



Addis Ababa University, College of Humanities, Language Studies, and  
Journalism and Communication

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Challenges of Private Press  
Journalists Imprisoned During EPRDF Era of Ethiopia

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March, 2024

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Journalism and Communication

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in Media Studies

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### **Dedication**

I dedicate this research to all journalists who, through their writing, battled for the establishment and growth of true democracy in their individual nations.

**Declaration**

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## **List of Abbreviations**

AI	Amnesty International
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CUD	Coalition for Unity and Democratic Party
EFJA	Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association
EHRC	Ethiopian Human Rights Council
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IFJ	International Federation of Journalists
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council

**“Those Who Do Not Learn from History Are Doomed To Repeat It.”**

*George Santayana, philosopher*

## **ABSTRACT**

This study is a phenomenological examination of first-hand accounts of how twelve Ethiopian private press journalists faced both personal and professional difficulties while carrying out their journalistic duties during the EPRDF era. The researcher employed a phenomenological research approach using Alfred Schutz's "Life World" theory as a lens to understand the "essence" of the phenomenon under study. The participants who were deemed to be involved in partisan journalism narrated their prison experiences and obstacles in both their personal and professional lives within the specified time period. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect qualitative data, and interpretive phenomenological analysis was used to analyse the data. In order to determine the "essence" of the phenomena, the study mainly looked into how these private press journalists faced trying circumstances while jailed at various detention facilities during the EPRDF era. The study shows that the EPRDF administration was a difficult period with a number of challenges for journalists, although some of them openly practiced partisan journalism and were to a degree blameworthy. Regardless, the administration's draconian interference with journalists' civic and professional freedoms, coupled with the journalists' own openly partisan practices, cost them both their professional and personal freedoms. Ethiopia's political system—both present and future—should learn from the past, and treat journalists with respect for the realisation of press freedom and respect for human rights. On the other hand, journalists should also make every effort to engage in professional journalism and refrain from partisan journalism that compromises their professional identity and image.

*Key words: Lived experience, Private press, Journalism in Ethiopia, Phenomenology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Authoritarian Democracy.*

## **PREFACE**

This dissertation's major goal is to investigate the challenges of twelve well-known private press journalists with the first-hand accounts during the EPRDF era. I conducted an in-depth interview with the journalists who have served as editors-in-chief of their respective newspapers and magazines for many years. In addition to practising their profession, a number of journalists are well known for having been involved in politics and political activism at different levels in their latter years. Iskinder Nega is an excellent illustration of this.

Iskinder and other well-known journalists, including Temesgaen Desalegn, Wubeshet Taye, and Reiyot Alemu, opened out to me in a long conversation about their painful real experiences—some of which had never been shared before. To be sure, I count myself lucky that I was able to obtain their participation and desire to reveal their life narrative without much difficulty.

One can guess that the question and answer periods I had with each participant were quite long, as each interview lasted between two and two and a-half-hours. "Those who do not want to learn from history are doomed to repeat it," as Santayana once stated. Since I use the first-hand accounts of the then journalists to provide light on a particular political epoch in Ethiopian history, this research study can be viewed as a historical analytical record.

Lastly, I would like to let readers know that a few sections of this dissertation have been published in two respectable international journals. The first article was published in *Frontiers* on September 7, 2023 under the title "Exploring how lack of judicial independence affects freedom of press in Ethiopia". Similarly, the second piece, titled "Making sense of Ethiopian journalists' prison experience: A phenomenological inquiry" was published on January 7, 2024 in *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* - "Springer-Nature", the prestigious worldwide magazine.

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The role of the print media in developing democracy as well as combating corruption and malfeasance has been significantly hindered and constrained for a long time. This is due to the undemocratic nature of many governments in Africa—Ethiopia was one example during EPRDF era—and the various tactics used to repress press freedom (Stapenhurst, 2000; Bach, 2011). Despite indicators of progress in certain developing nations in terms of press freedom (Singer, 2011; Mwesige, 2004), several countries, Ethiopia in particular, have been considered lagging in terms of allowing journalists to practice their profession freely.

This study was driven by a desire to learn more about the ways Ethiopia's political leadership during the EPRDF era subjected private press journalists, accused of engaging in partisan journalism (Skjerdal, 2009), to a variety of challenges and restrictions on their freedom of speech. The researcher tries to uncover the important components of this phenomenon happening in a country whose leader has been dubbed "a democrat" in the world arena for enshrining "freedom of speech and thinking" in Ethiopia's constitution for the first time in the country's history (de Waal, 2013).

Every participant provided their opinions based on their prior experiences, both personally and professionally, with EPRDF administration. The researcher observed that the accounts provided by each participant over the designated period aided in the development of a description for a better understanding of the experiences that these private press journalists—who were thought to be involved in partisan journalism—had during the stated period in both their personal and professional lives. For instance Skjerdal (2009) stated that the private press has largely failed to represent and inform the citizens; and it has been generally politicized.

The researcher attempted to respond to six study questions aimed at gathering data from the participants to aid in the description and interpretation of their experiences during the stated era. The data associated with and utilized to support each of the research questions are shown in the findings section related to each research question. For each

study topic, the data acquired during the interview and reflection phase provides insight and evidence.

This researcher uses Alfred Shutz's theory of "Life World" (1945) to analyze and provide a "pure" description of the participants' experiences. This theory claims that "ordinary life experience rather than philosophical or scientific observation is most significant for analysis" (p.124). Life World, according to Shutz, is "... the life of any person living amongst his peers, talking and sharing it as it is lived" (Shutz, 1945, p.534).

Overall, twelve journalists from the private press shared their experiences, especially their encounters, during Ethiopia's EPRDF administration, and their responses are largely based on the hardships they had as a result of practicing journalism, though they were accused by the leadership of practicing partisan journalism (HRW, 2015). The researcher's contact, combined with the reports on EPRDF regime's actions towards the private press journalists, (CPJ Reports, 2001, 2002, 2009; Human Rights Watch World Reports, HRWWR, 2002, 2005, 2012), prompted this researcher to investigate their encounters.

### **1.1. Background of the study**

EPRDF twenty-year leadership (from 1992 to 2012) was accused "dictatorial" by various international human rights organizations, with one manifestation being that the leadership topped the list for detaining, torturing, and harassing journalists until the death of its leader Meles Zenawi. (Article 19, 2002, 2005, 2008; CPJ Reports, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2009, 2011; Freedom House, 2001, 2008, 2011; HRWWR, 2002, 2005, 2012; Human Rights Watch World Reports). However, Meles Zenawi's death on August 20, 2012, ended "the rule of the game," since his replacement, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, couldn't manage to be as subtle as his predecessor (Addis Standard, November 2018; BBC, November 2018).

The years that Prime Minister Hailemariam oversaw Ethiopia (2014-2018) were truly "not good years" for many Ethiopians, as uprisings and revolts occurred across the country (Aaron, 2014; Gettleman, 2016; Warner, 2016; Ademo & Smith, 2018; Allison, 2018; Jones, 2018). The protests began in 2014 and took an unexpected turn when they

pushed the country into a crisis, prompting Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn to proclaim the State of Emergency in 2015 (Mebratu, 2015). However, there were claims that the protests had started earlier. For example, Heinlein (2013) reported that large-scale protests against the dictatorship were taking place across the country, although the protests mostly demanded the liberation of political detainees, including opposition leaders and journalists (VOA News, June 3, 2013).

During those turbulent days, the general public was unable to travel securely from one city to another due to young people obstructing transportation services by blocking roads with large stones and wrecking buses and trucks attempting to go from one location to another. These youth, afterward dubbed "Kero" in Oromiya and "Fano" in Amhara (both words meaning "youth"), did not halt their insurrection there, instead burning down regional government buildings and destroying other investment complexes they claimed were owned by the ruling EPRDF and its leaders (Reporter, 2015; The Guardian, 2015).

The administration of Hailemariam Desalegn, the successor of former Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, sought to quell the protests by ordering security officials to take "necessary measures" against the demonstrators, but it was in vain (Tsedale, 2016; Conversation, 2016). Apart from declaring martial law in various parts of the country and ordering the military to enter specific cities, the government's security officers began widespread arrests of activists, opposition political party leaders, and private press journalists. After nearly two years of fruitless attempts to quell the protests, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn announced his departure from office on February 15, 2018, leaving a problematic human rights record behind (Addis Standard, 2018; Aaron, 2014; Burke, 2016; Maasho, 2014; Kestler-D'Amours, 2018; Bruton, 2018; Mills 2018).

On one of Ethiopia's most turbulent days, in February 2018, this researcher visited one of the many prison houses in the capital city's surrounding Gotera, where renowned journalists like Iskinder Nega, editor-in-chief of *Satenaw* and *Menilik* weeklies, and Temesgen Desalegn, editor-in-chief of *Feteh* weekly, were believed to be imprisoned alongside other prominent opposition politicians like Andulaem Arage. Visitors were told by a police officer that they were not allowed to see the detainees that day because they were being interrogated by security personnel. "I genuinely don't know them," the police

officer said with a smile when asked who these "security officers" were and where they came from.

This researcher went back to the same place the next morning, and realized that each visitor was only allowed to see the convicts for five minutes that day. The researcher spoke for five minutes with two well-known journalists from the private press, Iskinder Nega and Temesgen Desalegn. During that time, they told the researcher, who was then a columnist for a reputable magazine, about their experiences sleeping in the prison toilet and being subjected to long, severe interrogations day and night.

