

## *International Journal of Scientific Research and Reviews*

### **Ethiopian Journalism, the Regime's Mouthpiece: A Brief Review of Media History in Ethiopia**

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#### **ABSTRACT:**

This paper briefly analyses a hundred and more years of media development in Ethiopia. A critical document overview and analysis of the available literature on the history of media in Ethiopia was conducted. Accordingly, it was observed that in its history of a hundred and more years, media in Ethiopia has been far from playing its watch-dog role. Ethiopian media has almost always served the dictatorial regimes of various times. It also was learned that government media dominated Ethiopian media history. Particularly formal private print media emerged after EPRDF, the present government came to power beginning of 1990s. Despite the claiming of various press rights, declarations and bills of almost all the regimes, the Ethiopian media still remains in its old fashion, serving as the mouthpiece of the incumbent government. Things have been worse particularly to the private press of the country which is characterized with a dramatic history of rising and falling. The current government has been cruel towards the private press; it has been continuously closing newspapers, arresting their editors, harassing and imprisoning journalists and others who seem to criticize it. Consequently, most newspapers that flourished abruptly have now disappeared in the manner they came to existence thus only a handful of private newspapers remain in the present media market of the country.

**KEY WORDS:** Media freedom, watch-dog, regime, press bill, mouthpiece

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In contrast to Ethiopia being an ancient state, the history of media in the country is relatively short with only a little more than hundred years. It seemed that the long history of having its own alphabet and rich documentations of old scriptures, particularly religious ones, did not help much in introducing or transferring means of communication to a higher state. This, however, does not mean that a means of communication did not exist in the country. It is a common understanding that mass communication is a universal thing. In other words, all human societies have always owned a means of mass communication. There might be a variation in the type and level of sophistication of the media they use.

In the case of Ethiopia also, there has always been traditional means of mass communication used whether at community level for everyday social events (weddings, funerals, etc) or at government level used for announcements<sup>1</sup>. When it comes to a proper and modern mass communication, however, Ethiopia can be considered as one of the countries where media was introduced late, slightly little more than only a century ago.

## **2. MEDIA DURING THE EMPIRE (–1974)**

In Ethiopia, a formal newspaper production began during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I with a couple of publications. Modern mass media, however, was introduced in Ethiopia during his predecessor, Emperor Mennelik II, around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (a hundred and more years ago). Mennelik's period was one of the magnificent periods of Ethiopian history. Emperor Mennelik championed over the Italians at Adwa in 1896 in a one-day battle. Mennelik as a leader was a visionary modernizer. He introduced modern infrastructure to his country. He built hospitals, postal and telecommunication networks, banks, railways, roads, electricity, running water etc. He played an important contribution in establishing modern education and communication services including modern press in Ethiopia<sup>1,10</sup>.

The introduction of the print medium in Ethiopia was mostly irregular, foreign-inspired and principally devoted to religious commitments<sup>3</sup>. Some trace the beginning of the print medium in Ethiopia to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century following the establishment of printing press in 1863 at Massawa (Eritrea) by a Lazarist missionary named Father Lorenzo Biancheri. Only a while later also, another small printing press was founded at Kankullo near Massawa in 1885<sup>1,10</sup>.

The name and the year of the first newspaper is different in different literature for the exact or the right name and year of the earliest newspaper publication is uncertain. However, if we speak of general sense, the first Ethiopian newspaper introduced in Ethiopia was possibly the weekly newspaper *La Semained'Ethiopie* (The Ethiopian Sower) around 1900's<sup>4,5,10</sup>. It was mainly a French

language newspaper (occasionally Amharic) published and authored by a Franciscan missionary Father Bern and living in Harar city in the eastern part of the country<sup>6,1</sup>. It was primarily made of health information, particularly campaigns against leprosy.

The other early Ethiopian newspaper is *Aemro* ('intelligence'). It came to existence in the relatively newly founded capital, Addis Ababa in 1900 alternatively 1901 or 1902<sup>4,7,10</sup>. Some view this publication as officially the earliest and first Ethiopian newspaper. It was a four page weekly newspaper. *Aemro*, which was also the first Amharic newspaper, covered mainly palace and church topics. Its first volumes had a circulation of 24 handwritten copies, but the circulation grew to more than 200 copies after it began to be duplicated on the new printing machine in Addis Ababa in 1905 until it ceased publication in 1906. Following its revival in 1924, the paper continued appearing for several years to come. *Aemro* was marked by a large degree of government control, patented by the fact that its name was coined by the Emperor himself, Mennelik II<sup>1,6</sup>.

