidents and prime ministers of the countries in which these media are based. So [accessibility] to international media as opposed to denial of information for the local private

media is not only exclusive to our Prime Minister... We as private media journalists could not even imagine conducting an exclusive interview with the PM (IIF)...

He also does not expect any change after the Provision for Freedom of the Press and Information Access (PIAL) has been passed.

I don't like discussing legislations. Things work in this country more by political will than by law (IIF).

Another editor is also of the opinion that the problem of access to information is deep-rooted in the realm of governance. The authoritarian culture Ethiopia sustained for long is still casting its shadow on in the transformation of the country:

This is a country where even [international newspapers like Newsweek] were filed as confidential documents in Government offices during the previous regime. Such tradition does not fade away easily. In some affairs of international relations, international media have the capacity to access information. When you, as a local reporter, go to Government offices, say to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with these background sources to get more on the Ethio-Eritrean Conflict or to the Ministry of Water Resources for information on the Nile Basin dialogues, etc, they can simply reject your appeal against your right of access to such information (IID).

As a private media journalist, access to official information is not as easy as it is for the Government media. I have to work hard to establish sources for such information. There is a general trend in the Government offices. They often regard most of the private media as anti-Government and pro-opposition. Access to information is then difficult to the extent of that perception. Still, I get information from insider sources and also from officials who judge me by the fairness of my reporting, not by which media I work for (IIK).

A research finding in 2005 also confirms the difficulty for the private news media to access official information. According to Getahun (2005: 96), “Government-owned or affiliated media get better access to information than the privately-owned media.”

The limiting circumstances in terms of access to information particularly in the sphere of politics are clearly daunting. Factual bases are not easy to establish particularly for the private press to achieve critical journalism. Still, they strive to do some investigative reporting. Journalists and editors from *Addis Admas* sometimes rely much on unnamed sources availing evidences for allegations of corrupt practices in the civil service for their investigative reporting. The Amharic *Reporter* is famous for its publishing factual documents from Government offices for its claims of corrupt management in such organizations as the Ethiopian Electric Power Authority, Ethiopian Road Authority and Ethiopian Telecommunication Agency in decisions such as to grant contracts to companies for maintenance, equipment supplies, and system installation undertakings. *Addis Neger*, gave more space and time for feature stories and commentaries involving in-depth analysis of various socio-political issues. In the process, it relied on experts who substantiate the journalistic analysis with their views and opinions often aired on conditions of anonymity. Lately, the newspaper faced challenges when the Government daily, *Addis Zemen*, published on October 7, 2009 an extensive article (which was first posted on October 6, 2009 on *Aiga Forum*, a pro-Government Diaspora website) severely criticizing the private weekly’s feature-based journalism. Under the title; ‘*A Newspaper on Destructive Objectives should Remain Threatened*’, the article unveiled its offensive in such a threatening manner.

The Newspaper’s feature allowed the reporters to inculcate their opinions the way they like (by mixing factual reporting and opinions) as if they were granted a special go to do that [against journalistic principles]. The columns of the newspaper are full of quotes from unnamed sources (a ‘renowned scholar’, according to an expert, etc) ...and the writers attempt to take refuge in these sources in order to make their opinion look like real and true....From journalistic point of view, it is none other than a weakness to qualify one’s opinion by blanketing it with quotes from some intellectuals, diplomats or foreigners. However such a strategy negatively influences those with little knowledge

of the profession and should be corrected. The employment of such propaganda techniques to create confusion in the public and incite violence and disturbance is as dangerous, if not more, as launching armed struggle or a terrorist attack [on a nation]...Since working towards instability in the mask of journalism is a crime, such a newspaper should be taken as a public enemy and needs to receive severe penalties (Translated from Amharic by the researcher).

According to the editor of *Addis Neger*, he and his colleagues never took such accusations as a mere opinion by an individual writer although the writer, Ali Abadama, claimed the article is no more than his own reflection on what he thought was a dangerous media activity. For the editor however;

This is not a personal opinion on our journalism; it is not an article on our weakness and strength either. This is a warning sent to us suggesting our future should we continue our critical reporting. We are told in the Government media that we are linked to the threats of the state and imagine being an editor of such a paper.

The use of unnamed sources can be a problem in itself as it is difficult to prove its accuracy. However, the above article also undermines the importance of intellectual and foreign sources in a feature story because the writer believed that only factual analyses need to be considered for all reporting except the editorial. When *Addis Neger* ceased publishing and the editors and some journalists of the paper fled the country, they justified their measure by such threats and fear of terrorism charges they thought were to be made against them. One basic reason for the use of unnamed sources may have to do with lack of transparent access to publicly held information. It is also common that sources would prefer anonymity for fear of harsh measures of various types for revealing information.

My assessment of the situation also attests that international correspondents in Ethiopia have a relatively better position in getting access to high level sources of information. The

correspondents have formed an Association to protect their interests related, among others, to gaining access to official information and the exercise of freedom of the press.

Jason McLure, a correspondent from *Bloomberg* and who also does some reporting for *Newsweek*, was referred to me by one of the members of the Association for information on the opportunities and challenges of international correspondence in Ethiopia. While focusing more on business, Mr. McLure also covers politics in the Horn with particular interest in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. He finds access to information difficult although he could not compare it to a country other than the US, where he comes from, with no third world experience before. He, nevertheless, felt the challenge of accessing information in Ethiopia.