In January 2018, a new leader, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, came to power after two weeks of my visit to the prison. Dr. Abiy was a member of the OPDO Politbureau, one of the ruling party's coalitions, but he was a fresh face to many Ethiopians with a new political outlook that promoted "National Unity" in contrast to the EPRDF's "Ethnic-based politics" (Burke, 2018; Dawit, 2019; Keane, 2019; Manek, 2018; Roth, 2018; Soleiman, 2018).

Dr. Abiy ordered the release of all political prisoners, activists, and private press journalists from prison after only a few days in the PM office, as well as the closure of the infamous "Maekelawi," a prison that had been used as a torture and killing facility since the Derg government. In addition, the government discovered seven underground residences used for arresting and torturing government opponents, including private press journalists, in various parts of Addis Ababa and decided to close them (Latif Dahir, 2018; Elias, 2018; Week, 2018; Prosecutor General, 2018; Reporter, 2018; VOA, 2018).

On November 12, 2018, the newly appointed Attorney General Birhanu Tsegaye, said that around 63 government security personnel from the EPRDF administration had been detained and accused of torturing and even killing politicians, professionals, and other members of society. According to the Prosecutor General, the officials committed these crimes at seven clandestine houses in Addis Ababa that had been set aside for this purpose (Latif Dahir, 2018; Elias, 2018; Week, 2018; Prosecutor General Statement, 2018; Reporter, 2018; VOA 2018). The Attorney General stated that Ethiopians of high caliber were killed and tortured, suffering physical injuries such as loss of their eyes,

teeth, and legs, and even sterilization of their genital organs (Prosecutor General Statement, 2018; Reporter, 2018).

According to the Prosecutor General's statement, private press journalists were one of the groups targeted by these security personnel and politicians (Reporter, 2018; National, 2018). The EPRDF administration described these journalists as "terrorists and persons who pursue their political agenda" on several occasions (Amnesty International, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2001). After being imprisoned in several prison houses in Addis Ababa and other parts of the country, they faced various sorts of persecution. The attorney general has affirmed that some of those arrested are suspected of "beatings, forced confessions, sodomy, rape, electrocution, and even death" of detainees (ibid, 2018).

In general, the researcher opted to investigate the lived experiences of private press journalists as a result of all these and other personal and professional encounters to fully comprehend the significance of the phenomenon that occurred in Ethiopia during EPRDF administration.

## **1.2. The Researcher**

This researcher is well-versed in conducting in-depth interviews with journalists from the private press to learn about their individual experiences because of his background in journalism. The researcher has a BA in literature as well as a master's degree in journalism and communication. After participating in several trainings in various journalism genres, he now holds several diplomas and credentials. The researcher has been teaching media and communication at Addis Ababa University for more than a decade, in addition to **practicing journalism for about eighteen years**. He has also been providing numerous skill-upgrading training courses for journalists working in Ethiopia's various media institutions.

The researcher was introduced to the journalistic profession when he was a first-year student at AAU in 1989 G.C. By then, he had started working as a proofreader for the daily newspaper *The Ethiopian Herald*, and he had been in the industry **for eighteen years**, working for the government-owned newspapers *The Ethiopian Herald* and *Addis*

*Zemen* for the first eight years and private newspapers and magazines for the remaining years. During those 19 years of professional service, the researcher served in a variety of positions, and he benefited not only in terms of professional development but also in terms of gaining a deeper understanding of the obstacles and ordeals faced by then-private press journalists.

This researcher was also editor-in-chief for the monthly publications "Zen" and "Image". He had also worked as a night editor for the daily newspaper "The Ethiopian Herald" and as Deputy-Editor-in-Chief for the weekly newspaper "Nation", and wrote columns for several publications, including the then popular political weekly magazines "Fact", "Fitih" and the monthly "Kumneger". He has also worked as a freelance writer for weekly newspapers, and while conducting this research he was still a columnist for the popular magazine "Woy Addis Ababa". The researcher's professional and educational background piqued his interest in learning more about the lived experiences of private press journalists who were subjected to various sorts of ordeals and sufferings by the Meles Zenawi administration, of which he was also a part.

While objectivity is demanded of journalists when reporting news, the researcher's background as a journalist can be disregarded for the sake of this study in a phenomenological investigation that permits subjectivity. He has, of course, been practicing journalism for years by avoiding personal opinions during interviews. However, the researcher in this study would subjectively analyse and evaluate the interviewees' answers while delving into each of his presumptions regarding the phenomenon (Katz, 1987). A good portion of the last chapter will also offer personal reflections.

### **1.3. Statement of the problem**

According to reports by numerous international organizations, Ethiopia was consistently ranked top for detaining, harassing, and torturing journalists, as well as for limiting press freedom under EPRDF rule (Amnesty International 2008, Human Rights Watch 2006). Was this because, as some historians believe (Bach, 2011; Tran, 2012), the administration, which was promoting itself as democratic in the international arena, was authoritarian in its political system?

This phenomenological study aims at looking into the challenges and hardships faced by twelve well-known private press journalists who were accused of partisan journalism while Ethiopia was ruled by the EPRDF. The EPRDF regime has been argued to be "authoritarian," even though the government has claimed to be democratic, but this has remained a point of contention in academic studies. This phenomenological investigation of the ordeals of these private press journalists during EPRDF era is especially significant because, as Confucius says in "The Analects of Confucius" (Legge, 2018, p.13), studying the past is necessary for defining the future.

Another reason for focusing on the current study is a statement made by Robert Dahl in his well-known book "On Democracy," in which he argued that in the twentieth century, tyrannical rulers sometimes veiled their reign with a shadow of "democracy" and "elections" because of the attractiveness of democratic concepts (Dahl, 2000, p.49). This seems to be the case when interpreting the more than 25-year period (1991–2018) of EPRDF political dominance in Ethiopia, which was viewed by many as an authoritarian democracy because it allowed the constitution to declare press and expression freedom while restricting that freedom through the use of subsidiary laws (Andargachew, 2006).

Exploring the lived experiences of private press journalists during EPRDF era will shed new light on the socio-political phenomenon by attempting to answer many unanswered questions, such as the crimes that the private press journalists were charged with, which resulted in their being imprisoned, tortured, and/or forced to flee the country, as well as the types of sufferings and ordeals that they endure, and how they manage to survive them.

This study also investigates journalism practices during the EPRDF era by considering some of the main shortcomings that the private press journalists observed during that time, particularly with regard to unethical behaviour. The difficulties faced by private press journalists were largely attributed to a lack of professionalism, which was blamed for a number of unethical and unprofessional actions, including partisan journalism, lack of journalism education, and lack of professionalism (Melesew, 2013; Negeri, 2012). This has led to the burgeoning of "Yellow Journalism" and sensational newspapers and magazines across the nation. Almost all journalists, whether state or

private, were performing their reporting simply by obtaining brief training or even without it.

Furthermore, the journalists' perceptions of the EPRDF regime, as well as the challenges and sufferings they faced at various police stations and prisons, and the various forms of interference from the administration's security officers while practicing their profession, as well as their perspectives on the constitution and other local and international laws relating to press freedom, have not yet been sufficiently studied and explored. Therefore, this research study can be considered as new because no previous research studies attempted to conduct a phenomenological analysis by exploring how they went through all those sufferings during the stated era.

To ensure that the subject under inquiry is illuminated in a novel way, the researcher examined past research studies that focused on the private press situation in Ethiopia during EPRDF reign. As a consequence, the researcher discovered that only a few Ph.D. and MA thesis papers sought to investigate the topic by raising numerous issues linked to the obstacles and difficulties faced by Ethiopian journalists. These research publications are mentioned further down.

In this regard, the first dissertation this researcher came across was Terje S. Skjerdal's "Competing Loyalties: Journalism Culture in Ethiopian State Media," which was completed in 2012. According to the researcher, the focus of this study is "on the tension that occurs when a journalist's professional dedication is challenged by a commitment to a non-professional community such as the nation" (p.1). Even though the study uses a mix of personal interviews, newsroom observation, and content analysis, the focus is on qualitative interviews with 67 journalists from three state-owned news organizations. In the Ethiopian setting, the researcher concludes that the professional and national loyalty of journalists in state media cannot be considered independently.

Mulat Almayehu's (2017) Ph.D. dissertation, "Ethiopian Journalism from Self-censoring to Silence: An Example of Reporting on Internal Conflict," is another PhD dissertation this researcher came across. "To analyze the extent to which journalists of *The Daily Monitor* and *The Ethiopian Herald* report on internal conflicts, particularly

ethnic conflicts, which were prominent in Ethiopia throughout the study period, from 2005 to 2013," says the study (p.1). The researcher studied the coverage of the ethnic conflict in two newspapers, one from the state media and the other from the private press (the latter now out of print), and discovered that journalists in both newspapers avoid reporting such issues because "journalists live in the circle of fear and self-censorship, resulting in the exclusion of ethnically related conflict stories in the selected media."

