

Addis Ababa University
School of Graduate Studies
School of Journalism and Communication

A Political History of the Private Press in Democratic Ethiopia 1991–2007

Hallelujah Lulie Wondimu

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Hallelujah Lulie Wondimu

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Advisors: Terje Skjerdal, external
Dr. Yacob Arsano, internal

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and all the sources of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Hallelujah Lulie Wondimu

Signature: _____

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A Political History of the Private Press in Democratic Ethiopia

1991–2007

Hallelujah Lulie Wondimu

Approved by the Examining Board

Chairman, Department Graduate Committee Signature

Internal Advisor Signature

External examiner Signature

Internal examiner Signature

TO
Netsanet Lulie
For your thoughts and care

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List of acronyms/abbreviations

BBC:	British Broadcasting Corporation
CPJ:	Committee to Protect Journalists
CUD:	Coalition for Unity and Democracy
E.C:	Ethiopian Calendar
EEJA:	Ethiopian Environmental Journalists Alliance
EFJA:	Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association
EHRCo:	The Ethiopian Human Rights Council
EJA:	Ethiopian Journalists Association
EMWA:	Ethiopian Media Women Association
ENJU:	Ethiopian National Journalists Union
EPRDF:	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
ESJA:	Ethiopian Sport Journalists Association
FDRE:	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FM:	Frequency Modulation
FSS:	Forum for Social Studies
HAPI:	Horn of Africa Press Institute
ITCO-Africa:	The International Transparency Commission on Africa
MOI:	Ministry of Information
MP:	Member of Parliament
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
OLF:	Oromo Liberation Front
PAZA:	Press Association of Zambia
SIDA:	Sweden International Development Agency
TGE:	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TV:	Television
UDHR:	The Universal Declaration on Human Rights
UN:	United Nations

UNESCO: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID: United States Agency for International Development
ZIMA: Zambia Independent Media Association

Abstract

1991 was the end of the dictatorial Marxist military regime (1974-91); transforming Ethiopia from a one party/one press regime to a multiparty/multi-press state, but the independent press began its mission as a sworn enemy of the government. There was a huge lack of professionalism and ethical standards of journalism accompanied by abuses of freedom of the press and expression by the newborn independent press and strong attacks on the new democratic government. In many instances it was difficult to name the press independent as it acted as a political opposition with a massive practice of advocacy journalism and sensationalism.

This attempt on a political history of the private press in democratic Ethiopia 1991-2007 tries to analyze the role of the independent press in bringing about sustainable democratic functions serving as a catalyst to multipartyism and democracy as an independent institution. The research analysed relevant research reports and books to understand the Sub-Saharan African and Ethiopian political and media scenario and see the different views regarding the landscape of Ethiopian political communication. Moreover, the role of the independent press in the new multiparty democratic system was assessed through in-depth interviews and informal talks held with key resource persons.

The study concludes that the Ethiopian independent press failed to play its role as an independent institution in the new system as it acted irresponsibly and unprofessionally against internationally accepted ethical and professional yardsticks of journalism creating a negative state-press relation where one considers the other as an arch enemy. The tension reached its peak in the post-election period of the 2005 national elections. In the absence of an organized self-regulatory body of the press, the Ethiopian government took advantage of the unprofessional and unethical practices and started to take legal and other measures against the press to make it behave responsibly leading to the suppression of the press once again by the government and harming the survival, excellence and advance of the independent press and its contribution for democracy.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background of the study and problem statement

The early 1990s witnessed the end of the cold war and the rise in democratic fervor and freedom of information. The huge international wave of democracy and freedom which swept the globe and Africa also touched Ethiopia, and following the downfall of the socialist Derg regime in 1991 the present force on power introduced free press and declared freedom of expression.

“The unfolding of the liberal democratic order in Africa ushered in the freedom of the press. New democracies based on democratic pluralisms and the rule of law emerged in many parts of Africa” (Girma, 2007: 1). Girma comments that the dramatic way in which freedom of the press ‘swamped’ the then fledging media might have proved slightly headed for some (printed) media operators.

The Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) adopted *Press proclamation No. 34/1992*, which is still mentioned as a prime landmark in the history of modern Ethiopia. The proclamation comprised the first press law in Ethiopia and brought the idea of an independent press to the country and opened up for private ownership of the media making an end to the long existed monopoly of the sole government control of the industry. The illustrious article 3.1 of the proclamation states, “Freedom of expression is recognized and respected in Ethiopia”, and article 4.1 says “[the] press stands for the pursuit of fundamental freedom, peace, democracy, justice, equality, and for the acceleration of social and economic development”.

After the proclamation of the Press Freedom Bill new, independent (mostly private) newspapers and magazines flourished in Ethiopia. The publishing industry mushroomed. Though more than half of the newspapers were closed down during the same five-year period, 385 publications comprising 265 newspapers and 120 magazines were registered between October 1992 and July 1997 (MOI, 2007).

Independent press is a major element of any democratic system and one can not exist in the absence of the other. In the words of Francis Kasoma,

Multiparty politics and democracy would not have come to Africa in the 1990s and certainly would not last without the enabling role of the independent press. I further argued that only the independent press, and not any other media, could guarantee freedom of the press, which such a basic human right that it is almost synonymous with democracy. (Kasoma, 1997: 295)

Kasoma contends that the independent press has roles as both a necessary prerequisite and a co-requisite for democracy and multiparty politics, but it should act ethically and professionally.

Recognized as one of the principal scholars on African media, the late Francis Kasoma argues that after the introduction of multi-party politics and freedom of expression a confrontational behavior developed in the media because of the press's own unprofessional behavior as it failed to play its role as an independent institution in the new system (Kasoma, 1992: 295). Despite the fact that many of the newspapers called themselves independent, their professionalism, ethical behavior and partiality created a confrontational relationship with the new Ethiopian government. The action urged many to question their independence and refrain from referring to the media as an independent institution as they were mostly acting as the sworn enemy of the party in power.

Kasoma contends that the widespread unprofessionalism of journalists of the independent press in Africa is itself responsible for a large proportion of governmental intervention. He proposes that to some extent governmental interference in the operations of the independent press is based on genuine concern for press freedom.

Faced with an independent press whose recklessness is reaching alarming proportions; Africa's multiparty rulers are increasingly taking measures to limit press freedom once again. The most common measures have included the passing or attempts to pass press-gagging laws, which have generally gone under the name of media councils, Media council laws, or laws with equivalent nomenclature. [...] These attempts have been preceded or accompanied by threats by the rulers in these countries to the independent newspapers not to overstep certain limits in their watchdog role. (Kasoma, 1992: 295)

The same scenario exists in Ethiopia as the government's response to what it perceived as the independent press' abuse of power and unethical behaviors and brazen partisanship was a sweeping one. "It involved the submission to parliament of a bill which could have substantially limited press freedom" (Girma, 2007: 2). And recently in October 2005 the majority of the

independent press was closed down and 13 editors, owners and reporters were imprisoned following the unrest after the national election in May 2005.

Investigating the first ten years of the private press in Ethiopia, Shimelis Bensa says that the non-governmental press in Ethiopia can not generally be referred to as an independent press as it has conventionally been known by three different names, each having its own 'fluid and unrefined' connotations: 'private', 'independent' and 'free'. He says the three denominations have been used interchangeably and in a preferential way. "A sizable number of those newspapers and magazines which are labeled as 'opposition publications' prefer to call themselves 'free and independent', however the claim is rejected and the term private is used instead as a reference to such periodicals" (Shimelis, 2000: 2).

The debate on which the media are independent or not is still a big issue in the Ethiopian media industry as the government says most of the private press is an opposition press. Labeling and accusing exist between the members of the independent press as newspapers like *Netsanet* claim that *Reporter* is a pro government press and lobbied for its boycott. Similar arguments have arisen between *Ethop* and *Addis Admas* and other newspapers.

The existence of a free and independent press contributes for the social, political and economic development of a nation by nurturing a culture of dialogue, accountability and openness. But for this the press should fulfill ethical and professional standards of journalism and there should be an enabling environment for the industry.

The purpose of this study is to examine the independence of the Ethiopian private press from 1991-2007 in light of the recent political development of the country and its contributions for the democratization of the nation. The study is *inter alia* based on in-depth interviews with 15 key actors in Ethiopian media and public life over the last two decades. Central to the study is a search for a model of state-media relationship in democratic Ethiopia.

1.2 Rationale of the study

According to Bofo:

Media in Africa could provide a basis for building sustainable pluralistic democratic structures by stimulating and encouraging critical awareness, public discussion and participation in the decision making process as well as exposing bureaucratic incompetence, corruption, abuse of power and violation of human rights. (Bofo, 1992: 4-5)

In a country like Ethiopia where freedom of expression and other major democratic rights have been suppressed for centuries the idea and practice of a free and independent media was a huge milestone in its history. Studying the independence of the private press in the period will help in understanding the basic problems of the media industry and its relation with the government as well as its general role in the political system of the nation.

This particular thesis is relevant because it aims to assess and analyze the general scenario of the independence of the private media and its political history with regard to state-press relations. It also attempts to come up with recommendations in light of the analysis.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study is to examine the degree of independence of the Ethiopian private press in the past sixteen years. The research looks at the role of the private press as an independent, professional and ethical institution in democratic Ethiopia 1991-2007 and its contribution for the development of a democratic society. The basis for analysis and the main source are a series of interviews with key actors in Ethiopian media and public life during the period and published and unpublished documents on the area.

The research will investigate the relationship between Ethiopian media and politics, professional ethics, policies regarding the press, its contribution for the society, and the position of the private press in relation to questions of media independence.

Realizing that it is hard to establish the link between the press and democratization, the research still tries to see if the press has contributed for the democratization process in the nation. Kasoma's theories of the role of the independent press in Africa's emerging democracies form an important backdrop for the study and will be tested against the Ethiopian media landscape.

Specifically, the research attempts to:

1. Examine the degree of independence in the private press during the period 1991-2007 (the *rights* of the press).
2. Shed light on the press' contribution to democratic society in general and public debate in particular (the *responsibilities* of the press).
3. Demonstrate various attitudes towards the functions of the newspapers of the time.

4. Point to the major challenges of the actors in the industry in the recent past and near future.

1.4 Research questions

Underneath are some of the questions which will be asked during the study and which have helped guiding the personal interviews for the study. Emphasis has been put on keeping the questions open-ended in order not to fix the interviewees in predetermined categories:

- In general, was the private press in the past 16 years really independent?
- What did the state/press relations look like?
- Which ties have there been between the press and politics?
- What were the major problems and challenges of the private press?
- In your view, what has been the effect of media partiality/impartiality for the nation's democratization process?

1.5 Hypothesis

Based on the background, problem statement and the research questions the following hypothesis will guide the research:

The independent press in Ethiopia 1991-2007 has tried to fulfill its roles as both a necessary prerequisite and a co-requisite for democracy and multiparty politics, but has not succeeded in performing its role ethically and professionally.

1.6 Significance of the study

Though the Ethiopian print media traces back a hundred years (Shimelis, 2000), little research has been done which can be used as references for study. This gap appears to be one of the major obstacles for enhancing and advancing the country's media study as such researches would help to identify problems and possible solutions in the industry. It is the hope that this research will contribute to enhancing an academic understanding of the Ethiopian private press.

The significance of the research is its attempt to show the bigger image of the private press in the period (1991-2007) regarding its role as a presumably independent institution.

Media scholars and practitioners, historians and other academicians can benefit from the study by using it as a background document to study the period which is so complex as well as decisive era in the history of democratic Ethiopia. It can also initiate more research, as well as incite concerned stakeholders to act up on the results of the research.

1.7 Limitations of the study

The research tries to look at the political history of the private press from 1991-2007 focusing on the level of its independence. Studying the period thoroughly and in detail is important in order to have a clear image of what happened in and to the media in the given period; however, polarization on the political arena, weak and unorganized nature of recording facts and information, the various versions of telling same stories by different actors of the industry, and the different ways to define independence and professionalism made the research challenging.

Lack of a strong and all-inclusive journalistic association and the reluctance of the industry to stand and speak as a single institution with common interests is the other major problem the researcher faced while conducting the study.

By the time of the study the shadow of post-election 2005 political problems still existed and some government officials and other potential informants were reluctant to speak overtly on the issue and some declined the request for an interview. Shortage of reference material and relevant literature on the topic is also a problem. And as always, time constraint has been a delimiting factor.

1.8 Scope of the study

The research focuses only on the non-governmental private print media. The government-run public media; the Internet and other media than the private press have only been looked to for contextualizing purposes.

1.9 Organization of the study

The thesis follows the standard outline of master's thesis papers at Addis Ababa University and consists of five chapters. *Chapter one* presents a general background of the study, research objectives

and statement of the problem. The chapter also outlines significances of the study, research questions, limitations and organization of the study.

Chapter two covers the print media history of Ethiopia and review of relevant literature and scholarly theories underpinning the study. In doing so an attempt has been made to show the general image of the private press emphasizing its independence following the 1990s' global wave of democracy in Ethiopia and other countries in Africa. The chapter discusses what scholars thought as the problems of the private press in its role as an independent body and its consequences.

The methods, procedures and sampling techniques employed in the research are the focus of *chapter three*. The chapter gives the rationale for adopting qualitative method in the study and it consequently places emphasis on the relevance of the two data collection techniques it uses: in-depth interviews and analysis of documents and books.

Chapter four discusses the major findings of the study in light of the introductory chapters and the theoretical perspectives in chapter two. The chapter presents the results of the data gathered through in-depth interviews and document analysis. The level of independence in the private press and its challenges and practices which have taken place in the Ethiopian private press since the coming into power of EPRDF will be discussed in this chapter.

The last chapter, *chapter five*, will focus on the conclusion and suggested recommendations based on the outcome of the research.

CHAPTER TWO

Review and discussion of related literature

2.1 A brief history of Ethiopian print media

2.1.1 The print media during the Empire until 1974

Though Ethiopia is the only nation in Africa with its own alphabet and a long-standing culture of writing, the modern print media was introduced a little more than a century ago and the number of publications has been comparably low. When it comes to the production of magazines, newspapers and other periodicals, the country was a late-comer and the publications have mostly been mere reflections of the various political periods.

Media owners are able to influence the content of 'their' media, and as the Ethiopian media have mostly been owned by the government it has also been the sole authority in the industry. In their review of the Ethiopian media, Øyvind Aadland and Mark Fackler (1999) assert that dictators have exerted power on the media in all periods of Ethiopian history.

Whatever press existed during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I (1930-74) and the following Derg regime, behaved, with a few exceptions, like willing mouthpieces for the rulers. Only during the 1990s have signs of a free and independent press emerged. During that decade a plethora of new magazines and papers appeared on Ethiopian stands. (Aadland and Fackler, 1999)

The first regularly produced newspaper in Ethiopia and a few other publications emerged under Emperor Haile Selassie I, who was crowned in 1930. However, publications were introduced in Ethiopia by the end of the 19th century, during the reign of Menelik II (1889-1913). The beginning of the print medium in Ethiopia, mostly irregular, foreign-inspired, and predominantly dedicated to religious matter, has been traced by some to the mid-nineteenth century, when the first printing press was set up in Massawa (presently in Eritrea) by a Lazarist missionary known as Father Lorenzo Biancheri. Later on, the Swedish Evangelical Mission established a small printing press at Kankullo, near Massawa in 1885 (Shimelis, 2000, 6-7).

In the 1890s a Franciscan missionary called Father Bernard was able to secure Emperor Menelik's acknowledgment, if not actual support, and expend his operations into commercial printing. In 1896 he started publishing, using a duplicating machine (Roneograph), a weekly French-Amharic newspaper entitled 'Le Semaine d' Ethiopia'. It was intended mainly for campaigns against leprosy. (Shimelis, 2000: 6-7)

Aemero which started around 1900 is officially considered as the first Ethiopian periodical. Between 1912 and 1915 weekly newspapers like *Melekete Selam*, *Yetor Wore* ('War News'), and many others emerged with the aid of mimeograph machines. *Aemero*, the first Amharic newspaper, mainly focusing on palace and church issues, had a weekly circulation of over two hundred copies until it ceased publication in 1916. Revived in 1924, the paper appeared weekly for several years. Before that, in 1923, Emperor Haile Selassie I had established the first printing press, *Berhanena Selam* ('Light and Peace'), which represented a landmark in the history of the Ethiopian press. *Berhanena Salem* is still the largest printing press in the country. "Right after this printing press, still the largest printing press in the country, was established; the first official Amharic newspaper, also called *Berhanena Selam* appeared in print. This was the first newspaper that served as a forum for the few young educated Ethiopians of that period." (Mocria et al., 2003).