Access to information from Government agencies, from civil society, from NGOs and the UN, I think, is relatively limited here. It's a difficult challenge and [I think] a lot of it has to do with the [fact that] Government keeps fairly closeted on alternative voices here...I do however think international media do get more access to the top level of policy makers...I did a couple interviews with the Prime Minister, I held interview with the Foreign Minister, I'm supposed to interview the Finance Minister soon.

The international media correspondents also attempt to negotiate with the Government through their Association in cases of denial of access to information as well as incidents of measures against the members. McLure remembers some incidents in this regard.

Our Association includes Ethiopian journalists working for international media...Mostly what we do is we seek to protect our interests. We define that fairly narrowly. So we generally don't have to care on behalf of the local media. For example, Addis Neger are constantly having problems with the Government. VOA Amharic service is also constantly having problems; we consider that [VOA] within our purview. The Association has acted on a number of occasions to facilitate dialogue between the Government and foreign journalists. [Here is] one instance.[I think it was February of 2008].There was an American journalist working for the Christian

Science Monitor traveling with me and a number of other foreign journalists to the Somali region. When he returned from that trip, he was given 24 hours to leave the country. Somali region is a sensitive place for this Government and I think they didn't like the fact that he was doing some independent reporting away from the Government sponsorship. The Association intervened [helped with the US Embassy] opened a dialogue with the Government. So he was allowed to stay. There are other examples of that. At a recent press conference by the Prime Minister, some of the Ethiopian journalists who work for international news agencies were not allowed to attend. And then we protested that and then they were allowed to get in.

Concluding, the international media seemed to enjoy more freedom and access to information from top level of Government, whereas the private press works under a significant pressure that relate to poor capacity, less access to Government information, and fear of intimidation. They use the international media in cases of difficulties for access, lack of capacity to cover events on their own, and in all this they seem to pick up news and views generally critical of the Government. They do not find relevance in Government media reporting as they often regard them as mere machinery of propaganda with less critical reporting. [It is worth mentioning that the private media journalists do not guide their activities by editorial policies, a situation that would suggest the absence of formalized ethical standards]. Similarly, the Government media seem to perceive the private press as destructive with their deliberate negative spins to their stories. Some even accuse them of being a threat to the country with allegations of disregarding national interests and working towards instability. The Government press appears to be deeply involved in positive coverage of Government affairs and policy issues with a scant body of critical reporting. Their relation with international media is largely hostile as a result of which they often criticize the latter's reporting on the country's challenges. However, the top level Government officials often use these same media organizations for interviews and briefings perhaps with a view to influencing perception of the international community.

6.7.6 Freedom of the Press

Most of the challenges for the journalists and editors mentioned in the previous discussions have direct or indirect implication on the state of freedom of expression in general and that of the press in particular. The legal provision does not seem to be what matters most for journalists. While the editors said to have read the newly passed press law, not so many journalist respondents did so. The Government journalists would have to assure their conformity with editorial policy to the maximum. One journalist, for instance, admitted he did not read the press law but *“I know all people involved, from the editor-in-chief of a newspaper down to the newspaper vendor on the street are liable to possible penalty in cases of breaching it: Knowing that, I do my job”* (IIL). In the process, he only needed to strictly follow the editorial policy which is not in any way in disagreement with the law. Most responses of Government media journalists are similar to this assertion.

The private media journalists also did not read the new press law in its entirety but they claimed to know the most important aspects relevant to their daily activities. They seem to respond more to the political will that they believe would practically determine the degree of freedom one is allowed to entertain despite legal provisions.

The newspaper I work for does not have problems with Government intimidation not because it is enjoying the utmost freedom granted in the law but because it avoids running the slightest risk of making the Government unhappy (IIK).

We were moderate before the 2005 election [when a dozen of journalists were jailed with charges related to inciting violence, attempting to unconstitutionally overthrowing Government, etc] and we remain so (IIG).

One of the most important repercussions of the sense of lack of freedom that seemed to have been felt by journalists and editors is their massive practices of self-censorship. Although direct Government instructions are not said to lead their activities, editors and journalists in both Government and private newspapers seem to work under various sources of pressure ranging

from restrictive editorial policy demands to seemingly persistent fear of trouble from Government even when one is not transcending any restrictions. Let us see some frustrations expressed by respondents.

It may not be like somebody comes and instructs you to do that and do this. We ourselves [involve in] self-censorship...may be due to lack of confidence in ourselves because we don't know what will happen. Nobody wants to take a risk. You are not only a journalist. You are a father, you are a family head, and you are a poor guy here in this country. Who do you have to come and pull you out of trouble? This is the biggest challenge [posed against] journalism as a profession (IIB).

There is no open pressure forcing you to do your reporting out of your way. However, you always work under immense fear of possible risks of doing things unpleasant to the bosses. We also find it difficult to define the fine line between what we should report as Government journalists even though we generally know what the editorial policy says. All these uncertainties often lead to self-censorship (IIH).

It's not always that you work whatever is allowed by the editorial policy. There is this deep-rooted fear among some people here. They tell you to change or omit some content because of their over cautiousness, not because the editorial policy disallows it. Let me give you an example. I was assigned to report a parliamentary discussion in which the PM himself said that [a certain aspect] of our economic performance was weak and I mentioned that in my news. Then I was told it was not appropriate to publish such a negative note on a Government newspaper [even if the PM himself said it]. What do you call this? It's nothing to do with the editorial policy or the Government. In some cases, the problem with us is not institutional but individual (IIL).