Another study examined by this researcher is Hallelujah Lulle's MA thesis (2008). The study paper, titled "A Political History of the Private Press in Democratic Ethiopia," aims to investigate the degree of independence of the Ethiopian private press over the last sixteen years, from 1991 to 2007. The study examines the function of the private press in Democratic Ethiopia as an autonomous, professional, and ethical organization, as well as its contribution to the formation of a democratic society.

The research posed study questions such as whether the private press was autonomous or not, the relationship between the state and the press, as well as the private press's problems and challenges, and so on. The majority of Ethiopia's independent press was unprofessional, unethical, and entangled with political attachments backing the opposition, according to the study's conclusions.

Dagim Afework, another MA student, completed his research thesis in 2013, titled "Media and Democracy in Ethiopia: Roles and Challenges of the Private Media Since 2005." According to the researcher, the study's overall goal is to "explore the responsibilities that private media could play in Ethiopia's democratization process since 2005, as well as the problems that they face when attempting to fulfill a democratic purpose." The study's findings reveal that the journalists who were pulled were aware of their democratic roles. The findings also show that the relationship between the Ethiopian government and the private media was acrimonious, with government officials reluctant to provide any kind of information to private media journalists, intimidation of private media journalists based on critical stories about them, and the government taking unnecessary "administrative measures" rather than tolerating and providing counter-arguments.

Gudeta Seifu's MA thesis, "Self-regulation of the Private Press in Ethiopia: Prospects and Challenges" was written in 2008 and focused on the Ethiopian private press. This study aims to look at the situation of existing and non-existent self-regulatory structures and institutions in Ethiopia that govern the behaviors and practices of private presses to discuss the problems and opportunities. The findings of the study revealed that since the aftermath of the 2005 Ethiopian election, there have been problems in the press. The press is split along political lines and views each other as a competitor. As a result, forming a voluntary self-regulatory agency to regulate the press is a significant challenge.

Another MA thesis study completed by Henock Ayalew in 2008, titled "Corrections and Replies: How Ethiopia's Private Press Views the Law and Practice," was examined by this researcher. The study's goal is to look at corrections and answers under Ethiopia's first proclamation, as well as to outline the private press's opinions and practices, with a focus on relevant aspects of Proclamation 34/1992 on how the press was expected to handle corrections and the right of reply. The purpose of the study paper, according to the researcher, was just to demonstrate some of the immediately noticeable holes left by press regulations, and he noted that there is no rationale to argue that self-regulation is the only solution, nor that press rules can provide maximum responsibility. At the very least, a balanced blend of media self-regulation (media rules produced by journalists) and the law may result in more press freedom and appropriate guidelines.

Finally, this researcher looked through Misrak Adugna's MA thesis, "Challenges of Private Media in Ethiopia," which he completed in 2009. The study's goal is to "identify the challenges that private media faces in contributing to the country's democracy and development process." "The private media does not know what the majority public expects from them most of the time," according to the study's conclusions, "since the majority have the conviction that their readers do not want to read anything positive about the government." The researcher, on the other hand, states that 95 percent of the readers she polled believe that the private media has a responsibility to report on the government's accomplishments, particularly in the economic area.

This researcher looked at past research papers that examined Ethiopia's private press issues and discovered the following gaps and flaws as limitations:

- No research study sought to analyze the lived experiences of private press journalists during Meles Zenawi's reign through phenomenology research;
- The majority of research studies focused on a specific aspect of the private press, such as loyalty, self-censorship, ethics, accountability, professionalism, or ideology;
- Researchers in a number of studies were largely unable to obtain the information they required, due in large part to well-known private press journalists who did not accept the researchers' requests for information or information on the subjects they were studying, (Dagim, 2013; Gudeta, 2008; Henok, 2008).
- The outcomes of several research papers contradict one another, even though their research themes are nearly identical;
- In some of the research projects, the number of articles mentioned and the number of respondents is modest. As a result, their research does not represent the majority of private press journalists' viewpoints, nor should it appear to do so (Dagim, 2013; Melesew, 2013; Misrak, 2009). Accordingly, the replies and results in the study can only be taken as a limited sample of the private press.

In addition to the aforementioned academic research papers, the researcher stumbled and discovered four Amharic-language books that recount the journalists' sufferings and tribulations while imprisoned during Meles Zenawi's reign.

Yakob Woldemicheal wrote the first book, titled "*Yegna Neger*" (The Story of Us). Wubeshet Tsigie's second book is titled "*Mogach Ewnwtoch*" (Challenging Truths), while Wosenseged Gebrekidan's third book is titled "*Yekaliti Mistroch*." In their writings, the authors describe how they faced numerous hardships and sufferings throughout EPRDF era, particularly in the country's many jails.

In general, research from phenomenological studies in the academic setting is often still insufficient when it comes to private press journalists who endured suffering and agony at various detention facilities during the EPRDF while simultaneously being charged with partisan journalism. If Ethiopian media is to improve going forward,

research is required not only to expose past wrongdoings and mistakes committed by earlier political leadership, but also to assist in preventing similar crimes from happening again and to steer clear of unethical journalistic practices including partisan journalism and its causes.

## **1.4. Objective of the study**

### **1.4.1. General Objective**

The general objective of this phenomenological study is to investigate the first-hand recollections of twelve (12) prominent partisan private press journalists to allow them to tell their challenges, ordeals, and tribulations they face while imprisoned during EPRDF era of Ethiopia.

My literature review's core themes structured the study's specific objectives, which were grounded in my research question: "How were the journalists experiencing suffering and anguish in prisons tackle their ordeals?"

### **1.4.2. Specific objectives**

In addition to its main objective, the following are specific objectives of the study:

1. It examines the various forms of legal impediments these journalists bear while practicing freedom of speech and expression, and freedom of press in Ethiopia;
2. It looks into the difficulties faced by the journalists who were the targets of law enforcement and secret service operatives due to their political reporting;
3. It detects the various forms of encounters the journalists faced with the judiciary in their attempt to getting a fair trials and verdicts;
4. The study uncovers the challenges the journalists bear and they ran with when they were being tried;
5. It investigates the anguish and pain the journalists endured while detained at different prison facilities across the nation;
6. It analyzes the physical and psychological suffering the journalists' affected their lives subsequently, and how this negatively impacted both their personal and professional lives once they were released from prison;

7. It looks into how the journalists' view the future of the print media in Ethiopia.

### **1.5. Research Questions**

This study primarily aims to investigate the first-hand recollections of partisan private press journalists in Ethiopia imprisoned during EPRDF era, to answer the central question: "How were the journalists experiencing suffering and anguish in prisons tackle their ordeals?"

The following research questions led the investigation of this study to further frame the questions:

RQ1: What were the main institutional and legal obstacles that the journalists encounter while carrying out their duties?

RQ2: How do the journalists describe the persecution they were subjected to by the police and secret service officers as a result of practicing journalism?

RQ3: What obstacles and challenges did the journalists face in their quest for a fair trial in the legal system?

RQ4: How did the journalists tackle the challenges they ran against when they were being tried?

RQ5: How do the journalists' portray the anguish and pain they endured while being detained in various prisons across the nation?

RQ6: How do they describe their lives after they were released from jail, i.e., the damage that resulted in their health, and the psychological trauma they suffered on their lives afterward?

RQ7: How do the journalists view the future of the print media in Ethiopia?

### **1.6. Significance of the study**

This research study attempts to develop new knowledge about a topic that has not been well-studied or explored previously, with the primary goal of filling in the gaps that

previous researchers have failed to address. In this regard, it aims to bridge research gaps by focusing on the following themes:

It will examine the pains, ordeals, and tribulations that private press journalists faced at various prisons during EPRDF era of Ethiopia;

It will look at how journalists deal with various types of obstacles by looking at how the country's numerous regulations prevented them from freely doing journalism since the laws were deemed to be lacking in democratic ideals;

The study also examines the terrible conditions that private press journalists were forced to endure in both their professional personal and family lives during the EPRDF era based on their first-hand experiences. It also examines the degree to which restrictions on freedom of expression have harmed the public's right to know the truth through the experiences of the private press. In addition, this research will look into how regime officials, as well as the police, courts, and other governmental entities, have violated the human rights of journalists working for the private press.

Furthermore, the researcher interprets the socio-political phenomena that occurred during EPRDF era of Ethiopia based on participants' feedback, as it often uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a methodology to develop new knowledge about a phenomenon not well-known or explored before, so that it mainly aims at filling the gap previous researchers didn't bother to look on.

Moreover, exploring the lived experiences of private press journalists during Meles' regime will shed new light on the socio-political phenomenon by attempting to answer many unanswered questions, such as the crimes that the private press journalists were charged with, which resulted in their being imprisoned, tortured, and/or forced to flee the country, as well as the types of suffering and ordeals that they endure, and how they manage to survive them.

Additionally, it adds to the body of research on the experiences of private press journalists by delving into their perspectives on Meles and his regime, the challenges and hardships they face in various jails and police stations, the various ways that the regime's

security guards obstruct their ability to do their jobs, and their thoughts on the constitution and other national and international laws pertaining to press freedom.

Examining the bleak aspects of our past will aid in rekindling our hopes for the future. According to numerous international and human rights organizations reports, hundreds of private press journalists were arrested, and tortured, and some managed to flee the country under EPRDF era (Amnesty International 2002, HRW 2001). However, the level of misery and anguish experienced by private press journalists in striving to practice their profession while exercising their constitutional rights remains to be known little, both in academic and empirical investigations.