Still other early publications are *blatta* Gebre Egziabher's exaltation sheets whose exact name still remained unknown. These were reports of satirical poems handwritten on sheets, which were duplicated in 50 copies and circulated weekly in the courtyards of the Emperor before the year 1900 in a newspaper resembling format<sup>1</sup>.

More and more early publication newspapers continued emerging in the years followed particularly between the years 1912 and 1915 including the weekly newspapers like *Melekete Selam* (Message of Peace) and *Yetor Wore* (War News) which appeared in Amharic in 1914 at the start of WWI, *Le Courtier d'Ethiopie* ('The Ethiopian Messenger) in French and several others<sup>1,3,4,7</sup>. Anyway, whichever publication is regarded as the first Ethiopian newspaper, each of the early newspaper publications emphasized features that have characterized the Ethiopian mass media to different degrees since its conception including international influence (*Le Semained'Ethiopie*), government allegiance (*Aemro*), and political criticism (*Gebre Egziabher's weekly sheets*)<sup>8</sup>.

In the year 1923, the first printing press was established by Emperor Haile Selassie I in Addis Ababa which later came to be known as *Berhanena Selam* Printing Press ('light and peace'). *Berhanena Selam* Printing Press is the largest printing press even in the present Ethiopia. Its establishment in the country represented a landmark in the history of the Ethiopian print media in particular and mass communication and journalism in general. In fact, there were other various types of printing machines and equipments that had been introduced and planted in Ethiopia/Eritrea earlier than *Berhanena Selam*: Massawa 1863, Keren 1879, Kankullo 1885, Addis Ababa 1893, and Harar 1905<sup>1</sup>. However, the overall technical quality of the printing machines was very poor and hence the machines were not in a good capacity to print newspaper publications for larger circulations<sup>1,6</sup>.

As a result, *Berhanena Selam* Printing Press was built with modern machinery imported from Germany. Despite the fact that this printing press was initially aimed at producing and publishing religious books, it was soon that it expanded itself to the newspaper publication business. Accordingly, the printing press started the first issue of *Berhanena Selam* newspaper which appeared in print in 1925 right after the establishment of the press. *Berhanena Selam* was an Amharic weekly newspaper to which Emperor Haile Selassie himself crafted the name<sup>1</sup>.

Distinguished from *Aemro* which emphasized on foreign news, *Berhanena Selam* was a semi-official periodical that concentrated on internal affairs<sup>1</sup>. This newspaper was a pioneer newspaper in serving as forum for the few educated Ethiopians of that period<sup>1,9</sup>. In other words, despite the fact that it remained loyal to the king, *Berhanena Selam* assertively functioned as a forum for the progressive ideas among young intellectuals in the 1920s and 30s<sup>1,10</sup>.

After the establishment of the printing press in Ethiopia, the press as whole was growing steadily. A number of smaller publications continued coming to the scene at that time including titles in European languages such as English, French, Greek, and Italian. Some of the major newspapers from 1923-1936 were; *Aithiopicos Kosmos* ('Ethiopian World') in Greek in 1925; *L'Ethiopia Commerciale* in French in 1932; *Ye-Ethiopia Demts* ('Voice of Ethiopia) in 1934 in Amharic but silenced by the Italian aggression; the political weekly *Atbia Kokeb* (The Morning Star') and quarterly *Kasate Berhan* ('The Light Giver') in 1935 in Amharic but short lived due to the Italian occupation (1936-1941)<sup>1,9,11</sup>.

Consequently, the government was obliged to introduce the first press law in 1934 that mandated the publishers to get permission from the government bureau called *Hagere Gizat* (Ministry of Interior)<sup>1,10</sup>. Emperor Haile Selassie I was also forced to grant the right to establish a private press for the publication of books and newspapers, a proclamation to publish newspapers and books. Procedures to be followed in applying for permission to establish or publish and a list of penalties in the event of violation were included and provided in this proclamation.