Direct influence from the owner as well as from the Government is rare. Sometimes the owner may want you to publish something in his own interest. He often concedes if you can provide strong defense against his proposal. Now [after owners are forbidden to be editors themselves] such involvement has diminished. Except contributing to the editorial, the owner doesn't have

any say in influencing content. Similarly, we receive no direct Government instructions to do this or that. However, we live in a very suspicious society. You may be engaging in self-censorship routines, for instance, if you think something you said may somehow make some ethnic group unhappy. Let me tell you a story. We got an article which we thought we could publish in our 'Art and Culture' page. The story was written by the Zonal Information Office of a region. We published it with no change. The article describes the people whose culture it was promoting as zikteгна (somehow similar to the English minorities). The labeling caused anger in the people that some people came to our office to deal with us (IIC).

The practice of self-censorship can generally be said to arise from the fine lines between legal provisions and restrictions leading to possible persecution, sensitivities of issues in the face of societal relationships and of course the climate of fear in which journalists operate despite some enabling legal provisions.

6.7.7 Moments Defining Journalism in Ethiopia

The private press in Ethiopia has a history of less than two decades as it came into being with the coming to power of the present Government in 1991. Therefore, this beginning remains by default the most important defining moment in the changing practice of journalism in the country. My respondents agreed completely with this assertion. They also attached a great deal of importance to the 2005 election with its consequential aftermath for the ensuing challenges of journalism in Ethiopia.

The Government showed unbelievably positive relationship with the media and NGOs. It allowed air time for position parties [in their election campaign]. Following the aftermath of the election, however, the political space is narrowing to the smallest....Self-censorship is on a rise and I think it is going that way for a very long time (IIF).

Although the opening space in the pre-election was encouraging, journalism practiced in the 2005 election period may be characterized by being defined by political polarization. The period after that, according to a respondent, witnessed significantly responsible journalistic work but it has also faced the unfortunate Government hostility which might contribute negatively to the relatively growing professionalism. *“Everybody seemed to be involved to right the wrongs done in 2005 by irresponsible journalism that gave way to political polarization”* (IIE). It is also important to remember the loss of public trust that some newspapers seemed to have experienced as mentioned earlier by a respondent from a Government newspaper. The importance of the 2005 elections in understanding current journalism practices in Ethiopia was also emphasized by one of the editors from the private press.

If you remember, there was a huge number of newspapers during the election period. Now most of them ceased to exist. I know some journalists who bid good bye once and for all following the massive restrictions following the elections. It's like our literature and music. Some argue there was a golden period when our music and literature were at their best. With all its problems, 2005 for me was the time when journalism was practiced with utmost freedom (IIC).

6.8 Conclusion

As the most responsible members of the media organizations in question, both Government and private newspaper editors need to deal with daunting tasks. The editor for Government newspapers should always make sure to keep the paper's allegiance to the Government. The challenges of the editor for the private newspaper, on the other hand, arise from fear and actual experiences of official accusations and intimidations and sometimes from owner pressure. While the editor for the Governments press deals with virtually no argument from journalists regarding content, the editor for the private press sometimes has to engage in confrontation and dialogue with journalists discontented with the rejections of their stories which the editor might think were consequential.

Freedom of the press in Ethiopia seems to relate not just to matters of legislation but also to issues of implementation. The free exercise of the Government press is significantly marred by political demands and expectations for it to be an avenue for uncritically propagating national agendas set by Government. The private press exists in a climate of uncertainty about the extent to which it can function freely and holds a subservient position to access official information. Sometimes, international media sources are used to tackle challenges related to difficulties of access and to working beyond undesirable consequences of own reporting based on journalistic investigations.

Chapter Seven

Local News and Analyses Using International Media Sources: A Qualitative Overview

7.1 The Selection

The qualitative content analysis for the use of international media as source for local news has mainly been centered on selected news stories about the 2005 elections. Occasionally, some news on the Ethio-Eritrean border disputes have been cited just because the allusion of international news sources for those news items particularly by the Government newspapers, as will be shown in the analysis, reveal similar purposes to those in election related news stories. The period considered for the analysis is from September to November of 2005 for three of the papers studied, namely *Addis Zemen*, *Addis Admas*, and *Reporter*. Although the 2005 elections took place in May, 2005, the most important developments including deadly clashes between police and opposition supporters, the arrest of dozens of opposition leaders and journalists as well as thousands of supporters took place in the aftermath. This justifies the selection of a 3-month period after the elections once election results were announced and reports of international observers such as the Carter Center and the European Union Election Observation Mission in Ethiopia (EU-EOM) were released. *Addis Neger*, which was not launched then, is discussed for its international source use in its feature pages in the period between September and November of 2009 to get a sense of recent trends in the interplay between local reporting and international sourcing.

I also overviewed the September, 2009 – October, 2009 issues of the newspapers in question to see if they used more or less international media after these legislations that I analyzed earlier came into being. Particularly on their front pages, they rarely used these sources. This can be explained by a number of reasons. One may be the relatively better access to official information in the form of press conferences including the one the Prime Minister periodically gives to both international and local journalists. It could be also that the newspapers chose to publish less politically sensitive news in which case they would refrain from loudly dwelling on issues calling the attention of the international media. One has to study the situation in depth, but the less use of international sources for particularly front page news on local politics was evident.