This research study can be considered as one addition to print media studies in Ethiopia, as it attempted to conduct a phenomenological analysis of some of the well-known private press journalists' lived experiences. The study focuses in examining how they handled the hardships they endured while being imprisoned in various jail houses in Ethiopia during the EPRDF era,

## **1.7. Scope and limitations of the study**

### **1.7.1. Scope of the study**

The period on which this study primarily focuses is the time of EPRDF rule, despite the researcher having unrestricted access to the private press journalists' life experiences through researching their sufferings and ordeals, and deciphering the meaning produced from their experiences. Additionally, the researcher has assembled only a small group of journalists—12 in total— but who are prominent members of the private press in the hope that they can contribute to illuminating the topic under investigation.

### **1.7.2. Limitations of the study**

This phenomenological qualitative study is limited to interviewing 10-15 private press journalists who were imprisoned, tortured, harassed, or forced to quit the country for fear of persecution. Therefore, the researcher is persuaded that it cannot fully depict the difficulties and hardships that Ethiopia's private press journalists faced under EPRDF administration. Additionally, some of the participants did not feel comfortable sharing all

that had happened to them while in prison or that they had been going through, and some asked that they did not share certain unpleasant truths because doing so might have a negative effect on their future personal and professional lives. Therefore, when conducting an in-depth interview on the participants' lived experiences, I chose not to disclose some of the obscene incidents mentioned by them.

The researcher has presumed that language gives participants the essential skills to capture their accounts because phenomenological research is interested in the experience itself. Despite the journalists' skill as writers, some of the participants' capacity to articulate their lived experiences was somewhat hampered, though opinions on this topic are mixed. However, I have used interpretive phenomenological analysis to figure out what they imply in their narration, as interview texts are used in the phenomenological analysis (Willig, 2008).

Even though it is debatable enough to be viewed as a limitation, there is criticism of phenomenology research itself as it records and describes participants' actual experiences without making an effort to comprehend them. "While such research is capable of producing detailed, rich descriptions of participants' experiences of situations and events, it does not tend to advance our understanding of why such experiences occur and why there may be differences between individuals' phenomenological representations" (O'Connor and Hallam 2000).

The researcher, however, refers to Kvale's (1996b) description that phenomenological research focuses on perception with the aim of "gaining a broader awareness of how participants feel and see the world from their viewpoints." "What counts is how individuals interpret reality," as a result (p.52).

Despite his assumption that the journalists he chose come from a diversity of experiences and backgrounds, the researcher is certain that their accounts of actual occurrences were validated and timely. Individual experiences and views from different viewpoints can best be revealed using phenomenological research methods, such as those this researcher employed.

## **1.8. Organization of the study**

This research is organized into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction that gives a general summary of the topic. The researcher concentrates on the personal statement, statement of the problem, the research purpose, significance of the study, and limitations and scope of the study in this section. The explanation of the problem (Chapter 1) explains the research question, as well as the study's aim (Chapter 2).

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to discuss and review some pertinent material. This chapter gives evidence and authority regarding the study's theme, which is primarily the issue of press freedom in Ethiopia, the theoretical basis of the research, and an overview of the private press. The review evaluates the material available from prior research. The researcher presents an overview of press freedom in Ethiopia historically and describes the jail environment as experienced by many authors who have written about it. This chapter's discussion of the study's theoretical foundations also touches on some philosophical questions regarding the theoretical foundation of phenomenology as a research approach.

The Research Questions and a full description of the Method and methodology are all covered in Chapter 3. Here, the reader will find comprehensive details regarding how the research approach and design align with the goals of the study. This chapter explains the study paradigm, the sampling size and processes, the data sources and collection techniques, as well as the analytic procedure.

"Findings of the result" are presented in Chapter 4, which includes an introduction to the research participants' descriptive information about their backgrounds. To develop a meaning for their experiences, the participants' responses to the interview range from typical to exceptional. The researcher is loyal to the participants and conscious of any biases that may be introduced during the unavoidable editing that will be required. The researcher thinks about ethical difficulties including misrepresenting, distorting, or deleting the input that participants have given in good faith. Although this chapter includes some description its primary purpose is to interpret rather than to explain. The researcher delves into the lived experiences of private press journalists by identifying the

major topics raised by participants. They are categorized into themes, and interpret the participants' perspectives to convey their impressions of the findings.

The "issues and implications" part is covered in Chapter 5, which also allows the researcher to analyze the participants' perspectives and form “conclusions” about the study. The researcher employs the phrase “conclusion” even if it suggests certainty since it can also indicate finality, which is warranted, even when generalizability in phenomenological qualitative research is discouraged (Creswell, 2013). Personal thoughts are provided in this section as well, but the researcher uses a suppositional structure to argue that the study is not arriving at a definitive conclusion, but rather pointing to implications or routes forward that make sense of the interpretation referred to.

## **1.9. Conclusion**

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the first-hand recollections of twelve prominent press journalists who were blamed for engaging in political journalism, suffered and agonised in various prisons across the nation, and spoke about their experiences during the EPRDF period. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the journalists who had held the position of chief editor at their respective newspapers and magazines for an extended period. Some of the journalists interviewed for this study are well-known for having engaged in politics and political engagement at various levels throughout their later years, in addition to exercising their profession.

The researcher has conducted an in-depth interview with these particular participants to answer the central question: How did private press journalists cope with sufferings, ordeals, and tribulations during EPRDF administration? This study, in general, attempts to explore the first-hand accounts of partisan private press journalists during EPRDF era by attempting to shed new light on the socio-political phenomenon. It has also endeavored to answer unanswered questions, such as the crimes that the private press journalists were charged with, which resulted in their being imprisoned, tortured, and/or forced to flee the country, as well as the types of suffering and ordeals that they endure, and how they manage to survive them.

The researcher is confident that examining the first-hand recollections of the difficulties and suffering of these private press journalists who were held accountable and imprisoned for partisan journalism during the EPRDF era could be considered as a significant contribution to the study of Ethiopian journalism, particularly in gaining an understanding of the socio-political phenomena of the time. It also aids in imparting valuable knowledge on how to prevent similar incidents from happening in the future to Ethiopian media and political leaders. In the words of Snatayna (1905), "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. Books and other publications**

This is a qualitative phenomenological study that focuses on the "challenges and suffering of twelve imprisoned private press journalists blamed for partisan journalistic practices". Therefore, the researcher will first provide the scenario of prisons as described by different authors in their books who had witnessed them, followed by a historical overview of the problem of press freedom in Ethiopia during EPRDF rule for a quarter-a-century, as well as looking into the role that partisan journalism played in the problems that the journalists faced.

The researcher also discusses the study's theoretical underpinnings in this chapter by dealing with some philosophical issues about the theoretical base of Phenomenology, as a research approach. It hinges on the importance of understanding phenomenology, not only as a philosophy but also as one of the many research approaches under qualitative research design. Therefore, I discuss phenomenology under the Methodology section in Chapter Three to shed light on how it relates to the theme and focus of this research study.

##### **2.1.1. The private press under EPRDF rule of Ethiopia**

The trajectory of history, and particularly that of Ethiopia's socio-political scenario, shifted when the military junta, known as the Derg, overthrew Emperor Haileselassie from his throne in 1974. This marked the beginning of the nation's dismal journey. Uncountable numbers of people from all walks of life were imprisoned at numerous detention facilities across the nation, particularly in the capital Addis Abeba, under the Derg, turning the entire nation into one giant prison. Abera (2005), a State Minister during the Emperor's era and an author of *"In the Lion's Den"*, affirms that the Derg even converted the stately palace, which had been used as a royal residence since the reign of Emperor Menilik II, into a prison.

Abera (2005) provides a moving account of his eight years of suffering at that prison, which was formerly the cellar of the Throne Hall of the Grand Palace of Emperor Haileselassie. He describes the location where he and other senior dignitaries were imprisoned and where many of them were later slain by the infamous Derg:

“Our circumstances were ones we had never imagined although our surroundings were not familiar. Gathered as we were in the Grand palace, we were far from living a palatial life of luxury. On the contrary, we were being accommodated in a cave-like dungeon, under the Throne Hall. In better times, these living quarters of ours had been used to chill and store wine. Come winter or summer, this dungeon was always damp and cold. Our bodies were now shrunken with this icy air, our bones chilled, our veins swollen from anger and frustration, and our spirits agitated (p.1)”.

The TPLF-led EPRDF administration has continued to build or use ancient cave-like prisons, such as Maekelawi, Kaliti, Ziway, and other jails across the nation, to toss individuals in there and allow them to suffer after the oppressive Derg regime fell. It was also observed that people continued to be imprisoned and through other sorts of persecution and torture during the reign of Meles, as stated by Dowdon (2008), "The fact that Hitler committed genocide did not make Stalin a saint" (p. 5) (Wubshet 2016, Wosenseged 2011).

In 2004, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRC) reported that there were 120 prisons throughout Ethiopia and that practically all of them were considered locations of detainees' pain and misery (Wubeshet, 2016, p.53). Numerous crimes, including rape and murder, were perpetrated in the overcrowded prisons. Wubshet (2016) noted that it was tragic that "people of various calibers, including politicians and journalists, were incarcerated in those awful areas with scandalous criminals" (p.54). In this regard, the researcher discovered several works that can be regarded as historical accounts because they were written by individuals who were made to endure a variety of gruesome situations in those jails.