This fast progressing press development in Ethiopia was interrupted or at least slowed during the five years of Italian occupation of the country. It was, however, right before the Italian occupation in 1935 that radio broadcasting came to Ethiopia. Radio as a new medium was allowed only a year of operation as Italian forces took over the governing structures and practically banned all the local media functioning in the country.

As a result, an underground press arose and played exceedingly essential role in rallying the Ethiopian forces in exile during the occupation period by distributing underground newspapers printed abroad<sup>1,6</sup>. *Bandirachin* (re-named later *Sendeq Alamachin*- Our Flag) a bi-weekly Amharic newspaper was one of these underground publications. After five years of ceaseless guerrilla fighting

and with the help of the British force, the Italian force ultimately evacuated the country completely in 1941. The return of the Ethiopian government in 1941 consequently brought with it a new beginning in the country's media history<sup>8</sup>.

Accordingly, different press as well as broadcast media started appearing in a new manner. The government launched *Addis Zemen*- an Amharic newspaper in 1941 that has remained the most important state-owned publication in the country ever since. The radio network, Addis Ababa Voice of Ethiopia resurrected and began broadcasting in 1942 by becoming the only radio station not established by colonial authorities in Africa<sup>1,6</sup>. However, television had to wait for more fifty years to come to Ethiopia since the beginning of the first press in the country. The first television signals in Ethiopia were transmitted in 1963. However, the Ethiopian Television launched permanent broadcasting a year and half later in 1964<sup>1,8</sup>. The establishment of the Ethiopian News Agency and The Ethiopian Herald- a weekly English-language newspaper in 1943 (daily since 1958) for the international community dwelling in Ethiopia by the government was one of the outstanding achievements in the post-occupation period<sup>1,10</sup>.

This new period for the Ethiopian media also brought with it a more systematic and detailed censorship to the Ethiopian media. For this, in the early times of the post-occupation period a censorship board was established under the Press and Information Office in the Ministry of the Pen<sup>1,8</sup>. In this respect, in the three decades of the post-occupation period (1941-1974), there were several legal measures and decrees taken with the intention of supporting and encouraging the development of the Ethiopian media. The decrees of 1942 and 1944, the Revised Constitution of 1955, the Penal Code of 1957 and the draft constitution of 1974 were the major changes introduced with related to the aforementioned issue<sup>1,9</sup>. In this post-occupation period, a large number of both daily and weekly state-owned as well as few private newspapers appeared though their coverage and circulation was restricted to the elite leadership mainly top bureaucrats and members of the urban-based literate communities<sup>1,10</sup>.

On the whole, the media that prevailed during the empire can be generalized as authoritarian in character. It was simply an instrument of the state. It only praised the throne and the king. Therefore, the media was almost wholly monopolized and operated under the control of the state<sup>10</sup>. Few remaining newspapers were published by pro-government organizations including the Ethiopian Patriotic Association and the Orthodox Church, assumed as the backbone of the monarchy<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, particularly government-owned newspapers almost always toned and resonated to the interest of the ruling power in the political atmosphere of the country. In other words, they had to comply with the direction from the top<sup>1</sup>. The significant challenge in this period was the authorities

feared the power of media and failed to see its positive contribution which is the essential potential of any given medium<sup>1</sup>.

### **3. MEDIA DURING THE DERG REGIME (1974-1991)**

Derg (refers to the military ‘committee’) removed Emperor Haile Selassie from the throne in 1974 following severe public protests in different parts of the country against the Emperor. Accordingly, it suspended the imperial constitution and dissolved the old parliament. Three months later immediately after overthrowing the Emperor, the Derg regime also announced socialism as its principal ideology.

In the first two or three years following the regime change, which can also be referred as the transitional period of the Derg regime, people as well as the press were allowed to exercise their freedom of expression among themselves and using the media<sup>1</sup>. Despite the fact that it became the worst regime regarding media independence sooner, these first years of Derg showed potential and there were growing expectations of freedom of the press. The censorship that existed on the state-owned media during the imperial regime was suddenly lifted. The press as well suddenly found itself to be free and began to exercise its freedom of expression elatedly thus began to report fairly and accurately. Government print media swiftly began to run opinionated topics on which media people criticized about the lack of media freedom and emerging intellectuals and opposition groups freely reflected their views on national issues of crucial importance like democracy, land tenure policy and governance system<sup>1</sup>.