Still, the look into the feature pages of *Addis Neger* provided more international sources, if not always the international mass media.

Mention should be made that a lot more issues of the Government daily, *Addis Zemen*, than the three private weeklies (*Addis Admas* and *Addis Neger*) and bi-weekly (*Reporter*) were viewed in an attempt to find as many international media sourcing as possible. The selection of issues in all cases is purposive in that I picked all those editions in which any international media are attributed as a source for election and sometimes conflict related stories.

7.2 International Sources Used in the Government's *Addis Zemen*

Out of the 14 issues of *Addis Zemen* (Government daily) selected for the analysis, in which some kind of international source is used in the news stories, eight carry stories with a single international media as a source. *CNN* was used once for its interview with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi on allegations of election rigging (Sept. 12, 2005). Taken four times as a single source and once jointly with other international sources, *Reuters* was the most frequently used international news agency. *Reuters* was referred to for stories ranging from positive reporting on election outcomes to official denial of 'negative' reporting by *Reuters* itself. Two regional media, namely, *24.Com* (Oct. 29, 2005) and *South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)* (Nov. 8, 2005) were used once each for a story on UN's denunciation of Eritrea and America's denunciation of the violence 'incited by Ethiopia's opposition' respectively. Two other news stories used accounts from press conferences given to international media correspondents in Ethiopia (Oct. 15, 2005, Nov. 11, 2005) while another sourcing mainly came in the form of a mosaic of pages from *Washington Post*, *Reuters*, *Sudan Tribune*, etc with quotes the media used from the Carter Center's final report on the elections (Sept. 17, 2005). The English Service of *Voice of America* was used once in a story about Ethiopians living in America protesting against biased reporting of the election saga by the Amharic service of *VOA* allegedly sympathizing with the opposition (Nov. 12, 2005). Two stories just took largely positive evaluations of The African Union (Sept. 15, 2005) and the Carter Center (Sept. 16, 2005) as a source to claims of fair and free elections.

7.3 International Media Used in the Private Newspapers

Eight front page news stories which used international media sources were identified in the *Reporter* (Amharic bi-weekly). The *BBC* was taken for an interview it held with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi particularly for Meles's expression of the Government's readiness to hold dialogues with the Oromo Liberation Front, an armed opposition struggling for the liberation of the Oromo people, the largest ethnic group in the country (Sept. 14, 2005). International correspondents were jointly referred to twice (Oct.19, 2005) for exclusive interviews they could have with the Prime Minister. In one of the front page stories, the Premier was said to accuse the chair of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), Hailu Shawel, of a statement he made on overthrowing the Government for which he and his party could have faced charges of treason. However, he said the Government had preferred political resolutions instead. The other story in the same edition relates to Ethiopia's readiness to defend any offensive from the Eritrean side following the possible termination of UNMEE's services (United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea) which the PM said was tantamount to the end of the cease fire deal between the two countries. On November 2, 2005 issue of the *Reporter*, almost the entire page was devoted to a collage of sensitive images of victims of the post election violence that took place in Addis Ababa between police and opposition protesters. The four most sensitive photos of wounded individuals seeking help were taken from the *Associated Press* while two pictures of policemen in their helmets and a city bus with broken windows were taken by the *Reporter* itself. More front page pictures of victims lying in hospital beds and women mourning dead protesters from *Xinua* and *Reuters* were run in the Nov. 6, 2005 issue of the paper. In the same issue, the sources for a picture of soldiers in a tank in the city, doctors treating a wounded woman and a fully burnt city bus were not mentioned. The *Voice of America (VOA)* was taken as a source for news on Jimmy Carter's urging the Ethiopian Government to avoid the use of excessive force against protesters (Nov.19, 2005) and for a critical statement of former US Head of African Affairs, Herman Cohen, against Prime Minister Meles's Government actions against peaceful protesters and its growing similarity to the former military dictatorship of Mengistu Hailemariam. The *Reporter* also ran the Carter Center Report on the elections as front page news with reflections of leaders of opposition parties and a Government spokesperson on it and it published the translated version of the entire report in its inside page (Sept. 18, 2005). The *Reporter* also used unnamed

sources to run news on attempts of diplomats and donor communities to initiate dialogues between the Ethiopian Government and opposition parties.

Addis Admas (Private weekly) used very few international sources in the period selected for analysis. Just two references to international media were identified. One of them was a reference made to a news briefing the opposition leaders gave in prison to international correspondents claiming that they were arrested for their political views. Denying Government allegations of terror and violent struggle, three of them (Hailu Shawel, Dr. Berhanu Nega, Professor Mesfin Woldemariam) were said to emphasize that they were just political prisoners. The other story takes *Reuters* as a source for words from Professor Beyene Petros, chair of the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), who was reported as doubting the independence of the committee established to investigate the measures taken against opposition protesters (Dec. 10, 2005). The paper used unnamed sources for its news on possible arrest of opposition leaders which was communicated to the leaders through Western diplomats (Oct. 29, 2005).