At the start of the First World War, in 1914, *Yetor Wore* ('War News') appeared in Amharic, and *Le Courier d'Ethiopie* ('The Ethiopian Messenger') in French. In 1917, *Goha Tsebah* ('The Dawn') was published in Amharic. The major newspapers from 1923–1936 were: *Aithiopicos Kosmos* ('Ethiopian World') in Greek in 1925; *L'Ethiopie Commerciale* in French in 1932, *Atbia Kokab* ('The Morning Star') in Amharic in 1934; and *Ye-Ethiopia Demts* ('Voice of Ethiopia') in Amharic the same year. *Ye-Ethiopia Demts* was silenced by the Italian aggression on Ethiopia and was reissued in 1958 (Mocria et al., 2003).

According to MOI, 1966: 8; and Pankhurst, 1962: 283, cited in Shimelis (2000), in 1934 Emperor Haile Selassie I granted the right to establish a private press for the publication of books and newspapers ('A Proclamation to Publish Newspapers and Books'). The proclamation provided for the procedures to be followed when applying for permission to publish, and a list of penalties in the event of infringement. The progress of the Ethiopian press was interrupted for about five years (1935-1941) as a result of the country's occupation by Mussolini's forces. However, *Bandirachin* (later re-named *sendedq Alamachin* - 'Our Flag'), some type of a bi-weekly field paper of the liberation

forces, was alive. There were also the many publications produced in foreign countries, especially in London, England to promote the Ethiopian cause.

In the three decades after liberation 1941–1974, a number of legal measures that encouraged the growth of the print media in Ethiopia were taken. The major ones among these were: the decrees of 1942 and 1944, the *Revised Constitution of 1955*, the *Penal Code of 1957*, the draft constitution in 1974, and a decree which was published in *Addis Zemen* in March 1975 (Mocria et al., 2003).

In the post-Liberation period (1941-1974), a number of decrees were passed recognizing freedom of speech and expression and allowing the existence of a private press. These included the decrees of 1942 (1934 E.C.) and 1944 (1936 E.C.), the Revised Constitution of 1955 (1948 E.C.), the penal code of 1957 (1949 E.C.), the draft constitution which was presented to the country's highest constitutional assembly in July 1974 (Hamle 30, 1966 E.C.), and a decree which was published in Addis Zemen in March 1975 (Megabit 18, 1967 E.C.). A number of private newspapers and other periodicals dealing with political, economic, social and religious issues came to life. The problem is, however, to correctly identify which of these periodicals were privately-owned and independent in their operation. (Kaplan, 1971: 326-327)

According to Shimelis this period had a larger number of both daily and weekly government owned and few private newspapers catering to a limited circle of an elite readership – mostly top bureaucrats and members of the urban-based intelligentsia (Shimelis, 2000: 9).

2.1.2 The print media during the Derg 1974–1991

The period of communist military dictatorship of the Derg from 1974 to 1991 was one of total government control of the media and the flow of information.

The military group Derg wrested power from Haileselassie in September 1974. Derg member Major Mengistu Haile Mariam established his own leadership within the organization in February 1977. During the 17 years of Mengistu's rule, the government- and party-owned publications Meskerem ('September'), Serto Ader ('Worker'), and the pre-Derg Yezareyitu Ethiopia ('Ethiopia Today') were published in addition to the previously mentioned Addis Zemen and the Ethiopian Herald. (Aadland and Fackler, 1999)

Though it became the worst regime regarding media independence, the first two or three years of the Derg regime were promising and there was hope of freedom of the press. Due to the sudden lifting of censorship from the state-controlled media the public press began to report fairly accurate and for the first time in their history, Ethiopians were able to read something other than soporific propaganda in their newspapers.

This euphoric exercise in free expression continued during the early days of the military regime. Such national issues of vital importance as democracy, form of government, and land tenure were subjects of open discussion between various opposing forces in the public media, but the press in particular. Dialogues between opposing political groups were seen in print and electronic media, and journalists became extremely open and critical of the government. (Markakis and Naga, 1978: 95)

According to Deneke (1991) cited in Shimelis (2000) the first years of the military regime which have sometimes been referred to as ‘the golden days of Ethiopian journalism’ did not last long as the military junta which promised a civilian government eventually assumed total control of the media, initially using it to denounce and humiliate the ancient regime and, subsequently, to consolidate the power of the military government. Such periodicals as *Democracia*, *Labader*, *Struggle* and *Ye Sefiw Hizb Dimts*, which held views incongruent with those of the regime, published by other political parties and movements, were eventually declared counter-revolutionary and forced to go clandestine. Eventually, the government eliminated most such papers and, in doing so, dashed all hopes of democracy and free expression. In the process, the media ended up being highly partisan and a totalitarian socialist propaganda machine till 1991.

Generally, mass media in Ethiopia, including the print medium, have always served as instruments of government propaganda. As practiced in the chronicles and diaries of the kings and emperors in the pre-modern Ethiopia the modern media have been full of stories of glorification, image-building and personal power consolidation struggles waged among the powers in the name of posterity.

In essence, the media in general could only be said to have changed masters, not the philosophy behind or the approach the art of public information. Loss of credibility, as exemplified by a progressive plummeting in newspaper sales and readership, is a glaring

indicator of the crisis in the government press in particular, and the media in general. (Shimelis, 2000: 15)

2.1.3 The print media post-1991

In a landmark move the Transitional Government of Ethiopia set up by the guerilla forces which overthrew The Derg in 1991 agreed to respect individual human rights, including freedom of expression. This was done in accordance with its ratification of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Press Freedom Bill was proclaimed by the Ethiopian Transitional Government (TGE) in October 1992. The document states in Paragraph 3 that, "1. Freedom of the press is recognized and respected in Ethiopia. 2. Censorship of the press and any restriction of a similar nature are hereby prohibited." Part Three further guarantees the right of access to information by saying that any press and its agents shall, without prejudice to rights conformed by other laws, has the right to seek, obtain and report news and information from any government source of news and information.

This had previously been confirmed through the charter of TGE in Proclamation No. 1/1991 and No. 6/1991, article 4 (6), and was reconfirmed with details by Press Proclamation No. 34/1992, and article 29 of the constitution. The article states the fundamental section avoiding censorship by saying that that "the media should operate freely and responsibly without censorship". The charter which recognizes the contribution of a free press to the development of democratic society permitted the establishment of a free press and subsequent proclamations related to the press. These measures were considered by many as marking the beginning of a new period of openness and democratization in Ethiopia (Shimelis, 2000).

After the proclamation of the Press Freedom Bill, new, independent newspapers and magazines developed, especially in Addis Ababa. These offer the minority points of view often left out of government-owned publications, but suffer from inadequate fact-checking and occasional censorship, as well as the government's refusal to allow representatives from non-official papers at its press conferences. (Aadland and Fackler, 1999)

The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (Shimelis, 2000) says that the proliferation of periodicals was taken as an acute demonstration of the people's long-harbored dissatisfaction with the

government-controlled media, while at the same time it served as an indication of their hunger for an alternative source of information.

The Ethiopian publishing industry mushroomed after the Press Bill of 1992. Figures differ, but according to the Government, 385 publications were registered between October 1992 and July 1997, of which 265 were newspapers and 120 magazines. At any one time, there are probably about 20 different newspapers for sale in Addis Ababa. More than half of the total number of papers were closed down during the same five-year period, often because of limited resources. The "independent papers" are owned by private share companies (business communities, political parties or just individual business entrepreneurs). Because of a very limited middle-class, the income on advertising is also very limited. The government papers are subsidized by government funds, and partly financed by advertisements and subscribers. (Aadland and Fackler, 1999)

2.2 The press in Africa: A pan-African perspective

2.2.1 The independent press and multipartyism

In his review book on African media of the last decade of the past century, *Africa's Media, Democracy and the Politics of Belongings*, Francis B. Nyamnjoh concludes that African governments have done very little to encourage independent media in the 1990s and put a huge blame on them as they were oppressive and media unfriendly regimes. But he simultaneously says that the media themselves must share some of the blame (Nyamnjoh, 2005).

Nyamnjoh's comment is shared by many authors who write about the history and state of the free press in Africa following the second wave of democracy in the early 1990s. The renowned late Zambian scholar Francis Kasoma, a prominent figure in African media studies, agrees that the private press is partly to blame. Kasoma concludes that the independent press in Africa's multiparty states of the 1990s developed a confrontational relationship with governments since its birth, largely being brought about by the press's own unprofessional behavior. The confrontational relationship causes governments to introduce measures, legal and otherwise, aimed at making the press behave responsibly, in the absence of effective self-regulating mechanisms by the press itself (Kasoma, 1997).

Kasoma says that these measures are likely to lead to the subjugation of the independent press by governments once again and the reintroduction of dictatorship in Africa. When this

happens, says Kasoma, the independent press will have to bear the bulk of the blame for loss of press freedom and democracy.

At the same time, Kasoma argues that multiparty politics and democracy would not have come to Africa in the 1990s and certainly would not have lasted without the enabling role of the independent press. He further says that only the independent press, and not any other media, can guarantee freedom of the press, which is such a basic human right that it is almost synonymous with democracy (Kasoma, 1997).

Experts on the press are not in agreement on the definition of 'independent press'. This is because there are numerous circumstances in which the press cannot be said to be truly independent and most media scholars believe that every media organization and outlet has its own bias. It is still fair to say that a constant factor in the definition is the absence of governmental interference in the operations of the media. The seminal Windhoek seminar on the independent press in Windhoek, Namibia in May 1991, which came up with the Windhoek Declaration, has defined 'independent press' as: "A press independent from government, political or economic control or from control of material and infrastructure essential for the production and dissemination of newspapers, magazines and periodicals" (UNESCO, 1991: 26).

Similarly, Article 19, an organization working on the freedom of the press refers to the independent press as: "Privately-owned newspapers and magazines which cover political affairs but which are not politically aligned, either with government or with opposition parties" (Article 19, 1991: 5). Generally, when we speak about an independent press, we are referring to a privately owned press which operates in an environment where there is no prior restraint by government and which is not politically aligned by editorial policy. 'Private press' may have been a more precise term, but since 'independent press' is an established term used by Kasoma and others, it will also be used for this thesis.

The emergence of the independent press in the 1990s in Africa has often been accompanied by the switch to multiparty politics. The hypothesis underlying Kasoma's theories is that the independent press is both a necessary prerequisite as well as co-requisite for democracy and multiparty politics – but only if it performs its role ethically and professionally (Kasoma, 1997: 297).

2.2.2 Professional and ethical challenges

Nicknames of the free press in Africa are often negative. Nyamnjoh reports that the press has been called all sorts of names from 'cocktail', 'bread-and-butter', 'cheque-book', 'yellow', 'attack collect', 'brown envelope' or 'survival' journalism on the one hand, to 'guerrilla journalism', 'le journalisme de combat', 'liberation journalism', 'journalism insurrectionnel', 'jungle journalism', 'junk journalism' and 'gutter journalism' on the other (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 59).

The African free press in the past decade and half has been accused of sensationalism, of frightening rather than reassuring its readership, of seeking to comfort indecent governments with indecent language, and of being unprofessional and unethical in its representation of events, individuals and groups. Kasoma poses a stronger and more critical look towards the free press than Nyamnjoh; he contends that many newspapers in Africa are "simply smear sheets churning out badly-sourced and one-sided gossip which they present as news" (Kasoma, 1999: 449).

Admitting the problems the new African free press faced, Nyamnjoh says nothing in the profession justifies the use of indecent language, sensationalism or unethical practices. In most countries journalists are ordinarily perceived as mouthpieces for competing political pressure groups. According to Ellis (cited in Nyamnjoh, 2005) it is common knowledge among journalists themselves "that certain writers or newspapers are the unofficial mouthpieces of particular interests or politicians or are simply open to hire in the form of bribery by any faction, occasionally for the defamation of their rivals" (Ellis, 2000: 225).

The pressure on them to please those for whom they work or with whom they belong are such that they cannot report fairly on all sides of an issue in the most attentive and self-critical manner, surprising personal prejudices and sticking to the facts. The private press pushes everyone else to the wall with its half-truths or blatant lies claiming infallibility. (Nyamnjoh, 2005)

Diana Senghor, who strongly supports the above argument, says that various media abuse certain human rights in the name of freedom and right to inform (Senghor, 1996: 1).

According to Kasoma the unprofessional practices by journalists of the independent press are manifested by three practices: the use of newspapers as political opposition, bad advocacy journalism, and the overuse of anonymous sources.

One of the independent press's ill-conceived roles is that of acting as political opposition, which African governments have found very objectionable and used as justification to muzzle the press. African governments, hitherto unaccustomed to political opposition, see themselves as being under double pressure: from the opposition parties, which are vying to replace them in power; and from the independent press, which they see as being in cahoots with the opposition parties. They find themselves in a spot. On one hand, they cannot get rid of opposition parties and continue to call themselves democratic governments. The international community, whose good will and aid they need, would cease to support them. On the other hand, they cannot get rid of a critical independent press by over means lest again international aid be denied to them. They have to do it covertly through the seeming use of the law and other supposedly orthodox means. (Kasoma, 1997: 298)

He says that the root of the problem is that both the government and the newspaper claim to speak for the people. "When they contradict each other, as they often do, the tension rises. But the upper-hand in resolving the conflict is usually held by the government, which uses the state machinery to silence recalcitrant newspapers and journalists" (ibid).

The rate of truth-reporting in Africa's newspapers, particularly those behaving as political oppositions, is extremely low. The newspapers are full of exaggerations; basing their reports on flimsy hear-say; making headlines cry 'wolf'; quoting sources out of context; not giving people against whom allegations are made a fair hearing; downright. (Kasoma, 1997: 299)

Another habit of journalists in independent newspapers is that of practicing too much advocacy journalism, often accompanied by sensationalism. Kasoma says that although it is not easy to judge the motive of a person's actions, journalistic advocacy included, some indicators of dishonorable motives often begin to emerge when journalists start telling blatant lies, half truths, distorted facts given out of context, one-sided coverage favoring the side they support, not giving credit where it is due especially to government, quoting fictitious or dubious sources, and using insulting language which end up in bad advocacy journalism (ibid).

Advocacy journalism is about championing a cause by presenting well reasoned and consistent arguments to win over public sympathy. It is not about repeating the same insulting and vulgar statements ad nauseam against those in authority as many independent newspapers in Africa are in the habit of doing. Emotional harping on an issue, particularly when it is the habit of doing. (Kasoma, 1997: 301)

Kasoma says that advocacy journalism does not mean sensationalizing issues by creating a story where there is none and creating panic and despondency. He argues it should be based on principle and not on selfish motives or, worse still, on personal feelings.

The bias of Africa's independent newspapers is more conspicuous in election time, during which they endorse their chosen candidates and present them in the most favorable and biased manner to the electorate. The candidates belonging to the parties they do not support are given a raw deal through bad or not coverage. They should not cheat members of the public by posing as independent newspapers when they are ipso facto party newspapers. The independence of a newspaper is not only determined by its private ownership but also by its editorial policy. A newspaper that has taken a permanent political side by uncritically supporting one political party forfeits its independence. A newspaper serving democracy makes available to the people all the information they need, including that which it finds unpalatable, because in a democracy the people have a right to know all the information this is fit to print. (Kasoma, 1997: 302)

Kasoma says that giving a hearing or publicity to the opposing side should be genuine and honest. It should not be done in an unfair manner in which information from the opposing side is twisted to prove a point. There are journalists from independent newspapers in Africa today who selectively choose what to publish from the opposition, reporting only information which tends to show that their newspaper's stand against those they politically oppose is correct. They are even prepared to quote statements from the politicians they oppose out of context to prove their point. This is evidently a very common practice in Ethiopian independent media journalism where newspapers of the private press ridicule the government officials or anyone with different views by misquoting and trying to divert his/her speech or remark by taking it out of the context. This was clearly seen at the 2005 national elections in Ethiopia where much of the independent press was busy in demonizing the government and its officials in any way possible. At a two-day workshop on the role of the media and journalists on the development of a democratic and prosperous state

jointly organized by the Horn of Africa Press Institute (HAPI) and Action Aid Ethiopia at the Global Hotel, Addis Ababa in 2006 Professor Andargachew Tiruneh, a part-time lecturer at City University in London and Graduate School of Journalism and Communication at Addis Ababa University, said:

We have been following a very left-wing policy in Ethiopia for a very long time. And that has influenced the attitude of people. They like to be radical. They like to be critical, and the criticisms usually are not constructive. It is just a matter of debunking, undermining the other side. (Andargachew, 2006)

Kasoma further says that the advocacy journalism practiced by many independent newspapers in Africa is characterized by sensationalism which is characterized by telling a story in a highly exaggerated manner or reporting in hyperboles.