It was also for the first time since the inception of media in Ethiopia that journalists were able to freely report from the parliament and brought famine, illiteracy and other social problems to the light. As part of the elated freedom of expression during this relief period, the old Empire received some of the harsh critics from the media which would have been unlikely if it were during the Empire’s period. Ethiopian media consumers in general, were for the first time able to hear and read something different from the old monotonous government propaganda. This part of media period as a result became to be referred as “the golden age of journalism” in Ethiopia<sup>1,9,10,12</sup>.

Unfortunately, this golden day free media climate did not last long. Instead, the darkest chapters of Ethiopian journalism started looming as the Derg Regime began to show its true face after consolidating its power. Despite its promise of a civilian government, Derg eventually decided to continue in power and assumed a total control of almost everything including the media. The strong revolutionary group of this Derg Regime started exploiting the state media as a means of its political strategy. For this, it used the media initially to denounce and humiliate the Empire Regime, and then to strengthen the power of its military government<sup>10,12</sup>.

Derg changed almost all the media outlets into a machine of propaganda and in effect closed every opening for media independence. The official media of Ethiopia, free and open just a while ago, was abruptly turning into a communist media dressing socialist attire. In other words, the Ethiopia media found itself abruptly embracing and echoing communist ideologies.

Derg, unlike the Haile Selassie regime, followed a clear political and economic policy which obviously was dictatorship and command economy based on socialist principles<sup>1</sup>. Sooner or later, to the media it became clear that crossing the given red-line would be taken as anti-revolutionary and hence would get oneself into trouble. Far more severe censorship was reintroduced in 1976. After nationalizing all the 17 media outlets that existed in 1974, the Derg regime restructured and put them under the new Ministry of Information and National Guidance. Also, in 1975, Derg also deported correspondent Western journalists<sup>8</sup>.

Several restrictions that the Derg regime passed touched even the newsrooms of the media outlets. Accordingly, for the common reporters, reading international news outlets (like Time, International Herald Tribune, and Newsweek) became strictly forbidden<sup>13</sup>. Any journalist, knowingly or unknowingly deviated from expectations, he/she would be considered as anti-revolutionary and ultimately jailed. Consequently, the newsrooms of the media during the Derg regime were affected with fear and tension. This action in turn, in one way or another, restricted press freedom and the freedom of the larger population of the country by making it only selectively informed about newsworthy events, to the extent that even important news about their own country published in the international media rarely came to their knowledge<sup>1,8</sup>.

It did not take very long for the Derg regime to become the sole proprietor of the media hence information as it was able to create and consolidate a highly centralized media system accompanied with a draconian censorship<sup>1</sup>. In the mean time, the regime continued nationalizing and silencing almost every available media in the country.

Newspapers and periodicals that were thought to hold a stand contrary to that of the regime became victims and were jailed or went underground for being anti-revolutionary. For instance, publications like *Democracia*, *Labader*, *Struggle*, *Ye Sefiw Hizb Dimts* and others that political parties and other movements published were forced by the regime to go underground publication<sup>3</sup>. Sooner or later, the Derg regime eradicated almost all of these and similar newspapers. By doing so, the regime ruined and sent all the hopes and expectations of democracy, media independency and free expression to the void.

Some scholars argue that there was no any change brought and contribution made during the Derg era in the process of modern media development in Ethiopian. For instances, the introduction of colour television in 1984 was the only advancement in the Ethiopian media during the



Dergregime<sup>14</sup>. Contrary to their finding, there was actually some effort made to develop the Ethiopian modern media; however, the media development occurred during this regime was more by way of restructuring, reshuffling and expanding the media agencies that existed during the Empire regime rather than creating a new ones<sup>1</sup>. Another and important contribution of the Derg era was to give the common citizen access to the media which was an essential change in contrast the elitist use of the media by imperial regime<sup>1</sup>. In other words, the media attributed the lifestyle of the common person and gave airtime and spaces to enable them participate. This, of course, was possible only as long as the views of participants were not crossing the red-line of the revolution.