Addis Neger, another private weekly, was launched in October, 2007. To my knowledge, it is the first ever feature-oriented local newspaper running long socio-political stories in its second page permanently. In its feature stories, *Addis Neger*, attempted to substantiate its analysis with an array of sources of information and opinions from local and international personalities and institutions of various kind. While it made use of international mass media for similar purposes as the other newspapers (accessing official information and views, minimizing risks of persecution, maintaining credibility), *Addis Neger*, basically took a broader international environment with recurrent reference to reports of rights groups such as the Human Rights Watch, studies conducted on Ethiopia and Africa at large by foreign universities, World Bank studies, and other international publications. The page-2 analysis often required one's ability to comprehend complex presentations of information on the social, political and economic doings of the country. One can, therefore, say these stories were meant to reach a readership with dependable educational backgrounds. As one of my respondents from *Addis Neger* posited, they were also meant to influence policy makers (IIE).

Within the period selected for analysis (between August and November, 2009), *Addis Neger*, used *The Economist* for its page-2 feature in its August 29, 2009 issue. The referred article in *The Economist* reported on August 20, 2009 the presence of thousands of political prisoners in Ethiopia, an allegation the Ethiopian Government has always denied. *Addis Neger's* feature itself was about the issue of political imprisonment in the country based on reports of rights groups such as the Human Rights Watch, and a book written by Paul Collier, *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in dangerous Places* (2009). On September 5, 2009, the paper ran a vast feature on “The Negotiating Drama”, in reference to the political negotiations taking place then between the Ethiopian Government and the opposition camp in which references were made to books by famous international scholars to annul possibilities of true negotiations in the absence of genuine commitment to democracy. The analysis extensively quoted from Collier’s book: *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in dangerous Places* once again. The September 12, 2009 issue of *Addis Neger*, ran a feature based on PM Meles Zenawi’s pledge to hand over power to the young generation. The Premier was initially quoted as saying “My personal position is that I have had enough” in an interview he gave to *The Financial Times*. *Addis Neger's* story reflected on what it meant that the PM finally elected to stay in power for another five years. In the story, it quoted the *Daily Nation* (Kenyan Newspaper) and other international experts on Ethiopia including Siegfried Pausewang, a Norwegian professor known for his criticism of the Ethiopian Government who this time reflected reportedly positively on Meles’s initiation of discussions on transfer of power to the young generation. Other international experts were also discussed for claims that the country lags behind other African nations in terms of institutionalizing power.

On September 26, 2009, *Addis Neger* published an article that, by the claims of the editors, would later become a very important reason for the paper’s closure in November 2009. The article speculated on ten possible threats in relation to the then upcoming elections in May 2010. In that article the first possible threat identified related to forecasts of Government harassment of the private media learning from their effects in the 2005 elections. The writer cynically mentioned the private media journalists who started to often ask each other, “Do you think we will survive the election period?” The exact reason yet to be known, *Addis Neger* did not survive

it. The article being so cynical, it made all sorts of attempts to substantiate its frustrations with quotes from Paul Collier's book, "*Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*" which ridicules Africa's election democracy as '*Democracy*'. It also attaches a great importance to the claims of the International Crisis Group that Ethiopia may face dangers of ethnic conflict ahead of the elections as well as the assertions in the article '*Discomfiture of democracy? The 2005 election crisis in Ethiopia and its aftermath*' by Jon Abbink on the Ethiopian voter described as seeing little chance of competitive elections in the country. Most of the feature articles in October and November of 2009 similarly based their analyses on local and international research materials to discuss good governance in the background of Mo Ibrahim Index (October 24, 2009, not bibliographic details in the newspaper), 'The Politics of Livelihood' (October 31, 2201), and Land Market available for the Middle Eastern countries ('Land Market Motivated by a Taste of Rice', Nov. 21, 2009).

7.4 Accessing Official Views

It was already mentioned that a recent short exclusive interview (November, 2006) with a Diaspora website reporting in favor of the Government aside, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is yet to allow an exclusive interview to the private press for the last 19 years. On the other hand, he has given so many interviews to international media such as the *BBC*, *CNN*, *Al Jazeera*, the *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, etc. This situation alone leads local newspapers to a great use of international media sources not just for their front page news, the focus of this study, but also for inside page commentary and analysis. It is also common to come across a full rerun of the translated versions of such interviews in inside pages. Due to a very complicated relationship between the private press and the Ethiopian Government involving mutual mistrust, partisanship, hostility and polarized views, all making access to official information very difficult for journalists, the private press imported a significant share of its news and information from international sources which would otherwise have been accessible locally.

It is very important to also note that, during the post election developments, international correspondents based in Addis Ababa had better access to official statements on the situations

then than the local press in general. Particularly the private press had to access such statements when officials conveyed their message across to the international community through the international media or/and when they wanted to reach the local population through the Government media.

7.5 Minimizing Risk of Government Persecution

It is not always the case that the local press lacks information to publish. The fear of persecution in media business in Ethiopia is always intact. It was not by accident that the *Reporter*, for instance, took the most sensitive images of victims of police shootings amidst opposition protesters from international media while the pictures taken from the paper's camera itself were less sensitive. In fact, a burnt bus basically shows the violent measures by the protesters and that was one of the images the *Reporter* chose to run from its own archives. Even so, one of my respondents remembers the then editor-in-chief and owner (now just the owner) was summoned to the court for running those images which were allegedly used to incite more violence. The fact that those images were run by international media earlier and that they were taken from these sources helped a lot when the case was eventually closed.