If, for example, a few ministers in government are accused of corruption, a sensationalist reporter will condemn the whole government as being corrupt. Or if some constituencies record irregularities in voting on polling day, then the whole election process is declared null and void because 'it was not free and fair'. To journalists and newspapers who are involved in sensationalist reporting, nothing seems to be illogical: a single incident is universalized and a couple of isolated incidents are twisted to represent a trend; if those being accused ignore, by staying silent, what may be clearly ridiculous allegations, then they are seen to have 'pleaded guilty' because 'silence means consent'. On the other hand, if they protest against the unfair charges, they are condemned as liars who are opposed to the freedom of the press. Sensationalist reporting has destroyed the credibility of many independent newspapers in Africa. (Kasoma, 1997: 303)

A third area of professional malpractice by journalists on the independent newspapers emphasized by Kasoma is the misuse of anonymous sources which he says is very common in Africa. "Many reporters are in the habit of attributing information to unnamed sources. When pressed to name the sources, the journalists often hide behind the ethical requirement that sources to whom journalists have promised confidentiality should not be named" (ibid). But he says that the irreparable damage done to the reputations of the people against whom the serious allegations are made apparently remains of no concern to the journalists - on the contrary, they are too happy to see their political enemies 'framed'.

Journalists on Africa's independent newspapers behave as if journalistic sources should always be secret. Generally in news reporting the identity of sources should be revealed, otherwise readers tend not to regard the news that is reported as being authentic. In the event of the reporter agreeing not to reveal the source, he or she should not break their promise, even if it means going to jail for refusing to disclose the source in court. The ethical requirement for the reporter not to name the source only applies to cases where the reporter has made a specific undertaking. It does not apply to any source who has not been named in a story. (Kasoma, 1997: 304-305)

2.2.3 Government-press relationships

Kasoma underlines that in a democracy the press and government should never be bed-fellows. Neither should they be sworn enemies as the two extreme scenarios only serve to distract the two institutions away from their common purpose: to make democratic governance possible. "Both the independent press and government are cogs in the democratic wheel and one cannot do without the other" (Kasoma, 1997).

Freedom of the press, which the independent media are supposed to uphold the best, and democracy are inseparable. There can be no democratic governance without a free press. Conversely, a free press can only exist where there is democratic governance. There is a causal link between the two. (Kasoma, 1997)

He further says that the press - government tension to a certain degree should, therefore, not necessarily be interpreted as a denial of freedom of the press and democracy. "On the contrary, if present within acceptable limits, they may be a sure sign of the presence of democracy and freedom of the press" (ibid).

Kasoma's assertion is that any rivalry between the independent press and politicians in power should, therefore, generally be regarded as healthy unless the press and those in power have drawn daggers and are in a state of war or on a collision course.

Professor Andargachew, discussed the 'political communication' i.e., the intercourse between the media and politics, and the watchdog role of the media in providing checks on abuses of power by both government and other actors who overstep their duties and responsibilities in Ethiopia at the two days workshop organized by HAPI. He said that journalists often say, "the best stories are those that afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted, the ones that the people of power do not want told." He also argues that this role of journalists as guardians of the public

interest is perhaps best reflected "in the many campaigns that the media conduct trying to bring authorities to account".

Andargachew points out that it can be claimed that Ethiopian journalists in the private sector have been acting as the fourth estate as they were critical of the government while he argues that they have "exceeded the legitimate bounds of acting as a fourth estate." He maintains that their treatment of issues has been one-sided, which practically prevented them from seeing that any good has been achieved by the government:

Their publications have been too partial and sensational so as to lead one to believe that they are not in the business of reporting politics but, rather, making it. It is as though they have a mission to accomplish, a mission which they pursue with extraordinary zeal and at all costs. (Andargachew, 2006)

2.3 The Ethiopian press in light of the African press

2.3.1 A young independent press

Although limited in number, there are some books about the Ethiopian media in general and the private press which came into being after 1991; for instance the *Media Survey of Ethiopia December 1994–January 1995 Main Findings* by BBC; *Survey of Culture and Media Ethiopia* Published by SIDA (Sweden International Development Agency) in 2003; and the major reference in studying the time *the Survey of the Private Press in Ethiopia: 1991–1999* by Shimelis Bonsa. Books on the Sub-Saharan Africa media of the last decade of the past century and some years of the first decade of the new millennium discuss the general atmosphere of the press and the spread of democracy and the mushrooming of the democratic media just after the end of the cold war. Books on other African nations with similar press experience are also used to show the bigger image at the continental level. In this case Nyamnjoh's *Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* and different works of Francis Kasoma and Wisdom J. Tetty are extensively used.

As a young institution the Ethiopian private media have been full of problems, both internal and external. This is reflected in the scholarly discussion, which is mostly problem-oriented. This research covers the period from 1991-2007, and all available books, articles, papers and other material focusing on the period have been deployed and shares most of the weaknesses listed in this chapter by African media scholars.

With reference to Hydén et al. (2002), Nyamnjoh reassures that the democratic process in Africa has brought with it not only multipartism, but also a sort of media pluralism. In almost every country the number of private newspapers increased dramatically with the clamor for more representative forms of democracy in the early 1990s (Nyamnjoh, 2002: 53). And Ansah cited in Nyamnjoh supports the idea further by saying “the progress towards more representative forms of government and participatory political and economic liberalization, the unprecedented advances in global technologies for the acquisition, and dissemination of information make the need for a democratic press all the more imperative” (Ansah, 1991: 13).

But the new multipartism had a lot of problems mainly lack of a strong opposition. Rønning cited in Nyamnjoh (2005) says, “the fact of a weak opposition in most African countries has offered repressive governments the easy potion of branding as oppositional all critical media and blaming all the opposition any embarrassing reports by the media instead of addressing the issue raised” (Rønning, 1994: 18). Nyamnjoh adds to this argument that the private press, by taking upon itself a highly oppositional political role, has often allowed itself to be “used as pawns in the dirty game of politics” and has eased the destruction of its professional credibility with sensationalism and suspicious advocacy (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 59).

The justification many members of the independent press in Ethiopia give for joining the journalistic profession is ‘love for the country’, a claim which could, and did in fact, imply opposition to the government in power. This claim was particularly presented in the most direct terms possible in the editorials of several of the newspapers as they oppose the policies of the political establishment, work for the preservation of the country’s unity and foundation of a democratic system and will not publish any news or article favoring or promoting the policies of the government (Tedbabe, 1990 E.C: 62-65).

EPRDF (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front), the party which overthrew the Marxist military regime in 1991 introduced a multiparty political and a free market economic system and guaranteed freedom of expression in the transitional government charter. Many legal opposition parties and many more independent newspapers appeared for the first time (*Ethiopia: Transition to Democracy [hereinafter, Ethiopia], 1991:122*) In his survey of the Ethiopian independent press in its first decade Shimelis says the 1992 press proclamation is the major landmark in the entire media history of the nation as it is the manifestation of the whole political system which

introduced multiparty politics. It was a transition from a one party/one press regime to a multiparty/multi-press era. But he says that the evolution of the private press in Ethiopia like the first-born of the modern media in Ethiopia began life as a rebel against the government which led to a strong attachment to the opposition (Shimelis, 2000).

Nyamnjoh says the ‘underdog syndrome’, which is the western assumption that the press would necessarily work in the direction of liberal democracy if it were free of government control, is too simplistic. He says it not only ignores the ability of the opposition, business and other lobbies in society to manipulate the press; it also overlooks the fact that just like in Europe and north America media proprietors and practitioners in Africa might be attracted to journalism for the reasons other than promoting liberal democracy which may be bad. “The press has divided citizens into riotous and wicked, depending on their party political leanings, ideologies, and regional, cultural and ideological belonging,” (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 82).

And the Ethiopian government claims that private newspapers have “no economic and development and democratization agenda. They are resorted to distort and exaggerate the existing situation and even create non-existing issues” (MOI, 2004). Many private newspapers in Ethiopia have been accused of writing sensational reports and mixing up opinion with facts, biased and unbalanced due to lack of experience and professionalism. “They also publish without counterchecking their sources. As a result, the cardinal principles of journalism, particularly fairness, impartiality, and accuracy, are at stake” (Shimelis, 2000).

Shimelis discusses three labels attached to the non-governmental press in Ethiopia: ‘private’, ‘independent’ and ‘free’. He says the three denominations have been used interchangeably and in a preferential way, a sizable number of those newspapers and magazines which are labeled as ‘opposition publications’ prefer to call themselves ‘free and independent’ (ibid: 2).

Even though many newspapers are published in Ethiopia, journalism as many Western nations practice (or at least believe in practicing) it – as an independent, critical, theoretically objective enterprise – has never really developed, and only sporadically have high-profile Ethiopians objected to the country's lack of an independent ‘fourth estate.’ Western journalists learn early on that reporting must be separated from commentary, but Ethiopian journalists routinely conflate the two. (Aadland and Fackler, 1999)

Shimelis argues that despite its immaturity the independent press in Ethiopia has been revealing, daring and remarkably outspoken, vigorously and audaciously reporting on topics of national concern and absorbing interest to readers such as political marginalization, power abuse, ethnic conflicts, corruption, economic mismanagement, while also advocated political liberalization, press freedom, human rights and national unity. Shimelis contends, however, that the professionalism was questionable all throughout the period he covered, i.e. 1991-1999 (Shimelis, 2000).

In addition to other weaknesses the private press in Africa is seen as leaning too overtly towards commentary and opinion.

Although it could be argued in certain cases that journalists probably focus on commentary and opinion because these are much less perishable than the news which they can not come out with in time because of financial problems, censorship and staff shortages, the fact remains that such opinion and commentary have often been presented as if these were the news. (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 59)

Kasoma's theory argues that the weaknesses of the new independent press gave the African governments an easy excuse to seek to withdraw past concession on freedom of expression and democratization (Kasoma, 1997: 298-307). The result is that newspapers are often irregular in publication "appearing and disappearing with such speed that is often difficult for an outsider to follow their progress or to establish who owns or runs which paper" (Ellis, 2000: 224).

2.3.2 Press regulation

Press and media laws and regulations are the other major factors authors on African media in the past decade and half gave a huge emphasis to. Nyamnjoh says that an examination of most legal frameworks reveals a carving to control that leaves little doubts about how the lawmakers see journalists as potential troublemakers who must be policed. He reports that in some parts of the continent the tendency for new law to grant freedom in principle, while providing the administrative nexus the curtailment of press freedom in practice, is a reality. The post-election period in Ethiopia is a showcase for this theory as the tension which got very high in the pre-election period reached its peak resulting in the imprisonment of many journalists, editors and owners and closing down of major typical independent newspapers like *Netsanet*, *Menelik*, *Abay*,

Ethop and others. And presently the new draft press law in Ethiopia, which is yet to be law, is panicking the Ethiopian media industry.

The confrontational relationship is causing governments to introduce measures, legal and otherwise, aimed at making the press behave responsibly, in the absence of effective self-regulating mechanisms by the press itself these measures are likely to lead to the subjugation of the independent press by governments once again and the reintroduction of dictatorship in Africa at the turn of the millennium and beyond. When this happens, the independent press will have to bear the bulk of the blame for loss of press freedom and democracy. (Kasoma, 1997:295)

Law professor Andargachew Tiruneh asserts that the issuance of a new press law (draft proclamation 2003), which the government issued to replace proclamation 34/1992, is rather restrictive, perhaps more restrictive than proclamation 34/1992 (Andargachew, 2006: 1).

2.3.3 Lack of training

Much of the bad journalism in Africa has been blamed on the lack of professional training for journalists. Onadipe (1998) supports this by saying that the problems with the capabilities of the messenger affect the nature of the message and how it is received. This has made quality, prestige and credibility suffer. In most African countries, journalists in the private press have little or no formal training, and the media have assumed a partisan, highly politicized militant role.

Shimelis emphasizes the challenge of qualified staff as a key factor in the successful launching and operation of a new newspaper.

In Ethiopia there is invariably scarcity of qualified personnel with experience in newspaper editing and management people with the knowledge and skills required to plan a newspaper provide an attractive editorial content and deal with such vital issues as supplies finance advertising and circulation are in short supply pathetically poor conditions of work and rates of pay combined with the low status of the profession make it an uphill struggle for Ethiopian journalism to attract talent and compete with other (more rewarding) callings. (Shimelis, 2000)

Of 25 editors and reporters Shimelis interviewed, 58.6% were 12th grade graduates, 7.2% were holders of a college diploma, 5.2% had a first degree (and one with a master's degree), and 2.5%

had pursued a two-to-three-years education in one or another of the vocational schools, institutes or colleges around the country. The rest (4%) were not willing to specify their educational qualifications (Shimelis, 2000: 31).

The lack of professionalism is acute with regard to the editorial staff as the number of qualified and experienced journalists available is incomparably lower than needed by the private newspapers under circulation. The concentration of the few qualified journalists in a small number of newspapers has limited the possibility of distribution of journalistic knowledge and experience. Accordingly, many newspapers are run by under-qualified individuals with little or no experience and in exceptional circumstances no training at all (Shimelis, 2000).

The trainings, workshops and seminars organized by several foreign organizations have been limited by the fact that they have been conducted in most cases in a language few understood (English). Courses have also tended to be too technical to comprehend and to apply to the Ethiopian scenario. Besides, most private newspapers are too understaffed to spare people for these workshops. All this is reflected in the deterioration of the standards and ethics of journalism in many newspapers, hence the rampancy of misquoting, misinterpreting, plagiarism, focusing on trivial issues, poor layout, subjectivity sensationalism, lies and others (Tedbabe 1990 E.C: 69-72).

Nolawi, a journalist at a local newspaper who produced a paper on the independent press of Ethiopia presented in a meeting held in Kampala, Uganda in 2006 states that technically, the media in Ethiopia is incapacitated, under-resourced, and plagued with a high degree of political partisanship, extremism, unprofessionalism, and a low level of journalistic skills and ethics. This is witnessed among electronic and print journalists working both in private and government outlets (Nolawi, 2006: 3).

2.3.4 Recent criticism of Ethiopian media policy

Poor journalism and government behavior alike have resulted in attack on the Ethiopian press from different sides. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) contends that during its 15 years in power the ruling party EPRDF has come under mounting criticism for its antagonistic attitude towards the country's burgeoning private press. The CPJ reports for the past six years (2001-2006) have claimed that authorities have used a restrictive press law to imprison journalists for critical reporting and to intimidate others into silence on sensitive issues, such as government infighting

and secessionist ethnic groups. The CPJ says that though the 1992 law guarantees freedom of the press, the government restricts this right in practice.

2.4 Summing up

The independent press has a major role in bringing about sustainable democratic functions serving as a catalyst to multipartyism and democracy, but the independent press which was introduced in much of the African countries following the early 1990s global wave of democracy began its mission as a sworn enemy of the young 'democrat' governments in most of the Sub-Saharan African countries including Ethiopia. There was a huge lack of professionalism and ethical standards of journalism and abuse of freedom of press and expression by the press itself. In many instances it was difficult to call the press independent as it acted as a political opposition with a massive practice of advocacy journalism and sensationalism.

The African governments took advantage of that and in the absence of a self-regulatory body of the press, the governments started to take legal and other measures against the press to make it behave responsibly. The confrontation and the government measures lead to the subjugation of the press once again by governments and paved a way for governments to reintroduce dictatorship in Cameroon, Congo, Mozambique, Egypt, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and other countries. Francis Kasoma (1997) says that the 'independent' press will be as much to blame as the governments which are taking draconian measures to stop irresponsible journalism.

The above theory is not a defense against state intervention in press operations. State intervention should be seen as a last measure to bring some sanity to the wanton practice of irresponsible journalism after the journalists themselves have consistently failed to put their own house in order.

Democratic governance works best when the four estates - parliament, the legislature the executive and the press - work independently with little interference from one another but keep a check on one another. As soon as one or more of the estates starts ordering the others what to do, both democratic governance and freedom of the press are diminished.