One of them, Wosenseged (2011), wrote a book called "*Yekaliti Mistroch*" (Secrets of Kaliti Prisons) in which he described his horrifying experiences at the Maekelawi and

Kaliti prisons. Wosenseged (2011) narrates that his first experience at Maekelawi prison was very agonizing and trying, especially when he was thrown into the pitch-black room. He had previously been placed in a prison cell that was only 3 meters by 3 meters in size. The only source of light for the 14 convicts who were jammed into that cramped room came from the iron rods supported by a tiny window in one of the corners. Prisoners may also breathe fresh air through the tiny gaps between the iron rods (Ibid. pp. 12–15).

According to Wosenseged (2011), his experiences in prison and his pain were "the most traumatic incident he'd ever had" (p.14). He claimed to have spent eight years in prison and was unable to adjust to the appalling conditions he was in. He was a journalist who had been charged with "producing wicked propaganda" that endangered public order, but he also accused Meles' administration of punishing and degrading private press journalists by imprisoning them alongside violent offenders with murder and rape convictions (Ibid. p.15).

Wosenseged (2011) recalls that the regime treated journalists with contempt because they were already seen as adversaries of the state. He was punished by being confined to a dark room for weeks because he complained about being restrained whenever he was brought to court. Wosenseged claims that it was done on purpose to subject them to psychological and mental abuse by holding the interrogations at night.

Wosenseged was in a better situation when he was detained at Kaliti prison together with CDU officials. He was at least charged with terrorism, and the guards were friendly to the CDU officials. Otherwise, being imprisoned in Ethiopia "...was like entering the most dreadful jail on the globe, particularly if accused of something related to being a private press journalist," Wosenseged (2011) describes (Ibid. p.17). According to Wosenseged, in Maekelawi, food was served to convicts in plastic bags (2011). Prisoners used empty cans that were put at the corners of each cell to relieve themselves during the day because they were only permitted to do so once a day. When the doors of each prison cell are unlocked at the end of the day, those cans let forth a foul scent (Ibid. pp.13-14).

In his book, Wosenseged (2011) also discusses Kaliti Prison, in particular, how hundreds of prisoners used to share one tiny cell and sleep "*deboqa*": "*Deboka* is the term

used by the inmates to describe sleeping on either side of our body. “When this happens, the inmates are sometimes compelled to stand or sit in the room's corner until someone wakes them up and replaces them. I had been tortured for years by *deboka* sleeping for long stretches of time, not only just in this prison but also in others” (pp.57-59). Wosenseged (2011) is also extremely critical of the judiciary in his book, particularly of the judges who had previously been associated with the ruling political party and how they demonstrated their allegiance by imprisoning journalists and opposition politicians before even considering their cases (pp. 141-143).

A book titled "*Mogach Ewnetoch*" (Challenging Truth) by journalist Wubeshet Taye was also consulted in this study. Wubeshet (2016) describes the terrifying situation he encountered at three separate prisons, Maekelawi, Kaliti, and Zeway, in a biographical account of his lived experiences in several jails throughout the Meles era. For instance, Maekelawi prison was defined by Wubeshet (2016) as a location where one can brutally suffer all suffering and where all prisons were built to torture those who were sentenced to get into them. At the Central Investigation Agency, where he was initially detained, he was kept in a unique space known as the "8th House".

The room was dark, and because the walls wouldn't let any sound in from the outside, it was terrifyingly quiet at all hours of day and night, according to Wubeshet's depiction of Maekelawi prison. He was detained in the chamber for 90 days. In the agency, there are only four such rooms, and they were designed exclusively for political captives. One other prisoner from the opposition political party was housed with him in that badly constructed chamber. They couldn't converse with one other in such a terrible condition, so they kept quiet and attempted to stay warm in the frigid chamber. "Any human being would find imprisonment unpleasant, let alone imprisonment for ninety days. However, they had already subjected me to torture by keeping me in the chamber for 90 days", according to Wubeshet (2016, pp.55-58).

In his book, Wubeshet (2016) also describes what prisoners called *Guantanamo*, *Eraero*, and other jails in Kaliti and Zeway intended to torture inmates. For instance, he writes the following about the dismal solitary confinement cell he was placed in at Zeway Prison: "A solitary cell is welcomed by most journalists and politicians. As I was forced

inside, the door shut behind me, leaving the room dark and deserted. Here, however, there was nothing but a frigid, silent abyss. In the other cells, at least, you could see the different colors of clothing that your cellmates, wore, and hear their sounds. You can't even see the flesh on your own body (pp. 72–73).

Wubeshet was once brought to Kaliti prison and detained there for several months while he awaited the judge's ruling. They placed him in the "6th House," a small chamber inside the Zone 3 prison where other private press journalists like Iskinder Nega, and others were detained. They were prohibited from interacting with other convicts because the Meles dictatorship viewed private press journalists as political prisoners who had committed serious crimes against the government (Ibid. pp.59-62).

Another author, Kiflu Yakob, recounted the unpleasant scenes he saw at several Addis Abeba prisons in his book *"Yegna Neger"* (Our Story), which was published in 2000. The author relates the horrific experiences he and his coworkers endured, as well as what they saw when imprisoned at various points in time, particularly in the infamous Maekelawi prison.

As they were connected to the ruling EPRDF, judges allegedly routinely reviewed their rulings with the prosecutors, according to Kiflu (2000). Instead of being immediately put into prison cells, journalists were frequently given to secret agents to be punished whatever they pleased, just like they did with Daniel Kifle, the former editor-in-chief of the weekly newspaper "Fendisha."

After Daniel revealed the million-dollar corruption by former Prime Minister Tamirat Layne, he was pursued by secret service operatives for a considerable amount of time. One day, after encircling and breaking into his home after midnight, secret agents transported him to Maekelawi prison. When they got to Maekelawi, they stripped him of everything but a T-shirt and a pair of pants. They then used an interior ladder designed for this purpose to carry him to the roof, where they instructed him to wait until they returned. They covered his face at the entrance and left him there to endure the bone-chilling cold of the night and the tormenting sun of the following day. Later, after midnight the following day, they let him in by opening the roof gate. Then they

discovered Daniel critically ill as a result of the situation to which he was subjected while lying on the rooftop for about 36 hours (pp. 80-85).

According to Kiflu (2000), both the Maekelawi and Kaliti prisons' cells might be compared to an imagined "hell." He claimed that the iron rod and corrugated sheet jail buildings were built specifically to torture inmates with the scorching sun during the day and the icy cold at night (ibid. p. 222).

Journalist Sinidu Abebe (2006) on her part published a fascinating biographical piece titled "*Kerchele Prison - in an insider look*" about one of Addis Abeba's jails. In Kerchele Prison, several female inmates were charged with political crimes, and some of them were only 15 years old, according to Sinidu (2006). The judge ordered that female inmates who appeared in court underage be given hospital certificates to verify their age, but for more than three years they were ignored in the prison. No one, not even the courts, had ever inquired about the young female convicts who were arrested (Sinidu, 2006, p. 19).

The five books listed above, which were written about the gross conditions in Ethiopian jails, were discovered by the researcher and discussed. To get a clear picture of the situation at the time and a solid understanding of prisons, the researcher carefully read the writers' descriptions of them. This provided the knowledge needed to adjust the interview questions posed to research participants so that they would be in line with the realities of Ethiopia's Meles era.

### **2.1.2. Press freedom and private press – historical perspective**

The history of print media in the developed world is investigated because they have always been active agents in political change, economic development, and social formation rather than simply recorders of society (Craig, 2007). In contrast, in emerging countries such as Ethiopia, the media has not had a significant role in bringing about political change, economic progress, or social formation. If one were to examine at least the past one hundred years of government type that Ethiopians have gone through, one would find the various kinds of political leadership with a different ideological orientation, but with a similar type of ruling system - an authoritarian one.

Emperor Haile Selassie ruled Ethiopia under an authoritarian monarchical system of government for more than 44 years (from 1930 to 1974), in which a single man with dictatorial power ruled the country with harsh censorship laws for all media outlets (Gasjorowski, 1990). The Emperor, like many authoritarian tyrants throughout history, did not allow free thought or speech.

Bahiru (2002) cites Article 4 of the Emperors' 1955 constitution as evidence of absolute power: "By virtue of His Imperial Blood, as well as the anointing which he has received, the Emperor's person is sacrosanct, His dignity is inviolable, and His power irrefutable" (p.13).

This just demonstrates how citizens were not permitted to oppose or denounce the Emperor verbally or in writing. In 1974, the Emperor was deposed from his throne and the monarchy was abolished by a military junta known as the "Derg," which literally means "committee." The "Derg" adopted communism as an ideology, declaring Ethiopia a Marxist-Leninist one-party state with itself as the vanguard party in a provisional government (Henze, 1985).