It is not the case that newspapers in Ethiopia publish all the worthwhile information that they get from international media. When they sometimes feel a piece of information may pose a serious threat to their existence, they do not run such issues no matter how important they are for their stories. The interview accounts as indicated elsewhere reveal that particularly the conflict situation in the Ogaden region (the Ethiopian Somali region) as well as the serious criticisms of Human Rights Watch on Ethiopia's handling of political dissent which gave way to the Government's angry responses get less coverage and depth than they deserve. Similarly, in my observations of the editorial meetings I at times witnessed editors' worries over possible Government reactions to their reporting. In particular, *Addis Neger* editors urged their reporters to tone down and measure the political tempo in the country to avoid undesired confrontations with the powers. In cases of highly politically charged issues by which editors think authorities

may be hugely offended, they set the frame of the stories to a lower tone if at all they do not resort to softer stories altogether.

7.6 Credibility with the International Media

In general terms most of the private media are in favor of one or another opposition group. If not so, they at least incline more in criticizing the Government and its doings. This has been well exhibited during the 2005 elections. The EU Election Observation Mission in Ethiopia (EU-EOM, 2005:31) observed a clear divide between private and Government and pro-Government outlets.

Media coverage in the state media in advance of election day was relevant for both the re-runs and the Somali regional elections. In news and current affairs programmes, ETV covered the CUD with 39 per cent and the UEDF with 27 per cent, but this coverage was largely negative in tone. The EPRDF received 27 per cent airtime, which was mostly positive. Coverage in Radio Ethiopia was similar. With the exception of the CUD, no party contesting the Somali elections received more than 2 per cent coverage in the public electronic media...

Coverage by private radio *Fana* was similar to that provided by state media. A lot of airtime was devoted to the opposition but most of this was negative in tone. Less coverage was provided to EPRDF, but the tone of all coverage the party received was positive.

In Government newspapers, the parties received a similar share of coverage. However, the coverage provided to opposition parties was mostly negative in tone, while the EPRDF was covered in a positive tone. In private newspapers the opposition received the largest amount of coverage, which was mostly positive or neutral in tone, while the EPRDF was mainly covered in negative terms.

Some research works by students of journalism indeed attested to the bias introduced by both private and Government newspapers in covering the 2005 elections in that the private press was largely in favor of the opposition parties, in particular, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy

(CUD) while the Government press exhibited bias in favor of the ruling EPRDF (Markos, 2005; Yosef, 2005).

Therefore, the local media, Government and private, refer to international media sources to add credibility. The Government media tell their audience that the positive coverage, say about the election results, are not their mere assertions but they have got favorable recognition in the international media and the international community at large. However, as international media seem to be usually critical, the Government press does not often find as many positive stories as it aspires.

The private media, on its part, could substantiate their criticisms or ‘negative’ reporting with supporting coverage from international sources. Even when they incorporate some positive developments, be it from international media or other foreign research sources, the private media often tend to present it in the background of details of assertions refuting the claims. In the “Politics of Livelihood” feature of *Addis Neger* (Oct. 31, 2009), for instance, the article mentioned international research works indicating economic growth only as a small part of its vast analysis emphasizing the little significance of such growth due to huge income disparity among the nation and unequal rate of growth across the various sectors of development such as infrastructure, agriculture and service.

If a quick comparison is to be made, however, it appears (this still needs more research) that the private media attempt to sometimes balance their use of positive and negative reporting on Ethiopia from international sources. This is most evident in the publishing of the election observation report of the Carter Center by the Government papers while they omitted the EU report which is more critical to the Government. The private weeklies (excluding *Addis Neger* which did not exist then) all ran the translated versions of both reports by the Carter Center and the EU Observation Mission in Ethiopia (EU-EOM). *Reporter* actually presented reflections of opposition leaders and a Government spokesperson together with the Carter Center’s report in particular.

7.7 The World beyond the Conventional Mass Media

Today's world is increasingly communicating through more means than the mass media. Information from transnational organizations such as the World Bank, IMF, the UN are now available not just through the media but they are also directly mediated by the organizations themselves through their own websites. In effect, such sources have become channels of information that both the media and interested individuals can easily access.

The Ethiopian media outlets are making such venues a good part of the source of their information. *Addis Neger*, in particular, largely based its feature articles more on reports of such transnational institutions as well as Western university studies than conventional international media. In this regard, the paper has created an avenue of international socio-political discourse in that, through its extensive use of sources outside the local milieu, it has sought to provide discussions on Ethiopia as seen within the global context of communication and research.

Similar to the international media sources, research outcomes and reports of international non-mass media sources are often used for their positive aspects by Government media while they are used by most private media for their critical notes suggesting some failure or weaknesses of the Government.

7.8 Counterattacking International Media and Other Transnational Organizations

Journalists' attitudes toward international media are diverse. Some accuse them to the extreme of their deliberately demeaning Ethiopia remaining true to the terrible image they have imprinted in the minds of their audiences. Others believe reporting the negative is the nature of journalism. So the international media are doing their job. Still others acknowledge the negative frame within which they believe Ethiopia is often portrayed in the international media because they think there is little that is positive about the country. Whatever attitudinal differences they exhibit, they have

one thing in common; they take the international media seriously in their own way. As a result, Government journalists are busy launching counterattacks, as one respondent put it, nearly against all negative accounts on Ethiopia reported by international media and other organizations such as the Human Rights Watch. Within the period I selected for analysis, *Addis Zemen*, for instance, severely criticized *Reuters* for its news on alleged jailing and beating of opposition supporters (Oct. 30, 2005). Labeled as a mouthpiece of the opposition, International media whose programming is based on the affairs of Ethiopia such as the *Voice of America* (VOA, Amharic) and *Deutsche Welle* (DW, Amharic) are approached by the Government newspapers even with more hostility (Oct. 31, 2005). In effect, although the Government media do not often publish critical international media accounts on Ethiopia, they react to them with their gross denial of allegations and attempts of nullifying these allegations or at least expression of their position as regards claims of international media reporting, and so on. Therefore, if not always a source of information for its press, international media news and analyses are often capable of causing alarm to the Government, thereby counter reacting through its media outlets.