CHAPTER THREE

Research methodology

3.1 Introduction

As outlined in the first chapter this research studies the recent political history of the private press in democratic Ethiopia. The research does not pretend to give a detailed account of the media history, but gives an analysis of the private press in relation to its independence; its professional and ethical standards; and its contribution for multipartyism and democracy. It also looks at the political communication, i.e. the intercourse between the media and politics, and the role of the media in the political process.

Any media history deserves study as do the institutions of education, politics, religion and labor, because the growth of media represents industrial growth, cultural change, professionalization, and other sociological and cultural factors. The study of media history requires a broad scope and the employment of perspectives and research methodologies of many disciplines, including mass communication, history, sociology and political science. (Folkerts et al., 1997: 458)

This chapter of the research discusses the different methodologies, methods and data-gathering techniques of the study. It also discusses the research design and data analysis procedures the research employed related to the theory discussed in the previous chapter. The methodological approaches are discussed in line with the theoretical framework and their relevance to the goals and aims of the study.

3.2 Data gathering techniques and sources

3.2.1 Main approach

The research approach to the study is qualitative in nature, with individual in-depth interviews and document analysis of historic material as the main sources. Both primary and secondary sources are used. Qualitative research is committed to seeing the social world from the actor's perspective. In this research tradition, there is a preference "for a contextual understanding so that behaviour is

to be understood in the context of meaning systems employed by a particular group or society” (Bryman, 1984: 78).

In analysing the political history of the Ethiopian private press focusing on its independence this thesis mainly takes a perspective of what is the dominant attitude towards the independence of the private press and its role in democratization process. In other words, the description of the independent media in Ethiopia in the past sixteen years has been approached from qualitative research which can be an appropriate choice. Focus in qualitative research lies in examining people’s interpretation of their social world. In fact, the interpretive approach to qualitative research is concerned “not with establishing relations of cause and effect but exploring the way that people make sense of their social worlds and how they express these understandings through language, sound [and] personal lifestyle” (Deacon, et.al., 1999: 13).

3.2.2 Key informants

Semi-structured in-depth interviews as well as informal talks with agents in the media industry were the major primary sources used. A total of 15 people were interviewed individually with semi-structured questions regarding the Ethiopian independent (non-governmental) media, its independence and other related political and historical issues revolving around the independent press. The main objective of the interviews and discussions was to reach at a general picture of the studied time period from various perspectives. Coming from the media, the government and academia, the interviewees represented various angles and interests and outlooks. For a list of the informants, see appendix 1.

3.2.3 Individual in-depth interviews

In-depth interview is an important tool in the elaboration of data concerning respondents’ opinion, value, motivations, recollections, and feelings (Wimmer and Dominic, 2006: 135). The researcher used this tool very intensively and found it helpful in the shaping, elaborating and framing of the raw history, dates, facts and figures about the industry from different sources.

For participants [...] in-depth interviews offer the opportunity to express themselves in a way ordinary life affords them. For their part, interviewers [...] are offered the privilege of

having people who are virtually strangers entrust them with a glimpse into their personal lives. (Natasha, 2005: 29)

As a result of its inherent characteristics of openness and flexibility, qualitative research may lead to the modification of the research design and new discoveries and relationships of research variables (Maxwell, 2005: 22-23). The in-depth interviews with key informants from various actors of the media industry and independent scholars and observers tried to examine personal and institutional views, comments and interpretations of the press and its course in the past sixteen years. The topics of the interviews were later found to be so important that they gave the outline for the thesis structure and the research findings section of the paper. The interviews also contributed to interpreting the legal and policy documents, the literature and other materials regarding the press and the politics of the nation in the given period.

Babbie and Mouton (2005) usefully outline the advantages of the in-depth interview in that it provides a wealth of detail information. The rapport between respondents and interviewer makes it easier to approach certain topics that might be difficult to discover in other approaches. Schroder et al. (2003: 153) explain that the individual interview prevents the “spiral of silence” impacts, contentious outlooks and experiences from being expressed in a group perspective. Due to that, individual interview might be the paramount choice for researcher who wishes to shed light on a sensitive issue that is felt by an individual to be too sensitive to converse about in the presence of others, other than a researcher who grants the informant full anonymity, though no interviewee wanted anonymity in this particular research.

A series of 15 semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were conducted over a three-month period. The interviewer has worked out a set of questions in advance, but was free to modify the nature and focus of the questions based upon the perception of what seems most appropriate in the context of the conversation (Robinson, 1993: 230). The interviewees had a combination of the people from various categories of the media industry who have been major figures in Ethiopian press in the past decade and half. Resource people both from the government, the private and state press, historians and political scientists, independent scholars, one opposition leader, a law maker and others were interviewed thoroughly on the issue. The breadth of interview

subjects sought to give a fair combination of persons who could give a wide image of the press in the given time period.

3.2.4 Secondary sources

Documentary sources are not only vital to check what research has already been done in the field and to examine facts and figures, but also to get an impression of the way events and actors have been portrayed in the past (Deacon et al., 1999). In this study, sources discussing the Ethiopian media are intensively used for the literature review and analysis. Books on the political development of the nation mentioning the press situation, academic studies and papers on the media made by institutions like SIDA , and FSS (Forum for Social Studies) and reports by international press organizations like CPJ [Committee to Protect Journalists] are used in this regard. Various books, studies and papers are used to understand the dominant view of scholars and authors towards the Ethiopian independent press, and to check if there is any significant difference in addressing the issue.

In the course missions, various laws and regulations by the Ministry of Information, mainly the press proclamation (1992) and the draft press law which came out 2003, which is yet to be law, are used; in addition to internet resources and teaching material and unpublished papers like those of Ethiopian law professor Andargachew Tiruneh and veteran journalist Girma Beshah were also studied and used. Statistical facts and figures on the press and other raw data which are released monthly and annually by the Ministry of Information on the nation's media status are also extensively used to interpret the ups and downs in the media in relation to the political development.

3.3 Data presentation and analysis

As discussed above the collection will be mainly qualitative. The researcher has attempted to make the presentation explanatory and the analysis interpretive. The individual in-depth interviews were recorded and notes were taken during the discussions to further strengthen the recorded materials. The data were then transcribed to capture the main ideas into words of the participants. After that the responses were categorized depending on the purpose and objective of the research and finally

were thematically compiled to analyze and examine the landscape of the media through the recent democratic period.

Strelitz (2005: 4) write that through the look into the ‘insider’ perspective, a qualitative researcher attempts to understand social behaviour in its social context instead of viewing, events from outside and imposing empirical concerns upon social reality as a quantitative researcher often does. Working for three major private independent newspapers – *Reporter* (both Amharic and English), *Capital* and the *Sub Saharan Informer* – as a reporter for more than two years, and taking part in various journalism initiatives and being a member of one of the seven journalist associations in Ethiopia is an additional asset of the researcher to understand what the interviewees talk about and the books and researches discuss. Because of the relations to the field the researcher also had the opportunity to contact many people in the industry informally and was in a position to get earnest views from the interviewees.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data presentation and analysis

4.1 Introduction

The departure point of this chapter is the status of the independent press which is both a necessary prerequisite and a co-requisite for democracy and multiparty politics in Ethiopia. The subsequent analysis attempts to shed light on the question whether the independent press performs its role ethically and professionally, and it analyzes the state-press relations and the involvement of the independent press in Ethiopian politics. The chapter presents and analyzes the findings of the study in light of the research objectives discussed in chapter one and in relation to arguments raised in the literature review section.

The analysis begins with an overview of the Ethiopian independent press since its birth in 1991.

4.2 The independent press since 1991

Before 1990 the African media was mostly controlled by governments where journalists were considered as the adherents of the system and were expected to pay allegiance to the government by respecting the canons of the civil service rather than those of journalism (Nyamnjoh, 2005). The Ethiopian scenario was hardly any different.

The history of the press in Ethiopia is dominated by political partisanship on both the privately owned and state controlled media outlets. Private media wasn't allowed to exist during the military regime of the Derg (1974-1991) and the State controlled print and electronic media was solely used for communist propaganda and rallying support for its wars with what it called "enemies of the revolution". Though the media was carefully watched and controlled by the EPRDF who took office ousting the military regime in May 1991, the private media has had better environment to flourish and give the people alternative sources of information. (Nolawi, 2006: 1)

The emergence of the independent press in the 1990s in Africa has often been accompanied by the switch to multiparty politics (Kasoma, 1992: 2). As Bofo states the media in Africa could, in

fact, help provide a basis for building sustainable pluralistic democratic structures by stimulating and encouraging critical awareness, public discussion, participation in the decision-making process as well as exposing bureaucratic incompetence, corruption, abuse of power and the violation of human rights (Boafo, 1992: 4-5).

To develop media as a viable source of information is to enable and support democracy in Ethiopia by strengthening human rights and democratic institutions. The promotion of human rights depends, among other factors, on the active involvement of the media. On the other hand, the effective operation of the media depends on a government that respects human rights and the freedom "to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through media and regardless of frontiers" (The Press Freedom Bill). The freedom of expression may be ushered in and cultivated through professional, independent journalism. (Aadland and Fackler, 1999)

In 1991 EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front), the party which overthrew the Marxist military regime introduced a multiparty political system and guaranteed freedom of expression in the TGE charter. Many legal opposition parties and many more independent newspapers, which are central for the new multiparty democratic system, appeared.

The continental and international wave and its significant effects were as much a test of the new government commitment to the democratization process as it was a challenge for Ethiopia's emerging democratic institutions. It was also a rare opportunity to be exploited in the promotion of democracy and basic individual rights that had been denied for so long the media, with all their component parts such as the print and electronic sectors and other communication paraphernalia, came to the fore to foster the development of participatory democracy. (Ethiopia: Transition to Democracy [hereinafter, Ethiopia], 1991: 122)

According to Bereket Simon, former Information Minister (2000-2005) and head of the political department of EPRDF, the 1992 press proclamation was drafted in the transitional time when the nation was transferring from the dictatorial military regime to a multi-party, free market federal system based on the willingness and rights of nations, nationalities and peoples of the country (personal interview, May 13, 2007). The 1991 regime change brought major political, economic and social restructuring of the nation. Shimelis Bensa, author of 'Survey of The Private Press in Ethiopia: 1991-1999', says that the 1992 press proclamation is the major landmark in the entire

media history of the nation since it is the manifestation of the whole political system which introduced multiparty politics, and as it was a transition from a one party/one press regime to a multiparty/multi-press era (Shimelis, 2000).

In his unpublished teaching material, law professor Andargachew Tiruneh puts the fate of the Ethiopian media 1991 as such:

When it came to power in 1991 the Ethiopian people's revolutionary democratic front (EPRDF) had a choice of policies it could have pursued regarding the mass media. On one hand it could have maintained state control of the media as its predecessors did, as China, Cuba and North Korea are still doing. (Andargachew, 2006: 1)

Andargachew points out that on the other hand EPRDF could have denationalized all the state-owned media and encouraged the development of the private media which is by and large the major practice in the west and the desire of the international economic institutions. EPRDF adopted a middle-of-the-road option instead of pursuing either of the above options by retaining the already existing public media under its control and greatly expanding it and by allowing the private sector to participate in the media industry.

The most liberal law of EPRDF is proclamation 34/1992 initially intended to govern both the electronic and print media in the private sector (art.2 (1) of proclamation 34/1992). It is more liberal than the other laws in part at least because it does not envisage the creation of a government agency to regulate the sub-sector. (Andargachew, 2006: 1)

Article 3(1) of the proclamation states, "freedom of the press is recognized and respected", while Article 3(10) also states, "censorship of the press and restriction of a similar nature are hereby prohibited". And right of access for journalists to state officials is supported in Article 8(1), as well as Article 19, which states: "Government officials shall have the duty to cooperate with the press in the furtherance of the principle that the people have the right to know about the operations of government and the accountability of government officials" (1992).

Though there were criticisms on the 1992 press proclamation, most share Andargachew's view as the concern of the industry was more on the practical applicability of the laws on the function of the press rather than the claw backs and other press unfriendly sections of the law,

“Ethiopia's Constitution grants basic civil liberties to its citizens, including freedom of speech and freedom of the press. However, the legislation governing the press is viewed by many as a hindrance to the development of a free press in Ethiopia” (Aadland and Fackler).The press proclamation was later solidly backed by the constitution of Ethiopia in 1995 establishing freedom of speech in Article 29 where it states that:

1. *Everyone has the right to hold opinions without interference.*
2. *Everyone has the right to freedom of expression without any interference. This 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.*
3. *Freedom of the press and other mass media and freedom of artistic creativity is guaranteed. Freedom of the press shall specifically include the following elements:*
 - (a) *Prohibition of any form of censorship.*
 - (b) *Access to information of public interest.*
4. *In the interest of the free flow of information, ideas and opinions which are essential to the functioning of a democratic order, the press shall, as an institution, enjoy legal protection to ensure its operational independence and its capacity to entertain diverse opinions.*
5. *Any media financed by or under the control of the State shall be operated in a manner ensuring its capacity to entertain diversity in the expression of opinion.*
6. *These rights can be limited only through laws which are guided by the principle that freedom of expression and information cannot be limited on account of the content or effect of the point of view expressed. Legal limitations can be laid down in order to protect the well-being of the youth, and the honor and reputation of individuals. Any propaganda for war as well as the public expression of opinion intended to injure human dignity shall be prohibited by law.*
7. *Any citizen who violates any legal limitations on the exercise of these rights may be held liable under the law.*
(FDRE Constitution, Art. 29)

But most of the independent press which started its operation as a sworn enemy of the government and the party in power, strongly opposed the constitution and some even overtly showed that they did not accept it. Degene Tessema, Editor-in-chief of the government-run English daily the Ethiopian Herald, says that many of them were sued as they did not recognize the constitution and the legal framework of the country and the legitimacy of the structures. “Defiantly most of the independent press was the unofficial papers of opposition parties with no balance and high degree of sensationalism,” Degene says (personal interview, April 28, 2007).

The Ethiopian publishing industry mushroomed after the Press Bill of 1992. Figures differ, but according to the Ministry of Information, 385 publications were registered between October 1992 and July 1997, of which 265 were newspapers and 120 magazines. At any one time, there are still probably about 20 different newspapers for sale. The proliferation of periodicals was taken as an acute demonstration of the people's long-harbored dissatisfaction with the government-controlled media, while at the same time it served as an indication of their hunger for an alternative source of information. But figures from the Ministry of Information shows that more than half of the newspapers were closed down during the same five-year period (Aadland and Fackler, 1999).

4.3 Analysis and discussion

4.3.1 Professional and ethical problems

Girma Beshah, 76, a veteran journalist says that “the independent press which came into being following the 1992 press proclamation was acting like a jinni out of the lamp, but it was a mad jinni,” (personal interview, June 5, 2007). Girma compares the ground-breaking event with opening flood gates which let the long blocked freedom of expression flow. But the conventional yardstick of professional and ethical standards of journalism were not respected as the euphoric press wanted to write about everything they want which he says is typical to the situation. Wisdom Tetty said that one editor acknowledges that ‘the feeling of euphoria that followed journalists’ newfound freedom of expression had led many to mistakenly assume that there were no limits on what they could and could not write’ (Tetty,2006)

Taferi Mekonnen, who has been a journalist for eleven years in seven independent newspapers and magazines and former president of the Ethiopian National Journalists Union (ENJU), backs Girma by saying the first years of the independent press was a time of madness (personal interview, May 7, 2007). In the same way six of the fifteen respondents for this study referred to the first years practice of the independent press as “madness”, “insanity”, “driven by instinct” or “big mess”, indicating the degree of unprofessional and unethical practices at the time.

Taferi and most of the interviewees try to divide the history of the Ethiopian independent press in three or four time periods. Most see the first five or six years of the industry (1991-1997) as a mess and madness where the people was unable to choose from the flooded industry. Some think that in the next period some coolness was seen as professional and ethically integrated

newspapers like *Reporter*, *Addis Admas*, *Fortune*, *Capital* and others joined and dominated the scene (1997-2004). Some try to create another small period between this period and the post-2005 election period as they portray the return of the gross irresponsible, unprofessional and unethical newspapers with sensational and biased reporting which led to the 'attack' by the government on the press at the end of 2005. And the last section is the post-election era where many of the typical independent newspapers were closed and their editors jailed. But interviewees like Bereket Simon (former Information Minister) do not acknowledge any divisions as he thinks that the press has been acting badly since its birth. He maintains that sensible journalism is just a new phenomenon in the industry which came in the past couple of years (personal interview, May 13, 2007).