Despite several publications the regime eliminated or sent to underground, there were few newspapers published during the 17 years that the Derg regime stayed in power. Beyond the permanent state-controlled *Addis Zemen* and *The Ethiopian Herald*, there were party-owned (ruling party) newspapers including *Yezareyitu Ethiopia* ('Ethiopia Today'), *SertoAder* ('Labourer'), and *Meskerem* ('September')<sup>15</sup> which of course were owned by the ruling party.

Generally, during the Derg regime, the military government became the only information manager. In other words, the flow of information in the media was entirely from top to bottom. As a result, the media outlets were used as the right hand of the government most precisely, the regime's mouthpiece<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, radio, television and Amharic newspapers were functional as organs through which government proclamations were made. In the mean time, the media was abused and ended up to be highly devotee and a massive authoritarian socialist propaganda machine until the fall of the Derg regime in 1991<sup>3</sup>.

#### **4. MEDIA DURING THE ETHNIC FEDERALISM (1992- )**

The fall of the military regime with all its huge army in 1991 was unprecedented event in the history of Ethiopia. It was the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) which is governing the country at present that came to power throwing the military regime in the mentioned year. In the same year, EPRDF issued a transitional government charter. This charter, built in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), awarded fundamental rights to the people of Ethiopia including freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of association, freedom of peaceful protest and others<sup>1,3,8</sup>.

The people in general had been demanding freedom of speech especially starting from the late post-occupation period though never provided. As a result, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TDF) later EPRDF did not take long to react to this long overdue demand of the Ethiopian public and it quickly promised freedom of the media almost immediately following its coming to



power<sup>1,8</sup>. Furthermore, numerous succeeding law reforms were carried out including laws having a particular relevance to the Ethiopian media.

This early period of EPRDF period brought a land-marking change with it to the Ethiopian media. It was a period in which an Ethiopian government introduced several press freedom bills for the first time in the history of the country and history of its media as well. It was when the 1991 transitional government charter was issued that the TGE passed the proclamation of press freedom. The bill that the new government introduced clearly defined the function of the state media. Accordingly, it gave the state media an essential responsibility accompanied with the expectation of unbiased news reporting and disclosure of government shortcomings. The state media during this period through the proclamation was restructured under the Ministry of Information<sup>1,8</sup>.

Another land-marking measure that the TGE proclaimed was the 1992 press freedom bill which was given a much more emphasis. At the time, it was an essential step taken in the history of the Ethiopian media policy. Despite the fact that it had crucial limitations, the press law assured numerous rights related to a free media society. For instance, the respect and recognition of press freedom, prohibition of censorship and any restriction on the press, and guaranteeing the right to free information access were clearly stated in the proclamation document. Part of this bill further guaranteed to any press or news agent including foreign correspondents, without any prejudice, the right to freely gather information in the country. For this, it assured right to obtain and access to information; the right to seek and the right to reply, and the duty and responsibility of government bodies to cooperate with the press in this regard<sup>1,3</sup>.

This introduction of press law in Ethiopia for the first time by the Ethiopian government was marked by two important principles: guaranteeing the right for any citizen to establish a media outlet and abolishing prepublication censorship. Similarly, the transitional government charter also substantiated this change in its proclamation No. 1/1991 and No. 6/1991 which was also confirmed with much more details in the press proclamation in No. 34/1992<sup>3</sup>.

All these dramatic changes in the early period of EPRDF created promising impressions and were perceived and spotted by many as the signs of the coming of a fresh period of openness and democratization in Ethiopia<sup>3,10</sup>. Particularly compared to the harsh nature of media governance of the previous Derg regime, these valuable changes made were considered as a major breakthrough in the history of Ethiopian median governance<sup>16</sup>.

On the other hand, some critical researches implied that the motivation behind this massive move made towards relatively liberal press law was not totally meant clean. It was inspired by the new government's purpose and ambition of creating a positive image and hence generating local and international support to itself<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, although the government shuttered down the censorship

department that was functioning under the information during the Derg regime; conversely, there were devoted government people assigned in every government media outlets who might censored any information before it was broadcasted or published<sup>1</sup>.