7.9 Conclusion

The international media outlets are often used as a source by the private press partly because they have better access to some types of information and partly because it is better to allude to their coverage as a shield for matters of political sensitivity. Also, the private press finds more relevance to the international media sources when their content often throws some negative light on the doings of the Government. Related to this is that most of the private press strives to achieve more credibility by substantiating its criticism of the Government with content from international media sources. In a way, the overall ‘negativity’ of international news on Ethiopian politics has found a place in local private press journalism as the latter seems to embrace a broader agenda of criticizing Government for which it attempts to substantiate with international news sources.

The Government press is generally hostile to international media sources as they are not so relevant for the agenda set by the Government along the lines of promoting national policies and affecting audiences through continuous praise of Government activities. Perhaps, the non-mass media sources such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank could be regarded as more friendly sources for the Government press owing to their claims of growth and development in Ethiopia.

The importance of international media sources for local journalism, however, should not be overemphasized as coverage on Ethiopia appears to be generally very small. Perhaps the increasing access to international media outlets may have contributed more to standardizing and professionalizing newspaper and television format and programming than providing access to local information. Still, the intensification of flows and extended social relations in the present world, as claimed by globalists, would definitely make it possible for local journalists to improve the quality of their reporting. One basic problem with the theory of globalization, at least in the context of this study, seems that the discrepancies between the rich and poor worlds in terms of enjoying the freedom of access to information and that of expression has remained intact that globalization may be unable to influence local systems so as to make them compatible with global communication.

With regard to international news flow, the dominance of Western media for sources of information still remains much more important than the counter-flow of regional media products. As a result, media outlets such as the BBC, CNN and the Western news agencies still have a relatively more prominence in local media in Ethiopia than, for instance, Al Jazeera. However, the small coverage of Ethiopia by these Western media as well as the limiting circumstances in the local media environment that makes it not so easy to maximize the use of international media sources on the part of the local press at large.

Chapter Eight

Summary and Conclusions

The study has attempted to map the working environment for local journalists in Ethiopia. It has also sought to demonstrate the relevance of international media sources to the local affairs reporting of newspapers in Ethiopia. It inquires how and in what situations these sources are used by selected newspapers having relatively bigger circulations and coverage of the country's political affairs. Mainly, the 2005 election period was selected for newspaper content analysis in order to find material lending itself to political sensitivity. Besides, the period drew more international media attention to cover the initially most competitive elections in the country's history that unfortunately had to end up becoming most violent and hugely disputed. Recent developments with regard to the local media environment and the use of international media sources were also documented through the analysis of post-2005 legislations and content from *Addis Neger*. This admittedly posed a methodological challenge for the analysis stands outside the time frame (2005). Still, it was found useful in revealing current situations which of course developed as a consequence of the 2005 elections. Data was also obtained through in-depth interviews held with journalists and editors of the selected papers. The themes of the interviews emphasized the respondents' perception and practical challenges of the environment in which they carry out their activities. In that relation, they were also asked as to how relevant international media reporting on Ethiopia is as source of information for their coverage of local politics. The significance of international media sources was also investigated through qualitative content analysis of the newspapers for a rough period of three months after the elections except for one of the newspapers for which sample was taken from recent issues to see current situations of sourcing.

I briefly discussed four theories of communication, namely *agenda-setting*, *framing*, *news flow* and *globalization*. The *agenda-setting* theory basically asserts that the media are able to influence public opinion particularly when their agenda appeals to the existing experiences of individuals or groups of audience. The engagement of the Government press in Ethiopia in continuously promoting Government policies and initiatives apparently aims to change attitudes

of the public in the manner that it appreciates these policies and activities and cooperate for their materialization. Success in affecting change in the public, however, depends on whether these items in the Government agenda are perceived by the public as relevant and true to life.

The theory of *framing* was mainly cited in relation to the opinions of local journalists who view international media coverage on Ethiopia as imaging the country in a negative frame. Some journalists working with the Government press argue that this negative framing is a deliberate practice in which the international media would indulge to sustain the global image they have created ever since the Great Famine in 1974/5. Private journalists, on the other hand, generally posit that negativity relates to the nature of news more than anything else, and that is what we experience in daily television and press news.

In the discussion on *news flow* theory, I have attempted to indicate that despite emerging counter-flow of information from other parts of the world, the West's domination in the flow of information is evident even in the sources from which Ethiopian newspapers access news. In the process, news seems to be appropriated to the needs and interests of the 'top-dog' nations even while covering local events in Africa. The *globalization* thesis has been approached from the perspective of its assertions that the world is experiencing increasing convergence. Owing to the advancement of information and communication technologies, journalism in developing nations may have emulated a certain degree of quality programming and formatting from the international media. Globalization may also have facilitated a better to information from global/international media. However, changes in relation to gaining access to local information and enjoying freedom of the press seem to be more dependent on the local systems of governance. Globalization rather seems to lack the means to affect change in these systems. In this regard, there appears to be a marked importance of the nation state in the face of globalization.