The unprofessional and unethical practices of the Ethiopian press which, was very much sensational, damaged its credibility. Referring to the continent at large in the early 1990s, Kasoma claims that the rate of truth-reporting in Africa's newspapers, particularly those behaving as political oppositions, was extremely low. "The newspapers are full of exaggerations; basing their reports on flimsy hear-say; making headlines cry 'wolf'; quoting sources out of context; not giving people against whom allegations are made a fair hearing; downright" (Kasoma, 1992: 6). And in the second period (1997-2004) most readers became selective which is one of the reasons for the closing down of a substantial number of the newspapers.

It is worrying that almost all respondents and other sources used for this thesis agree that the Ethiopian independent press was no different from what Kasoma expressed in the above paragraph. The difference, however, lies in the way the EPRDF government took care of the situation. One group among the respondents says that the government should have let the industry run its course as the industry had a lot of problems and as they believe that the press had to pass through the mess and madness, while the other group argues that through all the problems the very objectives of the press was wrong and it was a threat for the peace and stability of the nation and the newly implemented multiparty democratic system and the government had to do something to defend freedom of expression itself. But both groups, though they differ on their degree of confirmation, again agree that against all odds the independent press was a major catalyst in the democratization process.

Solome Tadesse, who served as the first and the last spokesperson of the Ethiopian government at the time of the Ethio-Eritrean war 1998-2000, says that what happened "should

have happened”. She argues that the press should have gone to the process to reach the professional and ethical standards and the government should have let the press follow its course in the situation. “There were not many professional and educated journalists but the people should have spoken what they wanted to speak” (personal interview, May 19, 2007). She says the freedom of expression should not be restricted because of absence of professionals; “The journalists came out of the society and they wrote what the society wanted to read. They are the exact reflections of the society”. She says that though there was strong link with the opposition parties and huge problem of professionalism and ethics the question should not be how *objective* the independent press was, it is how *less subjective* it was.

Another major actor in the industry, Abiy Teklemariam, Editor-in-chief of *Meznagna*, one of the Amharic newspapers closed down following the 2005 national election unrest, makes the government responsible for the decline in the number of the newspapers in the first five years after 1991 and after the turmoil following the 2005 national elections. He says that there is always quite a messy scenario in starting something and the independent press was also messy as there were unethical and unprofessional practices and some papers consider themselves only as a business firm without any social responsibility orientation (personal interview, April 25, 2007).

“At the time like this you should open up more that people will start to choose and the messy ones will go out of business” he says. “You learn by experience [that] if you allow more speech there will be a responsible press to curb the actions of the irresponsible one, so the solution is to broaden the freedom. As for every *Daily Mail* and *the Sun* there are *the Times* or/and *the Guardian* to counter-balance things.” Abiy argues that judging a philosophy by its abuse is wrong and because of unprofessional activities of the press one can not limit the freedom of expression. Abiy denounces any intervention from the government to behave the press as he believes that the press itself deals with its problems through time.

For Abiy, who does not recognize Ethiopia as a democratic state in practice, journalistic professional and ethical standards have different definitions in democracy and in dictatorship.

Sticking to the universal principles of journalism may not result in what should be the objectives of the independent press in Ethiopia, which is fighting dictatorship. I talked to Sisay, Ethop's (Amharic weekly banned after the election) owner before he was arrested and asked him about not being faithful to the ethics and professional

standards of journalism. He said that if I want I can call him 'unjournalist' and said that he doesn't want to be guided by the western journalistic standards because applying the western standards in Ethiopia like fairness and objectivity is giving the dictatorship government an unfair advantage. (Abiy Teklemariam, personal interview, April 25, 2007)

Abiy says that to some extent he agrees with Sisay Agena. Sisay specifically told Abiy that his role as a journalist is to do away with dictatorship. The attitude reflected by the owner of *Ethop*, a paper which was one of the top papers in circulation with more than 100.000 copies a week (MOI,2007) especially in the 2005 national election time, clearly shows the stand of the major independent newspapers and how journalistic professional and ethical yardsticks were baldly rejected among the independent press major actors. Based on this attitude of the independent press as an opposition with an intention to change the regime, one can easily define what can the industry's relations with the government and the opposition parties.

Tedbabe (1990 E.C., cited in Shimelis, 2000) says that one of the justifications for joining the journalistic profession is love for the country, a claim which could, and did in fact, imply opposition to the government in power for large parts of the independent press. This claim was presented in the most direct terms possible in the editorials of several of the newspapers. Shimelis Bonsa also proves the point when he says that to some extent, the motives for launching a newspaper have also become a drawback. In interviews conducted with some 70 journalists by Shimelis, it appeared that most embark upon publishing tabloids not for the love of the profession, nor to disseminate information and knowledge and to build democracy and social development, but rather to make profit and at the same time oppose some of the policies of the government. "With such narrow objectives, the profession itself suffers and some of the tabloids have lost credibility" (Shimelis, 2000).

Author of the major reference book of the Ethiopian press in the first years since 1991, Shimelis informs that some of the journalists he talked to in the course of producing the book think that it is impossible to work upon the international professional and ethical standards of journalism. They argued that an Ethiopian way of journalism which fit the political, economic and social status of the nation was needed (Shimelis Bonsa, personal interview, June 13, 2007).

There are clear indications that the standards of professionalism and ethics were often violated by the independent press after 1991. The press as a whole seemed to be working against many of the internationally accepted ethical and professional principles of journalism. Besides, most of the people who joined the industry had no experience in journalism. Unfortunately, it seems that the bad practice left some kind of a trend and precedent among new journalists and newspapers joining the industry. One should hate the government to be a good journalist or paper, as 'patriotism' was considered a major quality mark of the profession. Amare Aregawi editor-in-chief of the *Reporter* said that, it is difficult to determine which one is due to lack of professionalism and which one is an abuse (Gerbremedihin, 2006).

Bereket Simon, who was Information Minister at the peak time of the state-media tension (2000-2005), thinks that the government has been utterly tolerant towards the press. He says that war criminals in the former military regime that could have been charged with war crimes were also involved in the industry, but the right to publish meant a lot for the oppressed people and it was hard to put a limitation on it. He says that everyone had a right to work as a journalist whether he/she was a professional or not in a nation which did not have any journalism education.

Bereket claims that most of them were not professional and were politically inclined. "They used the press as a political weapon against the government ,and most of the independent press acted as an opposition press" (personal interview, May 13, 2007).

Lidetu Ayalew, MP and former vice president of the major opposition party CUD, shares the views of other informants that a considerable number of the private press acted as an opposition party press and worked with too much sensationalism. He says the press and the media were a reflection of the polarized political scenario which lacked tolerance and a disciplined culture of dialogue. Lidetu has been a favorite figure of the independent press and Ethiopian opposition politics. Much of the independent press has acted as his and his political fellows' outlet. But the moment Lidetu walked out of the coalition (CUD) after the 2005 election a serious series of attacks was devised against him, and a campaign which can probably be the major demonizing mission against a figure in the history of the Ethiopian independent press was launched. The scenario fits what Ellis says is common knowledge among journalists themselves, namely that "certain writers or newspapers are the unofficial mouthpieces of particular interests or politicians or are simply open to hire in the form of bribery by any faction, occasionally for the

defamation of their rivals” (Ellis, 2000: 225). Traitor, glutton and other insulting names were given to Lidetu by most of the typical independent newspapers and some even incited anger and rage against him.

But Lidetu still thinks that the private press was taken as an option for the opposition and the public to voice their say as the public media is abused and indulged in government propaganda and he makes the government responsible for misusing the public media. The freedom house report 2004 supports Lidetu, that the opposition parties were denied access to the public media (Freedom House, 2004).

Bereket disagrees with Lidetu who says that the government itself created the partisanship by making the public media the mouthpiece of the government and not giving the opposition an appropriate opportunity to utilize the public media. He says though there were problems in the past, these days the government media give airtime for all the opposition parties in a responsible manner, especially during the 2005 elections, when they used their quotas almost 100%. Bereket informs that the opposition took 56% of the airtime in the 2005 national elections. “But after the election the parties were not only carrying a peaceful struggle and it was hard to host them while they were combining riot and peaceful struggle and going against the constitution” (personal interview, May 13, 2007).

Concerning access to information, Bereket affirms that the performance of his government on the issue previously has been unsatisfactory. He says the government did not understand the value of free information. “As a result both the government and private journalists suffered, but at the same time, the government is doing much better now and the improvement continues”. At the same time he argues that the problem of the independent press is not strongly related to poor access to government-held information; it is rather related to its basic rationale for its existence and establishment and its political agenda.

Tafari Mekonnen and other informants think that there was a time in the middle of the 16-year period where a significant number of the independent press sobered from its ‘madness’ and started to act responsibly. This, Tafari maintains, was especially the case after the first five-year period of the independent press when the number of publications declined sharply. He relates this refinement of the newspaper industry to market theory, which he thinks explains why some outlets of the independent press managed to survive during the period 1997-2005, when responsible and

professional titles like *Reporter*, *Addis Admas*, *Fortune* and some others appeared. Bereket, however, maintains that Ethiopia never had a vibrant and democratic press during this period.

It has always been a crisis media, the circulation and the market goes up to 180,000 copies for bad news and at crisis times and the circulation and the number of the papers declines when the people start to live in peace and stability and the country experience development. They were papers of crisis and they were playing based on the political temperature. They eat crisis. The independent press has been the contest of who was the ugliest. (personal interview, May 13, 2007)

Though it is difficult to generalize the independent press as a crisis media it is clear that the circulation numbers sky rockets mostly when there is a crisis – or at election times – and some newspapers were experts in creating headlines out of nothing in producing fabricated stories or manipulating the truth to catch the readers, win the market, support their buddies and demonize their opponents. And as Tetty says because of the critical analysis, content and position of most of the independent newspapers which does not reflect a disintegrated political agenda he prefer to refer to them as private than independent as he thinks that most of the private press is not really independent (Tetty, 2001).

Wondwossen Mekonnen, who has been a journalist for more than a decade working as Editor-in-chief and editor for eight independent newspapers like *Tazabi*, *Meyisaw*, *Meyisaw Kassa*, *Aemero* and others says that strong vendors had a mandate to tell owners and editors what to write to get the market, and they had a significant role in deciding front page stories. Through time some of them were able to open their own newspapers and be ‘successful’. “Through time some of the vendors I personally know well turned out to be editors and publishers, you can easily guess what they would produce,” he says (personal interview, May 20, 2007).

There are in fact numerous reports where wholesale distributors-publishers force fabrication of news and the inclusion in the front pages of news and photographs which they thought would be of absorbing interest to readers. Such an unethical practice was used in response to the volatile newspaper market and at the expense of quality, fairness, and professionalism hence a serious debasing of many newspapers were sensationalism of libel was rampant and the boudoir between objectivity and subjectivity, fact and hyperbole became tenuous. (Shimelis, 2000)

Among the obstacles to newspaper development is the major problem of qualified staff, a key factor in the successful launching and operation of a new newspaper. In Ethiopia there is invariably scarcity of qualified personnel with experience in newspaper editing and management. Of 25 editors and reporters Shimelis interviewed, 58.6% were 12th grade graduates, 7.2% were holders of a college diploma, 5.2% had a first degree (and one with a master's degree), and 2.5% had pursued a two-to-three-years education in one or another of the vocational schools, institutes or colleges around the country. The rest (4%) were not willing to specify their educational qualifications (Shimelis, 2000: 31).

The proliferation of newspapers which are financially and organizationally weak or professionally under- or ill-qualified as well as the presence in the business of irresponsible publishers and editors correspondingly have increased the importance of a select few wholesale distributors. Such wholesalers emerged as sole financial providers to a number of papers, in addition to the additional role they played in newspaper distribution. This has inevitably enabled them, for instance to know the content of a newspaper prior to publication and consequently to substance. (Shimelis, 2000: 64)

Tesfu Birhane, Deputy Editor-in-chief of the business weekly Capital, is one of the stakeholders emphasizing the lack of competency and ability of Ethiopian journalists.

The major threat for Ethiopian independent journalism is incompetence. Ethiopian journalists are incompetent and English is the major problem. The other problem is lack of general knowledge skills and the know-how, how to write news. (personal interview, June 13, 2007)

Tesfu's concern is real that the poor level of general knowledge, basic math, English, economics and world international affairs usually lead to unintentional mistakes in reporting which mainly arise from lack of interest in the profession, lack of reading and fact checking and laziness. The managing director of the same newspaper, Tiguest Yilma, shares the idea and says that the in-house issue of professionalism has been the major threat and challenge for the practice of journalism rather than a threat from outside.

In his media accountability article where he asks who watches the watch dog? By exploring mechanisms of media accountability in Africa, Tetty said that it is worth pointing out that these

tensions among freedom of expression, media ethics and accountable journalism are not unique to Africa (Tetty, 2006).

Wondwossen alleges that most of the independent press journalists in Ethiopia in the 1990s served the former Derg government and therefore did extremely sensational and hatred-filled journalism because the change of the regime made them lose their interest. The first independent press was unprofessional, unethical, sensational and highly politicized and for the mass which did not have any experience of the practice and for journalists who joined the industry later it left a standard or precedent that that is the way to do good journalism to write with 'love of the country with patriotic feeling'. (Wondwossen Mekonnen, personal interview, May 20, 2007)

He continues to say that journalists had to lie for the existence of their newspaper and themselves. "The society itself forced you to lie and changed the industry to a commercial competition where the [better] news you have the better market you have. Some venders who adopted the routine joined the industry as owners, editors, journalists and gave the bad practice a momentum." He says besides considering the government as the common enemy of the independent press there was an ongoing battle between the industry itself, one newspaper against the other to kill it and avoid the other from the market which end up with dangerous practices like defamation inciting violence and going against the ABCs of journalism.

Even though many newspapers are published in Ethiopia, journalism as many Western nations practice (or at least believe in practicing) it—as an independent, critical, theoretically objective enterprise—has never really developed, and only sporadically have high-profile Ethiopians objected to the country's lack of an independent "fourth estate." Western journalists learn early on that reporting must be separated from commentary, but Ethiopian journalists routinely conflate the two. (Aadland and Fackler)

4.3.2 State-press relationship

The existence of an independent press adhering to roles like the 'fourth estate' and 'watch dog' were new in Ethiopian political life as the media has only been the mouthpiece of governments till 1991.

It is fair to say that while the makeup of Ethiopia's government has frequently changed during the twentieth century, the printing press's function, as well as that of radio, television, and news agencies, has remained the same: to serve the government in power. Media have consistently and primarily promoted government policy and activities.

Consequently, Ethiopia has little or no indigenous tradition of thinking about the press as a free commercial enterprise, or as a watchdog or critic of the government. (Aadland and Fackler: 1999)

It can be baldly stated that when the philosophy and practice of the independent media acting as the fourth *estate* came both the government miserably failed to understand the concept and the media did not know how to play their roles. The government did not recognize the media as a *fourth estate* as the existing three 'estates' had problems of check and balance by it self, and the media with strong political orientation and weak professional and ethical standard was not in a position to play the character.

Shimelis says that the existence of some kind of understanding between the private press and the government is fundamental to the status of the press. In countries like Ethiopia, where the forms of democracy are experimental, the private press is suspicious of the government. Professor Andargachew concludes that Ethiopian independent journalists have "exceeded the legitimate bounds of acting as a *fourth estate*." He says that their treatment of issues has been one-sided, which has practically prevented them from seeing that any good has been achieved by the government:

Their publications have been too partial and sensational so as to lead one to believe that they are not in the business of reporting politics but, rather, making it. It is as though they have a mission to accomplish, a mission which they pursue with extraordinary zeal and at all costs. (Andargachew Tiruneh, HAPI workshop, March 2006)

The question "Why be a journalist?" has been a determining factor in the state-press relations in Ethiopia in the past decade and half. Abiy (editor-in-chief, *Meznagna*) says the role and objectives of most of the private independent press in Ethiopia is seen as fighting dictatorship; and if one talks about professionalism, ethics or sensationalism it should be seen from this angle. He says that "In a country like Ethiopia, which is in a democratic transition but still on the border of dictatorship, the role of the press is different from the west."

He argues the role of the independent press is it to fight dictatorship, and allowing fair amount of space for dictators by sticking to the international standards is helping them to propagate their idea. "The theories and principles of journalism professionalism and ethics should

be different from the west as the Ethiopian independent press exists in an environment which is harshly critical,” Abiy says.