The national Constitution that came later in 1995 as well even in a much more emphasized manner validated important press and free speech rights under article 29<sup>3</sup>. This article clearly verified avoidance of censorship by asserting that the media should operate freely and responsibly without censorship. Moreover, the Constitution, recognizing the role that free press can play in advancing democratic society, incorporated the right to open a free media outlet to citizens and contained succeeding media related proclamations (freedom of expression without interference, prohibition of censorship, access to information, legal protection of private media, etc)<sup>1,3,8</sup>.

The 1995 National Constitution of EPRDF yet, was not the first and the only constitution that promised freedom of media and expression. Ethiopian governments in each of their respective periods enshrined a provision in their constitutions (the 1955 constitution, the abandoned 1974 constitution, the 1987 constitution) assuring press freedom, at least in varying levels. Nonetheless, containing such revered terms in a constitution all by itself cannot ensure this fundamental human right; putting in action only can, but, as was demonstrated earlier, this is what is still missing<sup>1,8</sup>. The new press law, with all of its controversies and limitations, was imposed for the next sixteen years only to be replaced by a more draconian revised version press law in 2008<sup>1</sup>.

One way or another, whatever kind of press existed during the previous two regimes, all of them, with few exceptions, acted as the mouthpieces of the respected governments. Beginning in the early days of the 1990s, however, hopes for free and independent press started to be emerging reality<sup>15</sup>. A distinctive nature of the Ethiopian media since the 1991 Press Bill is the explosion of the print media both in type and number of circulation. A huge number of privately owned newspapers appeared. Various kinds of periodicals together with party and government newspapers started to be published<sup>10,18</sup>.

During the succeeding five years after the Press Bill (1992-1997), Ministry of Information registered and licensed 385 publications from which 265 were newspapers and 120 were magazines<sup>15,19</sup>. On the ground nonetheless, only a small number of newspapers and magazines were able to really be published and made it to the news market and more than half if these registered publication shut down during this same period. Despite this, there were still several alternative newspapers published. In the capital of the country- Addis Ababa, for instance, there were around 20 newspapers to choose between as they all were published on the same day<sup>3</sup>.

The Ethiopian press continued flourishing during the ten years following the 1992 Press Bill. In this ten years period of media development and publication freedom in Ethiopia, it is documented that a total of 543 newspapers and 182 magazines were registered and licensed until 2001<sup>1,8,20</sup>. In fact, energized by the imminent press freedom, some publications did not wait for the proclamation of the press law to be issued in 1992. For instance, five magazines were sent to publishers for print and the first free newspaper, *Eyeta* came to existence five months before the actual Press Bill of 1992<sup>1,10</sup>. In 1994, however, Ethiopian newspaper development boosted and reached to its climax and a total of 128 publications were registered and published<sup>2,21</sup>.

In Ethiopia, since the Press bill of 1992, therefore, there have been a good number of government as well as privately owned publications. These publications in general, varied in many aspects including frequency, time of publication, circulation rate, target audience and achievements<sup>18</sup>. People from various angles of the Ethiopian community started participating in the newly opened press market. Accordingly, private newspapers and other publications were possessed by private companies including business people, communities, opposing political parties, or individual business persons.

The development of newspaper and other publications in the country also touched the government owned sector of press in Ethiopia. In this aspect, all the nine regional states and two administrative cities that were restructured after the 1995 national constitution have started their own publications. The federal government also has been publishing various newspapers and magazines through federal agencies particularly the Ethiopian Press Agency. The agency publishes four newspapers in four languages: Addis Zemen (Amharic daily), The Ethiopian Herald (English daily), Berissa (Oromi weekly) and Al-alem (Arabic weekly)<sup>4</sup>.

Press freedom in a democratic process, among many things, primarily entails the existence of alternative sources of information for readers in particular and the public in general<sup>22</sup>. In this regard, the development of media in Ethiopia particularly the private newspapers, was accompanied by both flaw and optimistic twinkles. To begin with, the flourishing Ethiopian press started functioning as an alternative source of information for the public playing a dominant significance in the efforts of building a democratic society to which informed citizen is the foundation<sup>22</sup>. Plus, the growing private press became a forum for the public to exercise their freedom of expressions<sup>5</sup>.