Findings of the study basically indicate that although the legal environment for the Ethiopian press embodies provisions that grant freedom of expression and the right to access information, practical challenges such as lack of political commitment to implement these provisions seem to govern journalistic engagement more than legislations. As a consequence, both Government and private press journalists and editors admit that their professional desire to practice independent journalism is hampered by journalists being cautious over what kind of content they could publish without facing trouble. This would lead to the practice of self-censorship not always to stay away from legal liability but to avoid confrontation with authorities. The task of the Government press, therefore, seems to praise socio-political and economic performance of the state with little critical reporting. The editorial policy and other working documents of the Government media regard such functions of the press as 'Development Journalism'. They aim to promote the economic, political and development agendas so persistently, and they may assume that the public appreciates and will eventually be influenced by them to bring about a positive change of mindset. If not for their occasional positive reporting on Ethiopia, international media sources are not very relevant to the Government press as such. Given their allegiance to the political leadership, the Government media have much less trouble accessing official information.

The private media mainly criticize Government malpractices and poor performances in various fields. In the process, they also respond to the limits of political pressure in such a manner that they either refer to international sources including the media or avoid reporting highly politically sensitive issues altogether. International media sources are particularly important for the private press to gain indirect access to official information at a higher level and to take refuge in these sources for matters having potential to cause undesired consequences such as intimidation and legal suits. Given their seemingly negative framing of the country's socio-political situation, the international media are indeed more useful for the private press engaged in criticizing the Government, albeit not necessarily doing critical journalism.

Overall, the study first provided a brief background on Ethiopia's socio-political context to understand the current challenges the nation has faced in its endeavor to enjoy transition to

democracy. The problems in the development of the media in Ethiopia are a component of a tradition of authoritarianism that prevailed quite for a long time.

It has been attempted to show how recent developments along the encouraging legislations on freedom of the press and that of expression have been met with practical challenges of Government coercion, political polarization (to which the media are at times the main catalyst) and lack of professionalism. Hostilities between especially the private press and the Government are sometimes very sharp. The private press may generally be dubbed more friendly to political oppositions. The Government press is often uncritical of the state, and it actually appears to do nothing less than serving as a Government mouthpiece promoting the national agendas as set by the Government so as to influence public opinion.

In the process, the international media and other global sources of information are used by both types of press in differing situations. The Government press sometimes makes allusions to support its claims of social, political and economic development under the current leadership. In most other instances, such sources are simply attacked for their 'negative' reporting with official statements denying the news and views by the international media outlets. The private media largely find more relevance in international media sources as such 'negative' coverage exhibits more proximity to their own nature of reporting which is often framed within the task of launching criticism of Government policies and performance.

One common perception is that both Government and private media journalists seem to be of the opinion that international media reporting on Ethiopia is largely negative. However, the private media journalists do not seem to see any problem with the tendency because, for some, it is a reflection of reality and, for others, negativity has to do with the nature of journalism. For Government journalists, nevertheless, the negative coverage is just a consistent frame within which these media would put Ethiopia no matter what the reality on the ground appears to be.

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Appendix I

Interview Guide for Editors/Journalists

1 Warm-up Questions

- i. How's work?
- ii. How do you like your work as an editor/reporter?
- iii. How long have you been here?
- iv. What were you before you became an editor/reporter here?

2 Topical Questions

2.1 On job description and challenges

- i. What're your responsibilities as an editor/reporter of the newspaper?
- ii. How do you view the freedom you exercise within the organization in relation to what you do?
- iii. Do you see significant differences between being a government media editor and a private media editor in Ethiopia?
- iv. What major challenges are there while working as a private/government editor/journalist in Ethiopia?
- v. How do you often address these problems?

2.2 On news sources for local stories

- i. What major sources of information do you use to write your news stories?
- ii. Are there times when you use local news agencies/ local media as sources of information for local events or situations?
- iii. What are the reasons for using or not using local media sources for local events and situations?

2.3 On international media sources

- i. How do you generally view international media in relation to their coverage of Ethiopia?
- ii. How important do you think are international media sources for your reporting?
- iii. Are there times when you use international media sources to report on locally happening events or situations?
- iv. What basic rationale do you attach to using or not using these sources to report on local events and situations?
- v. Can you think of any general categories of news that lend themselves to the essential use of international media sources?

2.4 On access to information

- i. How do you generally evaluate the issue of access to information in the country?
- ii. What is your opinion on the recently ratified press law in relation to its embodiments of rights of information access as well as freedom of expression?
- iii. Tell me if you draw any relation between any tendency to use international media sources for local events and the issue of access to information or/and freedom of expression in the country.

2.5 On defining moments

- i. Do you recall any defining moment in the country's political life in which the way you do things as a journalist has changed significantly? (Mention may be made by the researcher of the 2005 elections if need be)
- ii. What has specifically changed, if it has, in terms of the use of international media sources?
- iii. How do you generally define the current media environment in the country?

2.6 On source preferences

- i. Are there any international media sources that you often prefer over others?
- ii. If yes, why?

2.7 On international correspondents based in Ethiopia

- i. How do you view your position as a local media as opposed to international correspondents here in terms of access to government held information?
- ii. Are there times when you use reports by these correspondents due to your problem of direct access to information?