This formula which leads to unethical practices made the line between the opposition parties and the independent press less visible and is a major cause for the sour and marred state-media relations in Ethiopia. This line of thought, which is expressed in different ways by different actors in the interview and in documents used for this thesis, somehow fits with the accusation of the government that the fundamental intension of the independent press is ill-conceived. The philosophy leads the press to the problems discussed above; unprofessional, unethical and sometimes unlawful practices destroying the state-press relations severely.

Historically, the Ethiopian government will tolerate freedom of speech to a certain point. But opposition newspapers regularly report dramatic instances of censorship: stories of journalists harassed and imprisoned for reporting truth, etc. The appearance of such stories may, in some cases, have more to do with anti-government hostility on the part of opposition newspapers than with fact—much of these papers' content is based on rumors. A critical use of sources is a rare virtue in Ethiopian journalism of any kind, even though this is basic for developing a trustworthy journalism, and even promoters of human rights in Ethiopia are of the opinion that some journalists are asking for trouble. Journalists have a tendency to distrust open sources, and are more willing to trust what is whispered in the coffee houses. However, these points granted, one must still admit that government oppression of journalists is a reality in Ethiopia as it is throughout the world in fact, Ethiopia once imprisoned more journalists than almost any other country. (Aadland and Fackler, 1999)

This takes us to Kasoma’s argument that the independent press is playing the role of opposition parties in the new multipartism lacking strong opposition. African governments have found this malpractice very objectionable and used as justification to muzzle the press. Here it should be noticed that any strong criticism does not put a press under this category as many African governments use this excuse to muzzle the press as Kasoma said above.

Rønning (1994, cited in Nyamnjoh, 2005) says, “the fact of a weak opposition in most African countries has offered repressive governments the easy potion of branding as oppositional all critical media and blaming all the opposition any embarrassing reports by the media instead of addressing the issue raised” (Rønning, 1994: 18). Nyamnjoh adds to this argument that the private press, by taking upon itself a highly oppositional political role, has often allowed itself to be “used

as pawns in the dirty game of politics,” and has eased the destruction of its professional credibility with sensationalism and suspicious advocacy jeopardizing its relations with governments (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 59).

From the documents reviewed and people interviewed the researcher encountered that many journalists and editors of the independent press baldly admit that they joined the industry to oppose the government and to bring down the ‘dictatorship’ with a strong patriotic feeling rather than to inform, educate and empower the people. Most of the interviewees said that the independent press did not consider it wrong to actively involve in the politics and making politics rather than reporting it as politicians by holding strong stands and being a strong supporter of the opposition and an arch-enemy of the party in power. Newspapers which tried to be professional and ethical by being balanced and giving a fair space to the government are labeled as pro-government. Writing anything good in one way or the other about the government was considered as betraying the public as many newspapers like *Netsanet* and *Ethiop* continuously accused *Reporter* of being a pro-government newspaper and lobbied for its boycott. There was an unwritten rule that the government is always wrong. Most of the independent press was not critical of the opposition and attacked newspapers that did so, as happened with *Ethop* and *Addis Admas*. Here it should be noticed that though insignificant in number there have also been independent newspapers which usually publish pro-government and anti-opposition reports.

Objective news-reporting is rendered difficult due to the political orientation of most private newspapers. Any sign of appreciation, even if limited, of government policy or action has thus been treated as being unpatriotic and collusion with enemies of Ethiopia. This intense feeling, attributable as it is to the exclusionary policies and practices of the government and to the urban-cosmopolitan origin of most private journalists, has indeed become a mark of identification for the largest number of private newspapers. (Shimelis, 2000)

Professor Bahru Zewdie, a renowned contemporary historian, says that the independent press was born with a strong oppositional cult (personal interview, May 5, 2007). He says that professional and ethical standards were very poor, and as the industry opened its door many without qualification and real journalism interest, but with immense political agendas and inclination, joined the industry. Bahru, who says that the government also put a lot of hurdles for the new

industry, claims that this later on exposed the independent press to government attacks. He says that the role of the government to create a responsible and independent media was poor, even bad. Bahru's point is backed by many of the interviewees and the reading materials consulted for this thesis. It also arguably matches the reality.

Privately operating journalists are also hampered by the fact that they are cut off from part of the governmental flow of information. Direct censorship against independent newspapers is rare, but the government, on the other hand, claims that the independent press is irresponsible and un-trustworthy. This is the official reason why journalists from the independent press are denied access to the government press conferences. Thus the situation is aggravated by both sides in the conflict. (Aadland and Fackler, 1999)

Nolawi Melakedingel (2006: 1) confirms this when he writes that the situation of the media in the last 16 years can be characterized by a shadow of suspicion between the government and the private press, where the government categorizes the majority of the private media (the print media) as more of political advocates within the opposition camp using freedom of speech as a medium of conspiracy and incitement to topple the status quo. "However, one could say, with a bigger degree of confidence, that the private media has at times abused its constitutional rights by openly pursue political agendas," Nolawi writes. Looking at some of the dominant philosophies of the Ethiopian independent press reflected by editors Sisay Agena (*Ethop*) and Abiy Teklemariam (*Meznagna*), and based on what Shimelis and Tedbabe have found out in their researches backed by the reason of many journalists to join the profession, Nolawi's idea of the independent press as a political advocate appears trustworthy.

4.3.2.1 Polarized Society

Media scholars Øyvind Aadland and Mark Fackler (1999) observe that "public debate in Ethiopia seems polarized and events and statements are easily interpreted to fit into the patterns of old conflict, and few people seem willing to engage in constructive dialogue with their adversaries." History professor Bahru Zewdie backs the view by saying that the labeling and polarization developed in 1970s students' socialist movement still continues in the political arena of the nation and there is also deep mistrust regarding an opponent's motives. Professor Andargachew Tiruneh,

a part-time lecturer at City University in London and Graduate School of Journalism and Communication at Addis Ababa University, says:

We have been following a very left-wing policy in Ethiopia for a very long time. And that has influenced the attitude of people. They like to be radical. They like to be critical, and the criticisms usually are not constructive. It is just a matter of debunking, undermining the other side. (Andargachew Tiruneh, HAPI workshop, March 2006)

One of the causes for this polarization is the absence of a tradition of dialogue among adversaries. Ethiopia's democratic movement during the 1990s has so far been neither strong enough, nor has it lasted long enough to alleviate some peoples' fears that the dialogue will backfire that it may touch some sensitive issues regarding race or religion which can not be solved soon and may lead to violence.

Tafari (former president of ENJU) says the political and ethnic polarization in the society is clearly reflected in the activities of the independent media. "If you are not harsh on the government you will be labeled as government-affiliated as it is presumed that the government press is there to talk about the good of the government and the independent press should always talk the bad side and be an enemy" (personal interview, May 7, 2007).

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who tends to be strong in addressing the bad practices of the independent press, referred to the private press as a "ghetto and gutter press" in a press conference in 2005, and asserted that the private press in the country is not free of political affiliations and is consumed by undisguised bias. Nolawi says that "The cloud of mistrust that reigns between the government and private media has contributed to under-performance of the journalistic profession which paved the way to a lack of confidence and of professional and ethical standards of the press among the public" (Nolawi, 2006: 3).

According to the Ministry of Information, the private press has "no economic and development and democratization agenda. They are resorted to distort and exaggerate the existing situation and even create non-existing issues" (MoI, 2004). The private newspapers are accused by the ministry of writing sensational reports and mixing up opinion with facts, biased and unbalanced due to lack of experience and professionalism. They also publish without counterchecking their sources. As a result, the cardinal principles of journalism, particularly

fairness, impartiality, and accuracy, are at stake. In fact, distorted and even dishonest reports and news coverage are not uncommon in the private press. Moreover, in the case of *Tapela*, under-qualified persons employed in low quality newspapers are a showcase for irresponsible journalism, and the driving force for the press are not standard or ethics, but profit (Shimelis, 2000: 67).

Shimelis continues to say that the private press has blossomed to be outspokenly partisan. "Objective news-reporting is rendered difficult due to the political orientation of most private papers" (Shimelis, 2000: 70). He further concludes that this is, in fact, little more than an acute manifestation of a tradition of political intolerance, a period of transition, of heightened nationalism and of intolerantly divided politics.

4.3.2.2 The 2005 National Elections

The 2005 national election was a landmark event in the history of modern Ethiopian politics as it had the best pre-election time where opposition parties and the ruling party were campaigning in a relatively peaceful and matured way. Many citizens got really interested in the politics of the nation and were optimistic about the nation's future. It is also the time where some of the typical independent press newspapers like *Ethop* and *Netsanet* had record high circulation more than 100,000 a week. But the good spirit did not last beyond the voting day as the opposition claimed that the election was rigged and accused the government of fraud. The major opposition party CUD did not accept the results and boycotted to join the House of People's Representative. The independent press was the main advocate of the rigging claim and the boycotting of the House.

The independent press in Ethiopia blames the government of persistent crippling of media outlets outside of its direct control, while the government accuses the private media of being a propaganda tool working behind opposition political forces. Subsequently, a number of journalists were imprisoned following the October 2005 post-election crisis facing charges of conspiracy to topple a constitutionally established government through illegal acts. 13 journalists were arrested following the unrest in October 2005 and police blocked most private newspapers from publishing, raided newspaper offices, confiscated computers, documents and other materials; and issued a "wanted list" of editors, writers, and protesters.

Tafari Mekonnen (former president of ENJU) records that the private press in many ways was more powerful than the opposition parties in most of the past 16 years and it contributed

negatively to national consensus and decent and mature multiparty politics. “It was not genuinely critical, objective and impartial, and in most cases the private newspapers functioned as the mouthpiece of the opposition parties. So the government started to look at the press with the same glass as it looked at the opposition parties,” (personal interview, May 7, 2007).

The independent press’s role as an opposition press created more gaps and mistrust between the government and opposition parties as it was engaged in emphasizing their differences and clashes, destroying the spirit of collaboration on national issues with common interests and co-existence which is fundamental for multipartism. The press has been polarizing issues and differences between the two parties, putting the whole multiparty democratic system development and existence at risk. Following the 2005 unrest most of the prominent leaders in the nation’s major opposition which won the capital in a landslide, CUD were jailed and the party was disintegrated. Though the leaders along with the jailed journalists were released in August 2007 the party could not continue with its previous momentum as the division between the top leaders got irreversible. Many believe that wrong decisions especially boycotting the parliament has a lot to do with the collapse which the independent media advocated a lot for.

The above scenario which depicts the Ethiopian state-media relations fits the theory of Francis Kasoma regarding the behavior of the independent press in Africa in the 1990s. The flaws that Kasoma observes in the independent press continued in Ethiopia in the first years of the new millennium. Kasoma observes that the unprofessional journalistic practices by the independent press have included the use of newspapers as political opposition, bad advocacy journalism and the overuse of anonymous sources. All this have led governments to introduce or threaten with drastic measures to curtail press freedom (Kasoma, 1997).

One of the African independent press’ ill-conceived roles acting as political opposition is an overt feature of the Ethiopian independent press, which the Ethiopian government has found very objectionable and used as justification to muzzle the press. Kasoma says, “African governments, hitherto unaccustomed to political opposition, [see] themselves as being under double pressure: from the opposition parties, which are vying to replace them in power; and from the independent press, which they see as being in cahoots with the opposition parties” (ibid).

A very serious dilemma faces a popularly elected African government, or any popularly elected government for that matter, that has to deal with a strong independent press acting as a political opposition. The root of the problems is that both the government and the newspaper claim to speak for the people. When they contradict each other; as they often do, the tension rises. It is obvious that both of them cannot be right. Because neither of them is prepared to admit being wrong, both of them stick to what they are saying, thereby raising the tension even higher. In this connection, Powe has made an apt observation: 'A powerful and privileged press checking a popularly elected and powerful government creates tensions that cannot be removed without compromising press autonomy' (Powe, 1992:293). This is because the upper-hand in resolving the conflict is usually held by government creates tensions that cannot be removed without compromising press autonomy' (Powe, 1992: 293). This is because the upper-hand in resolving the conflict is usually held by government, which normally uses the states machinery to silence recalcitrant newspapers and journalists. (Kasoma, 1997: 5)

Rightly, Kasoma (1997) found that the bias of Africa's independent newspapers is more conspicuous in election time, during which they endorse their chosen candidates and present them in the most favorable and biased manner to the electorate. The candidates belonging to the parties the newspapers do not support are given a raw deal through poor or no coverage. In the Ethiopian scenario the government and its officials were demonized. Though the majority of the newspapers is partisan to the opposition, some accuse *Reporter* which has a much better professional and ethical standard, of being a pro-government press compared to the other newspapers. Based on the principle that the independence of a newspaper is not only determined by its private ownership but also by its editorial policy, it will be difficult to find a handful of papers which can be referred to as independent in Ethiopia.

That resembles what happened in Ethiopia after the 2005 national elections. Most of the independent newspapers were strongly supporting the opposition parties and the editorials of these newspapers were no different from the statements and position of the opposition on different issues; some even plainly wrote that their objective was to topple down the government. The press has been active in demonizing the government and its officials, baldly supporting the opposition. In the post-election period most of the newspapers listed below were lobbying for the idea of boycotting the parliament pushing the opposition not to join the law-making body. Though some members of the opposition joined the parliament, the major opposition CUD officially boycotted joining the house in the action which many believe took the nation's democracy and

multiparty political system many steps back. The press was the major advocate of the idea; sometimes even stronger than the opposition when the coalition CUD did not know what to do. Newspapers like *Reporter*, which backed the idea of joining the parliament, were labeled as pro-government and anti-public, while newspapers like *Netsanet* waged a campaign for the boycotting of *Reporter*.

This evidently clashes with the Article 19 definition to the independent press as privately-owned newspapers and magazines which cover political affairs but which are not politically aligned, either with government or with opposition parties (Article 19, 1991: 5) as the editorial policy of most of the above newspapers clearly shows their inclination.

The tension between the government and the independent press reached its peak in late 2005 and the hatred and mistrust which existed almost for a decade and half resulted in the imprisonment of editors and journalists and closing down of most of the typical independent newspapers including *Menlik*, *Netsanet*, *Ethop*, *Addis Zena*, *Satenaw*, *Meyisaw*, *Seife Nebelbal*, *Meznagna* and others. Here it should be known that some of the newspapers quitted publication either because of an indirect and unofficial intervention by the government, like *Meznagna* who were repeatedly told that there was no paper available at the government-owned *Birhanena Selam* printing press. Others stopped publishing to show their solidarity for the closed ones and their imprisoned editors or simply because they were scared to write.

A number of governments who find themselves under the scrutiny of the media have used their control over the instruments of coercion and compliance to impose and interpret laws in their favour, thereby intimidating and punishing their critics. This has been made possible by the fact that, in the transitional democracies that Africa is forging, separation of powers has not been firmly established and the executive will still tends to hold sway over other institutions of the state. (Tetty, 2006)

“I don’t believe that there is a free private press in Ethiopia without any political inclination and affiliation, and both the government and private press mostly have been very partisan,” says Bahru (personal interview, May 5, 2007). He believes the similarity of their objectives and beliefs and the existence of a common enemy, the government, made opposition parties and the independent press to stand in unison.

In a country which has been a socialist state the strength of business and the influence of cooperate interest is minimal. The link between the independent press and the opposition parties goes beyond having a common enemy and objective. Most newspapers visibly support anything but government, though some can be simply categorized to specific political parties and ethnic interest groups. One can easily identify which paper is the mouthpiece of OLF, CUD, UEDF or other racial interest group like Amhara or Oromo just by looking at the usual front page stories featuring the leaders of the respective parties; reading the editorial which is almost the direct version of the announcements by the parties; the framing of the story and one sided features and opinion pages. In July 2002 former editor in chief of the Amharic weekly *Ethop* Tewodros Kassa was sentenced for two years for defamation and disseminating false information that could incite people to political violence. And in May 2004 the editor in chief of *Seife nebelbal* which many refer as partisan to OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) was charged with inciting people to separate a region that has been constitutionally established (CPJ, 2004). Bahru says that in many instances the independent media are more powerful than the parties, and the media even guide the party moves and stand on critical issues like the issue of joining the House after the election.