On the other hand, flourishing print media in countries that go through a free media state after long dictatorship on freedom of expression is a phenomenon that is documented well<sup>8</sup>. There has been a tendency that young and immature free media market to be unstable. In Ethiopia also, most of the new newspaper and magazine publications established following the 1992 Press Bill did not stay long. They, for one reason or another, vanquished in the manner they came to existence. While some

persisted for two or more years before folding, others were not lucky enough even to make to the publishers.

The Ethiopian media particularly the private press has been challenged throughout its development with a number of serious shortcomings since its inception. A large number of the private press has struggled and resumed to operate in a gravely severe financial situation. Because of the economic situation of the country and extremely limited middle income community, the chances of creating financial income from newspaper advertising are very rare. Government subsidizes public newspapers except partly limited finance from advertisements and subscribers<sup>23</sup>. Besides, especially the newly emerged private papers, which government newspapers also share, have suffered because of the inadequate unprofessional journalism practiced by their employees, the newsroom and papers themselves<sup>22</sup>. These challenges and drawbacks forced some of the newspapers to disappear and others limit their circulations to Addis Ababa- the capital of the country.

Private publications in several encounters were blamed guilty for their partisan and sensational contents which the government press also shared<sup>10</sup>. In addition, many employees working as journalists and media people go to the profession and the business taking it a job opportunity to make a living rather than interest and professional qualification. This in turn compromised the professionalism and journalistic principles of the print media<sup>22</sup>.

Many of these early EPRDF period private newspapers and other publications were commonly politically motivated<sup>8</sup>. This sector of the Ethiopian press was extremely unfriendly towards the new comer government. Most of these publications were seriously concerned about several of the political and economic strategies the new Ethiopian government followed including the ethnic-based federalism, revolutionary democracy ideology, and the official strategy followed towards Eritrea<sup>8</sup>.

Eventually, this lively media life started to be tackled by the EPRDF government. Newspapers and media centres were shut down, journalists, other media professionals and publishers were threatened and arrested massively. Consequently, in the 1990s, Ethiopia among African countries became a place where the highest rate of journalists imprisoned<sup>24</sup>.

Conversely, starting the end of 1990s till the early days of the 2005 national election, the media environment started getting better<sup>8</sup>. The EPRDF government suddenly eased and showed sympathy towards the private press<sup>16</sup>. The press in its turn demonstrated inclination towards practicing professional journalism and the overall journalistic quality was improved both in private and government owned media.

In this second episode of media development in Ethiopia during the EPRDF regime, many long lasting newspapers were registered and launched around the year 2000. The Amharic weekly

newspaper *Addis Admass* (December 1999), the two English language financial newspapers *Capital* (December 1998) and *Fortune* (May 2000), and *The Reporter* Amharic (1995) and English (1996) were the popular and most stable newspapers established during the second storm of media development in Ethiopia<sup>1,8</sup>.

Especially in the early days of the 2005 election, a fresh liveliness stormed the market of the Ethiopian media particularly the newspaper sector. Newspaper publication in the media market doubled only from 2003 to 2005<sup>25</sup>. Both government media and the private press entertained extensive freedoms in the campaign period and even on the very Election Day<sup>26</sup>. However, things took a dramatic turn following the opposition party CUD making unexpected win in the 2005 Ethiopian election despite the ruling party claimed the election results for itself. Next, opposition exploded in the streets of the capital-Addis Ababa and the security forces of the government used extensive violence and killed around 200 persons, wounded hundreds, and detained thousands<sup>26</sup>. Plus, 14 journalists and 100 members of opposition party members and supporter imprisoned for a longer period of time<sup>26</sup>.

Ultimately, this whole chaos created a huge hindrance against the private press that was freshly flourishing. A quit large number of publications were forced to terminate following the arrest of their editors or managers including *Addis Zena*, *Menelik*, *Meyisaw*, *Meznagna*, *Netsanet*, *Satenaw*, and *Seife Nebelbal*<sup>16</sup>. The termination of these newspapers was partly as the result of the nature of the poor journalistic quality they employed and the deficiency of the professional ethics they demonstrated<sup>27</sup>. On the other hand, a reality that can equally explain the closure of these newspapers is that in the late 1990s and aftermath of the 2005 election, the EPRDF government exerted all the severe pressure possible and carried intimidation, arrest and allegation against these private newspapers and their employee journalists<sup>8</sup>.