The Derg, led by another dictator, Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam, declared socialist philosophy to be the highest law of the country, and no commercial media was permitted to exist in Ethiopia (Keller, 1985). Some believe that the Derg adapted its philosophy from rival Marxist parties, all of which emerged from the student movement. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), for example, was so committed to civilian government that it waged urban guerrilla wars against military rulers, resulting in anarchy in the years that followed (Marcus and Crummy, 2006). Others, however, disputed this assessment, claiming that when Somalia was at war with Ethiopia, America was unhelpful and that the Derg simply fell into the hands of the Soviet Union (Gebru, 2000). Whatever the case, the Derg proved to be authoritarian during its seventeen years in power by publicly banning citizens from using all democratic values and assets, including freedom of speech and opinion.

Following the demise of the Derg in May 1991, Meles Zenawi's TPLF, which eventually became the EPRDF, assumed control of the government with a socialist bent.

The Front's name, the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT), was a clear indication of their leftist political beliefs from the start (Aregawi, 2009; Young, 1991).

In May 1991, the TPLF, which eventually became the EPRDF, assumed control of the government under the socialist leadership of Meles Zenawi. The Front's name, the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT), was considered by many as a clear indication of their leftist political beliefs from the start (Aregawi, 2009; Young, 1991). Bach (2011) conducted a thorough examination of the ruling EPRDF party's political position, concluding that it is "authoritarian." He says the following in this regard:

Since 1991 and the arrival of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) into power, Ethiopian ideologists have maintained revolutionary democracy (abyotawi democracy in Amharic) as their core doctrine. The notion inherited from the struggle (1970s–1980s) aims at legitimizing a political and economic structure that de facto implies the resilience of authoritarianism (ibid. p.643).

That means that, according to Bach's assessment of the EPRDF's philosophy, the term "authoritarianism" might be applied not just to those who have seized power through a military coup or without a democratic election, but also to those who have concealed their power under the appearance of democracy. One method to understand such governments is to look at how they "handle" their country's media and journalists.

Although the EPRDF has been successful in bringing about economic development in Ethiopia, many view its leadership as authoritarian since it has repressed freedom of speech and thought through a variety of means. Alex De Waal (2012) writes the following about the EPRDF leader Meles and his political ideology in one of his review articles on Meles Zenawi's unfinished Master's thesis, "African Development: Dead Ends and New Beginnings."

World leaders have lauded Meles' economic achievements without acknowledging their theoretical basis. Human rights organizations have decried his political record as although he was a routine despot with no agenda other than hanging on to power (p.148).

In a similar vein, Mark Tran wrote an article for The Guardian on August 12, 2012, titled "Ethiopia's renaissance under Meles Zenawi tainted by authoritarianism," in which he states that while Meles has received praise for his economic record, his regime's intolerance of dissent has drawn criticism from human rights groups and the UN, and raises awkward questions from aid donors. In the following way, Tran (2012) describes how Meles' dictatorship hurt the country's private press:

... In July, Eskinder Nega, a prominent journalist and blogger, was sentenced to 18 years in prison, and an opposition activist, Andualem Arage, was given a life sentence for breaking anti-terrorism laws. Other journalists have been charged under the same sweeping anti-terrorism law that was introduced in 2009, prompting Navi Pillay, the UN high commissioner of human rights, to say journalists, human rights defenders, and critics were facing a "climate of intimidation" in Ethiopia (p.12).

This study also attempts to discover from the perspectives of the research participants whether the EPRDF led government was granted constitutional status out of a sincere desire to advance democracy and press freedom in the country or if it was only a publicity act to win over Western countries.

### **2.1.3. Press freedom during EPRDF era**

Unquestionably, the EPRDF's ascent to power in 1991 significantly altered the landscape of press freedom in Ethiopia by facilitating the growth of the private press, something that was unimaginable under the Derg regime. One example of it was ratification of the 1995 FDRE Constitution Article 29, which guarantees "The right of Thought, Opinion and Expression", and the other is the approval of the 1992 press declaration. All these measures taken by the EPRDF administration helped to the mushrooming of private newspapers and magazines with great numbers never seen before in the Ethiopian history.

Pausewang et al. (2002), for example, praised the Constitution for providing a democratic platform for all citizens, despite its flaws. The following is what the academicians had to say about the FDRE Constitution of 1995:

The Ethiopian Constitution of 1995 provides for a democratic structure of governance in the country. This is indeed an important innovation in the history of the Ethiopian state structure that one should not underestimate. There may still be room for some improvements, but in principle, this constitution sets the legal foundation for a fully-fledged democracy. (Pausewang et al, 2002, p.230)

After an extensive examination of EPRDF regime by various scholars in a book titled "Ethiopia, Since the Derg," Pausewang et al. concluded that the Ethiopian Constitution of 1995 provides for a democratic structure of governance in the country; however, democratic institutions are not allowed to operate by the spirit of democracy (Pausewang et al., 2002, p.230).

On the other hand, according to a 2010 Freedom House research, 35% of the world's states allow press freedom, 33% have a "partly free" press, and the remaining 32% lack press freedom, even when their constitutions promise it. Even in its 2018 examination of the international press scenario, Ethiopia is classified as being in the lowest tier (Freedom House, 2018). And this was observed that the EPRDF government's implementation of press freedom regulations was, at best, average, despite Ethiopia's constitution's guarantees for press freedom and all the international accords Ethiopia had ratified.

This was proved in a few years when the EPRDF produced two extreme conditions under which the Ethiopian press operated, leading numerous publications and magazines to become oppositional press and start engaging in partisan journalism. According to Eyerusalem (2013), these are independent versus dependent media. Under the totalitarian auspices of the governing party and the government, the dependent (public) press has been enjoying considerable freedom, while the independent (private) press has been prosecuted for being perceived as extremely political and antagonistic to the government. (Ibid. 2013) The media has had restrictions placed on their freedom in both extremes. As a result, Ethiopia's public media space has been severely restricted, negating the media's historical ability to act as a link between the people and the government. Because of the EPRDF, there is a situation where neither extreme satisfies the standards of press freedom that are set by wealthy nations.

During the EPRDF administration, hundreds of private press journalists were arrested, tortured, or forced to shut down their newspapers and magazines; and some managed to flee from the country in fear of persecution (Amnesty International 2002, and 2008; Human Rights Watch 2001 and 2005). Reports that had been made by foreign organizations throughout the world were also routinely criticizing the authoritarian type of rule by EPRDF administration, by labeling its leader Meles Zenawi as “one among the predators” of freedom of the press.

Following EPRDF ascension to power by toppling the Derg regime, several international and human rights organizations expressed concern about "unlawful arrests and torture of Ethiopian independent press journalists" (Amnesty International, 2002 and 2008; Article 19, 2001; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2002; Freedom House, 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2001, 2005; Reporters Without Borders, 2001).

Despite the Constitution's guarantee of freedom of speech and thought, Amnesty International reported in its April 1998 report on Ethiopia, "Journalists in Prison - Press Freedom Under Attack," that at least 16 journalists had been imprisoned at the time, bringing the total number of journalists imprisoned in the previous year to more than 200. It revealed that approximately 200 private press editors and reporters were imprisoned on various occasions, with several of them being detained multiple times (ibid. 1998, p.1). The journalists were held according to the article under the Press Law, which was enacted in October 1992, 17 months after EPRDF took political power of the country.

Many scholarly publications were also written, as well as analyses on the authoritarian nature of EPRDF in relation to lack of press freedom (Alemayehu, 2003; Dagim, 2009; Meseret, 2013; Skjerdal, 2010). The government, on the other hand, accused the journalists of being "criminals and saboteurs" and for practicing partisan journalism (CPJ, 2011; Freedom House, 2012). They were also branded as war and destabilization provocateurs, and some were even designated as terrorists (Abiye, 2011; Fesmedia, 2011; Fortin, 2011; HRW, 2015; VOA, 2012). International human rights organisations have consistently accused the government, and particularly its leader Meles Zenawi, of "deceiving the world" by merely putting freedom of speech and the press on paper, when in fact he was an authoritarian whose government ought to be held

accountable for a host of crimes and violations of human rights in Ethiopia. (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2002; Human Rights Watch - World Report, 2002).

Of course, Ethiopia was held up as an example of how, despite having "critically awful" human rights records, its leader Meles Zenawi was able to achieve economic growth. For example, in The New York Times' September 19, 2012 issue, under "The Opinion Pages - Room for Debate," the editor specifically accuses Meles of arresting and torturing journalists in his country, citing a Human Rights Watch report from 2010. "How should an influential country like the United States negotiate relationships with authoritarian regimes that have improved living standards in their countries, like Kagame in Rwanda and Zenawi in Ethiopia?" the editor asks after labeling Meles "authoritarian" (Ibid. 2012).

Daniel Bekele, the former Executive Director of Human Rights Watch's Africa Division and now Commissioner of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, was one of the many who spoke out about the matter. "Its human rights record has dramatically deteriorated, nonviolent protests have been shut down, opposition leaders, activists, and journalists have been arrested or forced to flee the country," Daniel said, acknowledging that Ethiopia made economic advances under the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Accusations of "terrorism" and artisan journalism have been used to stifle critics and intimidate activists (ibid. 2012).

#### **2.1.4. The era of EPRDF and Democracy in the context**

Robert Dahl in his well-known book "On Democracy," argued that in the twentieth century, tyrannical rulers sometimes veiled their reign with a shadow of "democracy" and "elections" because of the attractiveness of democratic concepts (Dahl, 2000, p.49). This appears to be true regarding interpreting the era of Meles Zenawi's political control in Ethiopia for twenty years (1992-2012), he was widely seen as an authoritarian leader, but who also permitted the constitution to declare freedom of the press and expression.