Wondwossen declares that the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association (EFJA), to which most of the typical independent newspapers belonged, was also clearly partisan to the opposition and acted like an opposition party at times. Following the 2005 national elections the opposition parties were in dilemma to join the parliament or not on the seats they won in the House of People's Representative (HPR) and to receive the Addis Ababa administration where CUD won 100%, as they said the election was nationally rigged. The independent press, especially the major papers like *Toby*, *Menlik*, *Netsanet*, *Ethop*, *Addis Zena* and many others were strongly lobbying for boycotting the parliament claiming that the parliament and the government are not legitimate and accusing papers who fevered taking the seats as traitors, while the parties were not sure what to do. At the end the major opposition CUD decided not to join the parliament mainly because of the conviction spread by the newspapers to the public.

A newspaper that has taken a permanent political side by uncritically supporting one political party no matter what that party does forfeits its independence. The Ethiopian scenario matches once again with Kasoma's observation of other Sub-Saharan African countries. Most of the independent newspapers have been strong supporters of the opposition through all the times

whatever they do, and are sometimes even stronger in their argumentation than the parties themselves while rejecting any good reporting about the ruling party and are busy in demonizing its leaders. All informants for this study conceded to this point. The major point here is that the public itself do not consider the practice as wrong doing as it was considered as a professional and normal practice for the private press to align with the opposition. Data shows that the circulation and popularity of these newspapers supporting opposition parties skyrocketed at the time of crisis when they baldly exposed their stands.

Kasoma links the issue of partisan journalism with the issue of anonymous sources. Press veteran Wondwossen says that a critical use of sources is a rare virtue in Ethiopian journalism. Many journalists have a tendency to distrust open sources, but are willing to trust what is whispered in the coffee houses and *chat* (mild stimulant drug chewed in Ethiopia) houses and publish a story with information fed by an anonymous source which can probably be a fabricated story (personal interview, May 20, 2007).

However, these points granted, one must still admit that government oppression of journalists is a reality in Ethiopia. In 2005 Ethiopia, which had 13 journalists in jail, was one of the top four countries in the world in jailing journalists next to China, Cuba and Eritrea (all these journalists were released in 2006 and 2007). The independent press was also held back by the fact that they are cut off from part of the governmental flow of information. For instance, they are frequently denied access to press conferences and other media events. Working for an independent newspaper the researcher encountered a number of media events only allowed for the government press. Prior to the 2005 national elections the Prime Minister's press conference was only allowed to governmental media. Imprisonment of journalists arbitrarily was also common in Ethiopia.

In a workshop on the Ethiopian press organized at the Hilton Hotel in Addis Ababa by students of the Graduate School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, and the European Union on May 2006 as part of celebrations of the European Day, Bereket Simon, Public Relations Advisor to the Prime Minister, admitted that relations between private media and government had been marred owing to the misconduct on the part of the private press which eroded the government's trust on their impartiality and professional capacity. In a gesture to improve the relation, the former information minister promised a better and workable atmosphere

for the private press. The Ethiopian independent press and its history have been closely followed by international institutions like Amnesty International, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters sans Frontiers who have revealed their concern on government's action against the freedom and practice of the press in Ethiopia.

Though most of the informants for this research respect the fundamental objectives of institutions like CPJ, they also say that reports on the Ethiopian media status by these bodies tend to be full of exaggerations, wrong information and biases. Amare Aregawi (editor-in-chief and owner of *Reporter*) believes that such reports are lack credibility and do not help for the smooth relations between government and press and for the positive development of the press. He says:

The donor community is aware of the low level in ethics and skills in the media. What they don't see, when they address the private press, is that they see it from one side; they only see the problems caused by officials; they don't see the problems caused by the journalists. That is where they don't help. They help, for example, some 'well-known' individuals despite the fact that they are engaged in activities that harm the development of independent and pluralistic media. Sometimes the reports by CPJ and IPI may not be convincing. They don't have a full perspective of the context, including the politics. (Gebremedhin, 2006: 58)

Amare says that the private media has achieved major encouraging advances. "However, the international community does not have the proper perspective about the state of media in the country. They assert that the government is putting into prison anybody that criticizes it." But he says that there is a room for criticism. "There is a good ground now for media development in the country. Interested journalists have agreed to establish a press council, press clubs, journalist associations, a code of conduct, etc" (Gebremedhin, 2006).

Wondwossen also says that there were times the reports claimed some people are jailed or tortured while in actual life nothing happened to them. In one instance the report said somebody was killed, but later it was proven that he was alive "Though there are a lot of wrongdoings against journalists, the information providers from here have political and personal agendas. People feed the international bodies with such information for their own political or personal interest" (Wondwossen Mekonnen, personal interview, May 20, 2007). On the other hand, Abiy and Bahru

say that they have no problem with such reports as the organizations fight for the realization of absolute press freedom.

Bereket shares Amare's view that reports from international institutions do not express the real situation in Ethiopia:

The freedom of the press in Ethiopia is comparable to many other democratic countries and no one goes to jail because of expressing a decent idea. One can condemn and complain based on facts. Every citizen has the right to do that and no one was penalized or jailed for doing so. But the government make legally accountable any journalist publisher or editor who try to over through the constitution. CPJ says that journalists can't be accountable but any citizen is accountable for his wrongdoing. People were jailed not because of their idea difference but they committed a crime and we are really surprised that people are asking for the release of the criminals which is not happening in US or Europe. (Bereket Simon, personal interview, May13, 2007)

4.3.2.3 Government reaction

Shimelis says there was a significant change in government-press relations at the time of the Ethio-Eritrean war 1998-2000 as both worked in some ways for the national interest of the nation, but after the war the timeout was over and they got back to the old game (personal interview, May 7, 2007).

Solome Taddese, who served as the only spokeswoman of the government at the time of the Ethio-Eritrean war, says that the government has been unwise regarding access to information. She blames it for the creation of fabricated stories and unethical practices among members of the independent press as its doors were closed for the private press. "The government-press relation was highly improved at the time of the Ethio-Eritrean war as there was a spokesperson office which gave information for the press" (personal interview, May 19, 2007). Solome says she does not know why the office which would have contributed a lot for good government-press relations discontinued existence after the end of the war.

Veteran journalist Girma also says the government had miserably failed to understand the movement of the people as it did not allow the press to run its course after opening the flood gates of the restricted and blocked freedom of expression in 1991. He says the government took a premature move to stop the tendency of unethical and unprofessional practices while there was no such big threat. "Loyalty of some of the papers to some party's interests that was quite clear. I

wonder if there is any press in the world which is not partisan with total objectivity; some of them were beyond the permissible limit but I wish they did not go that far” (personal interview, June 5, 2007).

Kasoma argues that in a democracy the press and government should never be bed-fellows. Neither should they be sworn enemies as seen in the Ethiopian case as either situation only serves to distract the two institutions away from their common purpose to make democratic governance possible. The situation in Ethiopia after the coming of democracy looked as if both the independent press and the government ignored that they are cogs in the democratic wheel and that one cannot do without the other.

Freedom of the press, which the independent media are supposed to uphold the best, and democracy are inseparable. There can be no democratic governance without a free press. Conversely, a free press can only exist where there is democratic governance. There is a causal link between the two. (Kasoma, 1995a, 1997: 237-43)

He states that conflicts between press and government should, therefore, not necessarily be interpreted as a denial of freedom of the press and democracy. On the contrary, if present within acceptable limits, they may be a sure sign of the presence of democracy and freedom of the press. Kasoma argues that any rivalry between the independent press and politicians in power should, therefore, generally be regarded as healthy. It only becomes unhealthy when the press and those in power have drawn daggers and are in a state of war or on a collision course. Unfortunately the latter has been the case in the Ethiopian situation where press freedom and the development of the independent press have taken many steps back.

The months prior to the 2005 national elections could be declared, with much greater amount of certainty, the better days in the recent history of the Ethiopian press. At the same time this period led to an unsurpassed tension between the government and the private press. Newspaper circulations hit an all-time high with some publishing more than a 100.000 copies in the wake and aftermath of the disputed election. But subsequent crackdown on the private press has shut down or pressured the closure of the majority of the privately owned newspapers.

The EPRDF-led government has blamed the closed private press for not only facilitating but also jointly engineering street violence and pervasive advocacy of hate speech to topple a

legitimate government. The accusation of the government is founded in that some products of the free press have exercised unrestrained pressure to advocate public disobedience of all means, including violence to pressure the government to step down. Some newspapers have openly called for immediate public action and ethnic-based hate speech and encouraged street action steadily urged change of government in a mix of peaceful and non-peaceful means in their editorials following the election row and the resulting June 2005 unrest in Addis Ababa.

At the end of the tension between the government and the independent press in 2005, the government used the state machinery and – as Kasoma puts it – “silenced recalcitrant newspapers”. The independent press, which had gone through difficult times for a better future, had to take many steps back to an unknown state. As the veteran journalist Girma puts it, “the industry is sitting in the dark” after the elections. The government actions damaged the freedom of expression, the journalistic practice, the existence of real independent press and the future government press relations. Though Sisay and his friends got out of prison in 2007 they were rejected to get their license back and join the industry again. Sisay who was the owner of *Ethop* and Eskindir Nega who owned *Menelik*, *Satenaw* and *Meyisay* gave a press conference in November 2007 claiming that they were stripped of their constitutional rights.

4.3.3 Professional associations along political dividing lines

Kasoma argues that professional associations of journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s played a weak role to resolve the three major problems he mentioned: Playing the role of the opposition, Being extremely sensational and advocate, and Massive use of anonymous sources. He argues that in some cases they are the major parties in the crisis promoting unethical practices.

In some countries, journalists have been unable to agree on a single body to control journalistic practices and this has resulted in separate bodies for the independent and the government press. In Zambia, for example, journalists from the independent press broke away from the Press Association of Zambia (PAZA) to form their own Zambia Independent Media Association (ZIMA), claiming that PAZA was dominated by journalist from government media. (Kasoma: 1992)

Kasoma continues to state that as a result neither PAZA nor ZIMA was able to instill professionalism into their members since the two bodies were busy quarrelling with one another

instead of enforcing the practice of responsible journalism. African governments have taken advantage of such division to try and impose their own agenda on the press, thereby further exacerbating the tensions between them and the press.

The Zambian situation equals that of Ethiopian with regard to independent press unions which took their root at the beginning and mid-1990s. Ethiopian journalist associations were not organized based on the principles of journalism for the development of the industry and the profession, or for the realization of freedom of expression, but were rather a collection of journalists with similar political or personal attitudes. There have been three major journalist associations in Ethiopia: two are considered as government-affiliated (The Ethiopian Journalists' Association, EJA; and The Ethiopian Journalists' National Union, ENJU), while the third which is considered independent (The Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association, EFJA) is also attached to opposition politics. But unfortunately EFJA itself has experienced a high profile split similar to what happened to PAZA.

A further demonstration is the division between journalists in the government-controlled print medium and those in the private press, a division which has found its concrete expression in the founding of two rival associations (the Ethiopian Journalists' Association vis-à-vis the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association) waging a non-conventional war of words. Consequently, a univocal-partisan press has been left to reign at the expense of a pluralistic press representing a wide spectrum of opinions. (Shimelis, 2000)

The strongest journalist association which used to claim to have the support and membership of most of the independent press is weakened and divided in recent years. Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association (EFJA) chairman Kifle Mulat, currently in exile in the USA, is derecognized as leader by some of the members of the association who support Wondossen Mekonnen as their local leader in Ethiopia. The government and critics condemn Kifle of pursuing personal political agendas and abusing financial resources of his organization (Nolawi, 2006). Together with a network of journalists in exile, Kifle has formed an alternative organization for journalists and editors in the same situation: Ethiopian Free Press Journalists in Exile.

Wondwossen, who was among the 20 founding members of EFJA in 1993, served as the executive secretary and president of the association for three years. He says today that the

leadership of the association was highly politicized with opposition politics, and there was indeed huge inclination which he and some other members had been fighting against for years. “Kifle Mulat was a president for more than 10 years and it turned out to be an organization led by single person with a crystal clear practice of dictatorship, mismanagement and corruption” (personal interview, May 20, 2007). Wondwossen claims that there was corruption and abuses of the privileges of the association and Ethiopian journalists. The researcher tried hard to talk to people who can represent Kifle in Ethiopia or the ‘original’ EFJA, but could not find any. Some persons in former EFJA who did not join the new faction declined the request as until recently Kifle was accused and charged with cases like attempted genocide and treason in absentia with the imprisoned CUD leaders who got released in August 2007 with the imprisoned journalists.

Tafari Mekonnen, former president of ENJU, says that the associations were not strong and they did not have the gut to criticize bad practices of the industry and their influence was limited as most journalists did not want to get involved in the associations. This is still the case, he claims: “They have political agendas and segregated journalists; they are politically embedded with no accountability and democratic practice” (personal interview, May 7, 2007).

Tafari’s successor Tesfaye Alene backs his predecessor in a speech ‘Challenges Facing Professional Media Associations’ on March 26, 2006. Tesfaye says that both the government and the opposition parties directly or indirectly attempt to influence the associations or label them otherwise besides the internal democratic structures of the association is so weak. “Associations haven’t developed democratic systems within themselves and are liable to be manipulated by few leaders of the associations while the members are not consulted about planning up to implementations.” Tesfaye latter faced challenges inside and was forced to leave his presidency.

The history of Ethiopian journalists as mostly charged with political affiliation, journalists would not take the associations as an independent entity. As there is no democratic, vibrant and strong professional journalists association, the country’s media could not benefit as other’s countries do. Therefore also other challenges which journalist associations face; journalists do not actively participate and are less interested to be listed in the membership. Journalists doubt the importance of associations as the experience of Ethiopian journalists association in one way or another associated with political parties’ affiliation. (Tesfaye, 2006)

Ideas listed above clearly shows the role of associations in the period. Kasoma's thought that the serious conflicts between government and the independent press which have rocked Africa could be eased if journalists created responsible bodies to enforce journalistic ethics are also true in Ethiopia. It is the absence of journalist associations or the weakness of existing ones in many African countries that has exacerbated the situation and encouraged governments to impose journalistic regulatory bodies such as state-sponsored media councils which was included in the first draft of the new Ethiopian draft press law which came out in 2003. Though the state run press council disappointed many, the MoI omitted the section in the draft which made public recently (in 2007). The contention of some of the African governments which have taken this path is that if the journalists cannot regulate themselves, then government has to step in and do the job for them.

Amare Aregawi, editor-in-chief of the Reporter, supports Kasoma's argument that journalists and government should not be seen as neither enemies nor buddies. He says the independent press should not be afraid to work with the government to put issues of the industry on the agenda like the new draft press law, even if some members of the independent media are afraid of the labeling from extremists as pro-government. He says that the journalist himself should start the initiative and be able to solve its problems and control the practice of bad journalism and avoid the mistrust and hostility with the government.

Other professional associations like The Ethiopian Media Women Association (EMWA), Ethiopian Environmental Journalists' Alliance (EEJA) and Ethiopian Sport Journalists Association (ESJA) are relatively out of the political labeling and mostly work on their specialized target areas.

4.3.4 Press law

In January 2003, the Ethiopian Ministry of Information introduced a new draft press law. Even if the government claimed the new law is designed to "encourage constructive and responsible journalism", there were huge concerns it may halt the progress in press freedom. The country had a series of discussions and public stakeholders meetings regarding the new draft law in 2003. Though the draft is not made a law yet, many changes and improvements were made, including the exclusion of a state-run media council, after the discussion forums and comments from

international consultants. But the draft press law is still fiercely criticized by the Ethiopian news media and by both Ethiopian and international organizations that claim to defend free expression.

The draft press law contains the following sections:

- a) Part One: A proclamation on freedom of the press followed by a definitions section and a further statement on the freedom of the press.
- b) Part Two: the right of the media to engage in press activities with articles on registration and press licenses.
- c) Part Three: the right of access to information, including requests for information, prohibited information, journalists' right to confidentiality, and the right of reply.
- d) Part Four: the responsibilities of the press, and keeping a record of authors.
- e) Part Five: the penalties for failure to follow the law.

Despite the changes made to it in the past four years the new draft law is largely criticized among members of the media for being a legal ground for the government to exercise full control over the flow of information and cripple media capacity to produce investigative stories and act as a watchdog to the use and abuse of power. Shimeles Kemal, one of the drafters of the law from the Ministry of Information, claims that people are panicking out of nothing. He underlines that a lot has been changed in the draft since its first release in 2003 with comments from a group of international renowned media consultants, including Toby Mendel who also have taken part in the same activity for other nations. Bereket backs Shimeles in that most of the opposition regarding the draft press law was not about freedom of expression or access to information. "In the previous discussion the major issue was the matter of ownership and advertisement which is the interest of owners and publishers" (Bereket Simon, personal interview, May 13, 2007).