Around two years after the 2005 national election, various critical private newspapers again started coming up to the scene of the media market including the main appearances like *Awramba Times*, *Fiteh*, and *Addis Neger*<sup>28</sup>. Particularly the Amharic weekly newspaper *Addis Neger* was seriously critical of both the government and the opposition parties and was gaining readability among the educated community until it was hit by the next wave of government coercion in 2011 and 2012 together with rest of early mentioned newspapers.

The fall and the rise of newspaper publication and the print media during the EPRDF regime continued in this manner until eventually only a handful of private publications remained in the media market of the country. Similarly, the detention and imprisonment of journalists also resumed until it reached its climax between 2007 and 2012 which was severe than any African country<sup>8</sup>.

This malpractice of the government has been going from bad to worse including intimidation and imprisonment of journalists<sup>9,29</sup>. Plus, even in the current government, the media have also been used mainly as a government propaganda tools<sup>30</sup>. Division in the Ethiopian media is another phenomenon where the private press disproves the development efforts the government claims, and the government press proves and covers in favour of government claims, efforts and activities<sup>31</sup>.

Eventually, the situation of the print media in Ethiopia shrunk from bad to worse. It does not seem the near future is promising neither. In this regard and in many other ways, the year 2016 has not been kind to Ethiopia and its people. It hit the country with several calamities including widespread popular unrest, the El Nino Drought Emergency in many parts of the country, the cholera outbreak and stampede at Oromo cultural festival. And ultimately, there has come the declaration of the State of Emergency in October 2016 in the entire country.

Despite the constitution and law providing for freedom of speech and press, the state of emergency regulations included restrictions on these rights. Accordingly, government authorities have harassed, arrested, detained, charged, and prosecuted journalists and others perceived as dangerous to the government, which in turn has been creating an environment of self-censorship<sup>32</sup>.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The Ethiopian media compared to its history of more than a hundred years, it is still at its early stage. It has yet not started playing its watch-dog role or being a voice to the voiceless mainly because of the strict control from the regimes of the country. Instead, it has been almost always the right hand and mouthpiece of any regime that came to power.

Starting from its appearance in the governance of the country, the Ethiopian media has been owned and managed by the regime in power. If we consider the media that existed during the empire as instance, one can generalize that it was in many ways nothing but authoritarian in any of its features. The media during this period was a simple utility of the empire state. The only role it played was to honour empire throne and the king himself. Therefore, the media functioned and operated under the total control and direction of the king and his empire.

When the king was made to leave the throne by and the next regime (Derg), things got even worse to the development of the Ethiopian media. Derg officially declared there is no such thing as private at all let alone private media. It nationalized almost everything that belonged to individual citizens including private properties. The media once again became under the dictatorial control. Accordingly, Derg became the only manager of media and media information. Consequently, all the mass media that existed during the Derg regime were busy serving as the propaganda mouthpieces of the regime.

During the current regime also, despite the encouraging boost of private newspaper following EPRDF assuming power, the continuity of newspapers in the media market of the country is never guaranteed. In other words, as soon as the media starts flourishing and begins exercising its freedom of expression, then the government takes measure and the media all of a sudden diminishes and goes to void. Anyways, the fall and the rise of media particularly the newspaper publication and the print media during the EPRDF regime continued in this manner until eventually only a handful of private publications remained in the present media market of the country.

## **6. FUTURE PROSPECTS**

Media in Ethiopia particularly during the Imperial and the Derg regimes was not as developed and there were very limited media outlets especially compared to the media development during the EPRDF regime. The researchers believe the reviews made here in this paper are not enough particularly concerning media development during the EPRDF regime. Therefore, maybe future researchers need to focus on this point and dig deeper into the media development and function during this mentioned period.

Moreover, it was observed that most of the articles and books reviewed in this paper focused on specific topics such election, gender, HIV/AIDS, etc and the media. Therefore, more comprehensive study that comprises broader study is needed in the future in order to clearly illustrate the situation of Ethiopian journalism in particular and media in general.

This paper is a brief overview of the Ethiopian media in particular. However, researchers can carry out similar reviews be it media in the Horn of Africa or Africa in general. Doing so may help shade light to real nature and function of media in Ethiopia, Horn Africa and ultimately Africa.

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