This researcher believes that the concept of Authoritarian Democracy can work within the context of Ethiopian politics during the era of Meles Zenawi's nearly quarter-century rule of the nation. International human rights organizations accused Meles of

"deceiving the world" as a democratic leader by simply putting the rights of freedom of press and speech on paper when in reality he was a true authoritarian whose government should be accused of committing numerous crimes and human rights violations in Ethiopia (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2002; Human Rights Watch - World Report, 2002;).

Theoretically, this study is informed by the literature on the concept of Authoritarian Democracy in its relation to press freedom as well as by examining its contribution to the challenges and hurdles that journalists can face while performing their tasks under the EPRDF regime as it was considered by many international organizations (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2002; Human Rights Watch - World Report, 2002) not different from past governments even though its constitution allowed freedom of press and speech, as well as permitting multi-party democracy, at least in theory.

Alabaster (1994) states that Authoritarian Democracy is a type of democracy that aims to reflect the interests of society and is run by the governing elite of an authoritarian state. According to Alabaster (1994), the idea of Authoritarian Democracy was originally conceived by Italian fascist political theorist Giovanni Gentile and used by Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini (1994, p.48). Soucy (1967) cited Maurice Barrès, a major fascist influencer, and asserted that authoritarian democracy was the only genuine kind of democracy, rejecting liberal democracy as a forgery. According to Barrès, authoritarian democracy entailed a spiritual bond between a country's ruler and its citizens, and real freedom was achieved by "heroic leadership" and "national force" rather than individual freedoms or parliamentary limitations (Soucy, 1975, pp. 87-90).

In his discussion of how authoritarian regimes control the media, Schindler (2013) lists restrictions on communication channels, including prohibitions on private ownership in the form of state monopolies on print or electronic mass media; postproduction restrictions on media content, including censorship, license revocation, beatings, arrests and assassinations of journalists, harassment or other forms of pressure; and restrictions on means of production (Schedler, 2013).

In this regard, according to a 2010 Freedom House research, 35% of the world's states allow press freedom, 33% have a "partly free" press, and the remaining 32% lack press freedom, even when their constitutions promise it. Even in its 2018 examination of the international press scenario, Ethiopia is classified as being in the lowest tier (Freedom House, 2018).

In terms of press freedom, Article 29 of the Constitution, which was adopted by the directly elected Constitutional Assembly in November 1995, declares: "1) the right to hold opinions without interference, 2) the right to freedom of expression without any interference with the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, and 3) freedom of the press and other mass media and freedom of artistic creativity is guaranteed... etc.

The constitutional manifestation of press freedom in the FDRE Constitution, as a result, allowed the private press to flourish in the country. According to the figures obtained from the Broadcasting Agency, which was the only organ at the time with the authority to license the media (Broadcasting Proclamation No. 178/1999) until the establishment of the Broadcasting Authority in 2007 (Broadcasting Proclamation No. 533/2007), more than 200 newspapers and 87 magazines were launched in Ethiopia between 1992 and 1997, one year after the EPRDF took power (Stremlau, 2011).

About the situation of the private press in Ethiopia at the time, Stremlau (2011) says that most of these publications were deeply critical of the EPRDF's ambitious political project to consolidate power and fundamentally restructure the Ethiopian state through "ethnic federalism. And responding to the criticism, the EPRDF sought to control the press by arresting journalists and using the state media for propaganda. In the long term, this contradictory strategy failed to facilitate the development of a media system that contributes to genuine democratic governance (ibid. p.716).

In six years, especially after the regime released "the Draconian Law of Press Proclamation 1992," the number of newspapers and magazines began to drop in 1998, eventually dwindling to only 47 newspapers and 32 magazines (Freedom House, 2011). According to a 2001 study by Human Rights Watch, the government continued to limit

freedom of expression and press and twenty-seven Ethiopian journalists were forced to flee the country owing to recurrent arrests and ill-treatment in custody. According to the report, the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association (EFPJA) was only recognized by the government in March 2001, seven years after the independent organization originally applied for registration. Meanwhile, their reporters remained imprisoned. Four had been in custody for up to two years before receiving a one-year term, and they were still being held on additional charges. During the year 2000, the government kept another thirty-one journalists on a short leash after releasing them on extremely high bail pending court proceedings (HRW, 2001, p.2).

Another international organization, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), in its report released on March 19, 2001, stated the grim scenario that was being seen in Ethiopia about the arrest and harassment of journalists stating that even though Meles claimed that the peace treaty signed between him and his Eritrean counterpart Isaias Afewerki would allow his government to strengthen Ethiopian democracy, seven journalists were put in jail at year's end, and according to the Organization's report the arrest was unclear whether he would end his government's vengeful crusade against the local independent press.

According to the research, Ethiopian journalism is governed by Press Proclamation No. 34/1992, which allows journalists to be imprisoned on broad allegations such as criminal defamation, inciting violence, or distributing false information. "Many journalists are facing multiple charges and are being held in custody pending trial or while serving multiple terms. Massive fines are sometimes accompanied by prison sentences, and failure to pay fines is punishable by additional jail time and fines", according to the report (CPJ, 2001, p.1).

Article 19 was one of many organizations that expressed worry about the safety of Ethiopian journalists. This organization has also expressed its worry for many years about the actions done by Prime Minister Meles' rule in restricting the expansion of the private press in Ethiopia by enacting regulations such as the Ethiopian Press Law of 1992. In 2001, the organization published "The Legal Framework for Freedom of Expression in Ethiopia," which attacked the government as follows:

Journalists in the private press have been subjected to arbitrary arrest, intimidation, harassment, criminal prosecution, and subsequent conviction. Many journalists have been forced to flee from the country and seek refugee status in neighboring countries. Repression of the private press and attacks on journalists from the private sector escalated to a level at one point where the government of Ethiopia was listed as one of the world's worst ten enemies of the press (p.33).

Similarly, CPJ named Ethiopia's government as Africa's greatest jailer of journalists in 2002, while Reporters Without Borders named Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi as one of the world's top 38 press freedom predators (2002, p.4).

Following Ethiopia's 2005 elections, Human Rights Watch published a report accusing the government of "sharply reversing a liberalizing trend and subjecting independent newspapers, their editors, publishers, and reporters to renewed harassment, intimidation, and criminal charges solely for their reporting and editorials" (Human Rights Watch, 2005). According to the study, 18 journalists were sentenced under legislation passed by the military administration before 1991 that renders claimed defamation and the printing of "false" information illegal.

In a 2005 report, CPJ stated that journalists Andualem Ayele of "Ethop" newspaper and Nardos Meaza of "Satanaw" newspaper had been detained in a growing government crackdown, while Kifle Mulat, President of Ethiopian Free Press Association, as well as the Publisher and two editors of "Netsanet" newspaper, and an editor of "Abay" newspaper, had been arrested and their offices searched, their documents, computers, and money confiscated by (CPJ, 2005, p.4). In a government crackdown on private press journalists, four journalists were arrested: Befekadu Moreda, editor-in-chief of "Tomar," Zelalem Gebre, editor-in-chief of "Menelik," Dawit Fasil, editor-in-chief of "Asqual," and Tamirat Serbesa of "Satenaw," according to the report (Ibid. 2005, p.5). CPJ in its December 2005 report also expressed its concern over the jailing of 16 private press journalists and asked the government for their immediate release (Ibid. 2005, p.3).

Another international group, Freedom House, reported the following in its 2008 report on the problem of press freedom in Ethiopia:

The Constitution guarantees freedom of the press, but this right is often restricted in practice. Authorities frequently invoke the 1992 Press Law regarding the publication of false and offensive information, incitement of ethnic hatred, or libel to justify the arrest and detainment of journalists. Court cases can continue for years, and journalists often have multiple charges pending against them. The 2003 draft Press Law, which has been criticized by the private press and press freedom groups for imposing restrictions on the practice of journalism and harsh sanctions for violations, remained under consideration by parliament in 2007, although certain provisions of the bill were included in the new penal code that took effect in May 2005 (p.1).

Following the Press Proclamation of 1992, the updated statute of the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information (Proclamation No. 590/2008 of 2008) was seen as a new threat to Ethiopia's already challenged press freedom (Mushtaq, 2008). Furthermore, the Anti-Terrorism Law, which went into effect in 2009, was viewed as "a clear indication of the government's authoritarian rule of the manner," particularly over the private media, as hundreds of journalists were either imprisoned, tortured, harassed, or forced to flee the country to save their lives (Article 19, 2011; CPJ Report, 2005, 2009; Human Rights Watch - World Report, 2011).

Following the passage of the Terrorism Law in 2009, the number of private newspapers and magazines continued to dwindle until only a few remained in the country. For example, Hussein (2015) stated that the Anti-Terrorism Law impacted the press in violation of the International Human Rights Charter and many stated rights in Ethiopia's Constitution:

Ethiopia recognized the right to freedom of expression and information by ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1993. It also recognizes the right to freedom of expression and other scores of civil and political rights under its constitution of 1995. However, the anti-terrorism law of 2009 contains overly broad and vague definitions of terrorism that are susceptible to misinterpretation and misapplication, which adversely affect the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression and political opposition. In practice, the government of Ethiopia has used and abused the anti-terrorism law to stifle, dissent, and crack down on members

of legal opposition parties, human rights activists, journalists, bloggers, and the civil society who criticize the ruling party and its policies and practices (p.1).