Tafari (former president of ENJU) thinks the same as he believes that a lot of changes were made to the draft press law and it is not that restrictive. He also believes that if journalists are strong enough to give their say in unison for their common interests, things will change.

Wondwossen says that some of the concerns of government expressed in the draft press law are real (that the independent press has been acting irresponsibly), but as a whole he thinks that the draft is not a treat for the industry.

4.3.5 Post-2005 election era

Much of the private press has since 2005 stayed in closure or refrained from direct and vicious criticisms on government policies and activities as compared to the period prior to the election and to October 2005. However, some privately operated newspapers like *Reporter* (both English and Amharic versions), *Fortune*, *the Sub-Saharan Informer*, *Capital* and *Addis Admas* stayed unaffected during the clamp-down and have continued to publish public views and news on socio-political and economic issues. A cascade of suspicion on the free press still prevails on the side of the government, while public opinion still shows favoritism to the closed down newspapers and partisan journalism tuned in blatant opposition to the incumbent political party as most do not consider the existing press as a real independent one. Wondwossen says that this is because of the poor journalism practice which was introduced in the first days of the independent press; a practice which set a bad standard and a trend that good journalism is sensational and patriotic.

Bereket maintains that during the past two years after the election, the sensible media with a professional and ethical practice have gotten strong.

The quantity did not determine the content, now there are various views. It is easy to get a license for print media. The prime minister's press conference is now open to the independent press which shows changes from both the government and the independent press and that government is opening and the press is being professional and ethical. But the madness may continue when the crisis comes.

But other informants look differently at the period. They think the government has recently tightened the screw and put unexpected hurdles for the independent press. Professor Bahru refers to the 2005 election as the big divide which put the existence of the independent press in jeopardy. He argues that actions taken in the post-election period resulted in a major set back in the industry, damaging the independent press and people's right of expression. Girma adds to this and says the Ethiopian community is in the dark. Abiy also refers to the period after October 2005 as the most restrictive period since 1991.

According to data obtained from the Ministry of Information in June 2007, there were 63 newspapers which circulated beyond the confinement of one region. The newspapers' content can be categorized as belonging to one of 12 content categories, namely current affairs (political, economic and social issues), religion, sport, love and gender, culture and art, trade and

advertisement, social issues, health, children recreation, miracle stories and crime. The above publications are owned by private sector, government, non-governmental organizations, religious organizations, and associations and are published in various languages such as Amharic, Oromifa Tigrigna, English, Arabic, Amharic/English and Amharic/English/French. The schedule of their publication varies from dailies to monthlies with a circulation range of 300 to 40.000 copies.

Though 63 newspapers sound like a high number, most of the publications focus mainly on religion, sports, fashion and life style, love trade and advertisement. Independent papers which report mainly on politics and current affairs are small in number. After the huge fall of independent newspapers in October 2005 the plurality and diversity of ideas and voices in the media was limited and the strength and amount of critical political reports on the government was low. This factor with the previous trend of political reporting set by the closed down newspapers helped for the strengthening of the conviction many accept: there is no independent press in Ethiopia. Most of the people the researcher informally contacted to get their point of views on the existence of the vibrant independent press responded negatively while the fact is it never really existed in Ethiopia.

Bereket sees the post-election period as an era of development for the press.

If you look at development in terms of quantity, there is no development, but in terms of the quality of the papers [they] are working upon the constitution and the law and order of the nation which is the foundation of any functioning democracy. If you don't respect the law there won't be democracy and there will be anarchy. Papers against the rule of law are out after the election, but papers who oppose the government still exist. The bad apples which crowded out the good papers writing for mutiny and rebellions are out. Most of the papers that played the major role in the election do not fulfill the basic professional and ethical standards of journalism but the society wanted them. (Bereket Simon, personal interview, May 13, 2007)

Bereket argues that the bad papers created a problem for the development of the reasonable and critical press in the country.

Though the outlook for many of the now defunct outlets is dark and the industry has lost diversified ideas which is basic for any independent media, most of the newspapers which are still functioning are less sensational and politically attached while they are much better in their professional and ethical standard compared to the typical independent press in Ethiopia. Besides,

the fact that the first two private FM radio stations by Zami Public Connection and Tinsea Promotion went operational on the first week of October 2007 can be considered as an encouraging gesture by the government for the print medium as well.

4.3.6 The role of the independent press in the democratization process

Kasoma argues that multiparty politics and democracy would not have come to Africa in the 1990s and certainly would not have lasted without the enabling role of the independent press. He further argues that only the independent press, and not any other media, can guarantee freedom of the press, which is such a basic human right that it is almost synonymous with democracy. Free and diverse presses inform citizens and provide them with the opportunity to receive diverse views of issues (Kasoma 1995, 1997 and 2000). But for this the private press has to devote itself to inform 'citizens on matters of public policy by presenting and debating alternatives', and it is not only mere news they should present to their readers and viewers, but also inform them about their civil and political rights and how and when these rights should be exercised (Tetty, 2001).

The question is: Has the Ethiopian press actually devoted itself to this? Almost all of the respondents and books and papers consulted in this research agree with Kasoma's points as the major problems of the independent press in the Ethiopian scenario. But still most think that, though it is difficult to agree on the level of devotion and degree of its contribution as a democratization *agent*, the independent press has contributed for the *development* of democracy.

Lidetu (former vice president of the major opposition party CUD) says through all its vices the press did great in developing a democratic concept in the Ethiopian society. This view is shared by many respondents for this study as well as documents on the Ethiopian independent media. In line with Kasoma's assumptions, multiparty politics and democracy would not have come to Ethiopia and may not have lasted without the enabling role of the independent press. Though there was no independent press prior to 1991 in Ethiopia, the new multiparty system which came in 1991 would have been incomplete without the independent press.

The informants from different sectors gave supporting arguments for the role of the independent media in the democratization process. Girma says the press was euphoric and contributed tremendously in deepening the democratic process in Ethiopia through informing people about what is happening and in increasing the culture of reading and tolerance. Professor

Bahru seconds the idea that the independent press played so good in creating awareness that one can oppose and criticize the government which was impossible in the past though the industry was not successful in nurturing balanced views. Solome says that through all the accusations and through all its existence, the press has contributed a lot for the democratization process, whereas from the media side, Wondwossen says against all odds it played a very significant and dynamic role in supporting the democratization process.

After the traumatic socialist military Derg regime (1974-1991), where hundreds of thousands died just because of the political ideology they believed in and opposing the dictatorial regime, the Ethiopian people were so scared of politics and an axiom 'stay away from politics and electric' was accepted as it was thought that both politics and electric kill if one gets near them. The press can be credited for alleviating such fears and nurturing the idea that the people are the boss of the government and the people has the right to be governed by its choice.

As democracy needs informed citizens the independent press has provided the public with diversified views, grievances, human rights violations, killings, power abuse and other social, political and economic ideas and problems the nation faced. The press acted as an alternative source for those who are deprived of voicing their opinion by the government-run state media. It also contributed in informing citizens about their civil and political rights which in turn enhances human rights and values of democracy, although it must also be said that this is relative to the fairly low readership of newspapers in Ethiopia reaching out mainly the economic and political elite and middle and upper middle class in the urban areas mainly limited in Addis Ababa.

The independent press was successful in increasing the public participation and concern in politics and gaining back the spirit the people had at the early stages of the hijacked revolution in 1974. And though many question the quality and balance of the information, it helped citizens to make informed political decisions. The free press also advances democracy by acting as watchdogs and preventing authoritarian tendencies from appropriating excessive power to abuse the public and the political setting (Waldal, 2004).

Through exposing ill-practices by government officials, the press also enables the public to measure the pronouncements of politicians against their deeds and hence make informed decisions. They also contributed a lot, as active watchdogs, in guiding various

investigative bodies to go on and thoroughly inspect cases of corruption, power abuses and ethnic nepotism. (Tetty, 2001)

The Ethiopian independent press played a significant role regarding the above point as it can be said that of all the roles of the press it has been majorly sticking to the watchdog role and many of its reports have been on the wrongdoings of the government. Furthermore, the private press, particularly in the absence of strong political parties, serves as a platform for opposing ideas and policy critics. According to Sandbrook (1996, cited in Tetty, 2001), in the absence of strong parties newspapers may fill the gap in forging a more informed electorate and empower the public to make informed political decisions.

In a newspaper article on the role of the independent press at election times Abiy Teklemariam says, “A very good example again can be the role of private newspapers here in Ethiopia in the second national election (2000). They introduced the election candidates and alternative policies. It is why, as most people argue, they ended up as partisans in the 2005 elections” (Abiy, 2005). Abiy wrote his article before the third national election in 2005 where the press played a much more significant and effective role in an election with a great number of voters and interesting pre-election debates and campaign.

However professor Bahru’s concern regarding nurturing unbalanced views in the society is also strongly shared by almost all of the respondents and literature consulted as the press did not know its limit of informing and educating citizens and leaving the judgment to the public. The Ethiopian independent press was full of judgments and opinion. Nurturing unbalanced views was the major undemocratic element of the independent press in the contrary. And in some ways the press can also be held responsible for cultivating undemocratic concepts like extreme racism, intolerance, promoting the isolation and discrimination of supporters of the ruling party and promoting anger and rage against some individuals and the government. The press has also acted as a destabilizer in the process of having a consensus and unified view in national concerns. “The press has divided citizens into riotous and wicked, depending on their party political leanings, ideologies, and regional, cultural and ideological belonging” (Nyamnjuh, 2005: 82).

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The study has been conducted to analyse the political history of the Ethiopian private press in the past decade and half, particularly on its independence from the political camps and its problems regarding professional and ethical issues. Specifically, the study examined the various views of major actors in the independent media and other parties who have interests in the industry.

One of the major findings of this study is that the Ethiopian private press, which has had a significant role in the public political landscape of the nation in the past 16 years, has had a lot of problems both internal and external. The major problem with the press revolves around the term professional ethics as the industry suffered a shortage of skilled professionals with ethical principles. The thesis which tried to spotlight the problems within the industry based on Francis Kasoma's theories on the role of the independent press in democratic Africa found that the Ethiopian private press has failed to play its role as an independent institution in the new democratic multiparty system. Most of the independent press in Ethiopia has been unprofessional, unethical and had a lot of political attachment supporting the opposition. The government claim that the independent press is an opposition media in some ways fits the scenario which created a very strenuous and antagonistic state-media relation.

Although it can not totally be concluded that all the independent press in Ethiopia is that same, the independent press acting as an opposition press is a fact in Ethiopia creating a very hostile relations between the two institutions. The press forfeited its independence, damaged its credibility and destroyed the professional ethics of journalism by supporting the opposition baldly. The unprofessional and unethical behaviour of the independent press made the state-media relations poor in most of the years 1991-2007 but it got worse and reached its peak in October 2005, in the post-election period when the nation was swayed in unrest following the opposition's claim that the national election was rigged.

Then as Kasoma puts it when both the media and government think that they are speaking for the people the upper-hand in resolving the conflict is usually held by the government, which uses

the state machinery to silence recalcitrant newspapers and journalists. This is mirrored in the Ethiopian situation, as most of the typical newspapers were closed, their editors and owners jailed and the ones who were not attacked by the government stopped operation fearing attacks or to show solidarity with their jailed and closed buddies.

As a result, the nation's independent media had to take many steps back. Many were jailed and many more were afraid to perform good journalism and putting the whole democratic process in jeopardy. Many consider the post October 2005 period as a dark period and a great divide in the history of the Ethiopian independent press. As Kasoma says the independent press will have to bear the bulk of the blame for loss of press freedom and democracy as a widespread unprofessionalism of journalists of the independent press in Africa itself is responsible for a large proportion of governmental intervention to limit press freedom, this theory precisely fits the Ethiopian scenario.

The thesis has found out that through all the odds the independent press has contributed much for the democratization process in the nation, mainly as a great way to voice the interests of the voiceless grassroots and unlike the government run public media hosting divergent and pluralistic views in the society. But in some ways it did the reverse as it promoted intolerance, mob mentality and abused the freedom of expression which is a major element of the system and synonym to democracy while it should have provided a basis for building sustainable pluralistic democratic structures by stimulating and encouraging critical awareness and public discussion.

This thesis in no way encourage or defend government intervention in the functioning of the press but though there are a lot of discouraging and suppressing moves, policies and actions from the Ethiopian government on the independent press and as the Ethiopian government is considered as a press unfriendly government by many the independent press has a lot to in initiating the attack on the press as it acted unprofessionally, unethically and as an opposition press .Blaming the government without dealing with the internal problems within the press itself won't take the industry anywhere. The press can also be blamed as in many instances as it acted irresponsibly and illegally in addressing critical issues like ethnic relations and behaved with a minimum social responsibility attitude.

5.2 Recommendations

In a democracy the press and government should never be bed-fellows. Neither should they be sworn enemies as the Ethiopian case since the two extreme scenarios only serve to distract the two institutions away from their common purpose: to make democratic governance possible so it is a must to find a middle ground to sustain the democratic system and freedom of expression in Ethiopia.

It is crystal clear that the independent press guarantees freedom of the press, which is a basic human right that it is almost synonymous with democracy but for this the institution should be based on the basic principles of journalism professional ethics. The independent press has been the exact reflection of the political and social culture of the nation in which radicalism and polarization are dominant in. To develop media as a viable source of information which plays a democratization role and by strengthening human rights and democratic institutions the press should be aware of its role as well as its responsibilities, ethical limits and professional standards

The first quality the Ethiopian independent press should develop is impartiality and neutrality which without it is impossible to be balanced and fair and serve the public. There should be an end to the strong political attachment of the independent press. The independent press should also access training and education regarding the know-how and principles of journalism as many of the bad practices emanate from being unskilled. A strong and unified body representing the industry should also be available. Creating a network between journalists and their different associations that may help in formulating code of ethics can also be useful. Strong and independent investment in the area can also solve the problem.

Active involvement of the media promote human rights, democracy and development of a nation but though the independent press a good professional ethics orientation its operation depends on a government that respects human rights and the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas . The Ethiopian government needs to work much harder to open its doors for the independent press and should stop considering it as a foe and for this a constructive dialogue between the two institutions should be established and the government should find a way to support the press in actions like establishing media fund. The Ethiopian government and the independent press who claim to uphold the social, economic and political well being of the

Ethiopian people, share interests and responsibilities, so they should learn to work in harmony and partnership.

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Appendix 1: List of key informants

1. **Abiy Teklemariam:** Was an Editor-in-chief of *Meznagna*, MA in Media Law and now he started a new newspaper (*Addis Neger*) after the interview. April 25, 2007.
2. **Bereket Simon:** Former information Minister (2000-2005) and now PM special advisor and Head of Political Department, EPRDF. May 13, 2007.
3. **Amare Aregawi:** Editor-in-chief, *Reporter*. Director of HAPI. July 7, 2007.
4. **Girma Beshah:** Editor-in-chief, *Press Digest*, was speech writer and translator for Megistu Hailemariam. June 5, 2007.
5. **Degene Tesema:** Editor-in-chief, *the Ethiopian Herald*. April 28, 2007.
6. **Kassahun Addis:** Correspondent for *the Washington Post*, Political analyst, Lecturer at New Generation University College, MA in International Relations. May 15, 2007.
7. **Lidetu Ayalew:** Former Vice president of the major opposition CUD. Chair person of EUDP-MEDHIN party. May 10, 2007.
8. **Professor Bahru Zewdie:** Contemporary historian and Director of Forum for Social Studies (FSS). May 5, 2007.
9. **Shimeles Bonsa:** Author of the survey on the Ethiopian private press, history lecturer at AAU. June 13, 2007.
10. **Shimeles Kemal:** Drafter of the new draft press law, policy maker. June 25, 2007.
11. **Solome Tadesse:** Former government spokeswoman. May 19, 2007.
12. **Tafari Mekonnen:** Former president of ENJU, worked as a journalist for eight newspapers. May 7, 2007.
13. **Tigust Yilma:** Managing director and owner, *Capital* newspaper. June 13, 2007.
14. **Wondwossen Mekonnen:** President of EFJA, journalist. May 20, 2007.
15. **Tesfu Birhane:** Deputy Editor-in-chief *Capital*. June 13, 2007