For example, in 2012, Freedom House, an international human rights organization, published the following statement about Ethiopian private press journalists' mistreatment:

Ethiopia's authoritarian government showed no sign of loosening its grip on power in 2011, using an antiterrorism law to target opponents of the ruling party. More than 100 political activists and journalists were detained, often for several months, before being charged with vaguely defined terrorism offenses. Also during the year, tensions with neighboring Eritrea increased after it was accused by a UN panel of plotting a terrorist attack in Ethiopia (p.2).

Amnesty International, on the other hand, stated in their research that nearly all journalists incarcerated since 1993 were detained as a result of critical newspaper articles on the administration. According to the research, the majority of them are prisoners of conscience, imprisoned for peacefully expressing their beliefs and their professional activities as journalists (ibid. 1998, p.2).

This study can be considered a phenomenological analysis of the first-hand accounts of private press journalists blamed for partisan practices and imprisoned during EPRDF era.

#### **2.1.5. Partisan Journalism**

According to Kyupers (2015), partisan journalism is a method of reporting news, events, and stories that is biased and motivated by a political viewpoint. It is frequently distinguished by an allegiance to a particular ideology or party line and the presentation of data in a manner that prioritises one political opinion over another. According to Kyupers, publications that publish stories from numerous views but with a blatant bias towards one political position can be considered partisan journalism, as can news sources that solely present stories from a single perspective (2015, p.172). While partisan journalism can result in a decline in public confidence in media institutions, reform-minded journalists work to give a fair and balanced view of the news.

Furthermore, Jessica and Jay (2023) reported that, in comparison to mainstream and nonpartisan media, extreme partisan media on both the left and the right typically uses easier-to-read language that is more negative and frequently less formal. They especially looked for stories from a variety of left, conservative, and non-partisan media outlets that exhibited a range of partisanship, ideology, dependability, and bias.

Ethiopia has been characterised as a media-unfriendly nation during the EPRDF era, according to Stremlau (2011). This is because of the state's strict control over the media landscape and the way it has largely prevented journalists, particularly those in the private press, from accessing information and reporting stories on their own. However, one of the main factors contributing to the emergence of partisan journalism in Ethiopia during the aforementioned era was the restricted access that the media, and the private press in particular, had to public information from government agencies. The private press may also engage in partisan journalism due to a lack of professionalism or a difference in political viewpoint (Hallelujah 2008; Zewge 2010).

Twelve prominent members of the private press were selected by the researcher who were blamed for partisan journalism by the political leadership of the EPRDF (HRW, 2015). In this sense, the researcher feels that it is relevant to investigate ethical practices of the profession in order to get their stance on what partisan journalism involves based on prior research in the field, even though it is not the primary emphasis of the study.

#### **2.1.6. Summary and Conclusion**

The first section of this chapter looked at and discussed the subject of press freedom, as well as the obstacles that private press journalists faced throughout the EPRDF administration. Furthermore, different reports produced by local and international organizations, as well as prominent scholars, on the trials and tribulations that private press journalists were forced to endure during the EPRDF administration of Ethiopia were briefly reviewed.

A country is considered democratic if it meets both contestation and participation requirements (Dahl, 1998). Indeed, there is no greater definition of "democracy" than

this, because contestation and involvement have not truly existed in Ethiopian regimes until today (Freedom House, 2018).

When EPRDF took control in 1991, the public expected and predicted that Ethiopia would enter a new and better period of democracy. The forecast was reinforced when Ethiopia's new Constitution, which guarantees freedom of opinion and expression, was approved in 1995 (FDRE Constitution, 1995 E.C., Art. 29). Indeed, many journalists and media employees had hoped that the EPRDF government would encourage press freedom by enabling them to publicly criticize and uncover wrongdoings by politicians and others from the start. But their optimism was short-lived, as the regime continued to detain, torture, and threaten journalists (Amnesty International 2001, Human Rights Watch, 2001).

Dr. Abiy Ahmed came to power in 2018 after over a quarter-century of drama, and he requested people to forgive him for all "his party" EPRDF done during those years of turmoil (Reporter, 2018; Reuters, 2018; Tewodrose, 2018, FDRE Embassy in London - press release, 2018). However, the public continued to demand that at least the primary perpetrators of severe crimes against the nation and individuals be brought to justice. Private press journalists who were persecuted by Meles Zenawi's dictatorship are also part of the popular demand for justice.

## **2.2. Theoretical grounding**

One fundamental tenet of any research study is its theoretical foundation. The researcher firmly believes that choosing the most pertinent and appropriate hypothesis to investigate is crucial to the success of such an endeavor. Some scholars define a theoretical framework as "the 'blueprint' or guide for a research" (Grant & Osanloo, 2014), while others define it as "a framework based on an existing theory in an area of inquiry that is related to and/or reflects the study constructed" (Sinclair, 2007).

A theoretical framework, according to Green (2014), consists of concepts, definitions, and references to the relevant scholarly literature, as well as an existing theory that is used for that specific study, and "the selection of a theory should depend on its appropriateness, ease of application, and explanatory power" to (p.36). In this regard,

the study's theoretical foundation is "Phenomenology," and it focuses on the problems, harassment, torture, arrests, persecution, and other sorts of experiences that partisan private press journalists face under EPRDF era. The goal is to understand the genuine meaning of "being a partisan journalist" under a type of government that we had during EPRDF administration by making the participants' prison life experiences apparent.

The researcher ultimately decided that phenomenology was the best theory to use in order to investigate the difficulties that journalists face in this particular situation. It's also thought of as a means of looking at people's lives. To bolster its argument that phenomenology is one theoretical foundation for this research, the researcher extensively examined phenomenology as a research approach in this chapter's part. In this component of the study, the researcher also covered the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology, in particular Alfred Shutz's "Life World Theory" and its application to the examination of the lived experiences of private press journalists regarding the hardships they endured while working under EPRDF rule over Ethiopia. The Interpretative Theory of Hermeneutic Phenomenology has also been covered in this section. This theory serves as both a theoretical framework and a practical procedure, as it forms the basis of the methodologies employed in the research being studied.

Furthermore, authoritarian democracy is examined, since the researcher thinks the idea can be applied to examine the problem under investigation in the context of Ethiopian politics during EPRDF nearly 25-year control over the country. The study's theoretical foundation is the literature on the idea of authoritarian democracy and press freedom, as well as an analysis of how it relates to the difficulties and obstacles that journalists may encounter when carrying out their duties in such a system.

Lastly, one normative theory of mass communication that is included in this part is the Authoritarian Theory of the Press, which contends that the media must obey the wishes of the authorities, respect their wishes, and show them respect in return. This section discusses the theory and how it is applied to examine how journalists' real-life experiences during EPRDF rule are viewed, as well as how the administration fits within this category of such governments.

### 2.2.1. Phenomenology

'Phenomenon' is a Greek term that means 'something which emerges.' p.9) (Bengtsson, 2013). Phenomenology is the study of the essence of a phenomenon as it manifests itself in lived experience in the world, according to Crotty (1998). As a result, phenomenology is primarily concerned with human experience. Phenomenology is defined by Mambrol (2020) as a philosophy of experience: "For phenomenology, the ultimate source of all meaning and value is human beings' lived experience" (p.1). Phenomenology, on the other hand, is a sort of qualitative inquiry concerned with human understanding that originates in Edmund Husserl's concepts, according to Fade (2004).

Husserl first proposed it in 1936 (Husserl, 1970), rejecting the idea that empirical science is the only way to explain the universe and emphasizing the relevance of the 'life world' or lived experience instead (p.647). "Reality cannot be comprehended directly since it is only attainable through experiences of reality that are representations of it in mind," writes Husserl (1962), the father of phenomenology (p.10). That is why Husserl was interested in the epistemological view of reality, i.e., human knowledge as reality. According to Husserl, awareness does not exist "in" the mind but rather exists "outside" of it (Moran, 2000).

Phenomenology is thus "the reflective study of the essence of consciousness as perceived from the first person point of view," according to Husserl (Smith, 2007, p.299). In other words, Husserl was interested in learning about the universe through describing the essence of a phenomenon, which is the basic and necessary element that gives a thing its identity. Husserl (1982) defined Phenomenology as the "science of essences" or "what we can know about our reality, i.e., epistemology" (Lavery, 2003, p.24).

In general, Husserl's Descriptive Phenomenology is based on the idea that the subject learns about the outside world (object) through sensory data and mental representations (Thomas et al., 2013). Even though many of Husserl's disciples disagreed with his phenomenology's philosophical aspects, he is considered the creator of phenomenology as a philosophical movement, as "a Moses leading his people to the new land of transcendental or descriptive objectivity" (Moran, 2000, p.2).

In contrast to other approaches that rely on the processes of categorizing things, abstracting them, quantifying them, and theorizing about them, van Mannen (1990) describes phenomenology as a discipline that "aims to focus on people's perceptions of the world in which they live in and theorizing about them," while Langdrige (2007) defines phenomenology as a discipline that "aims to focus on people's perceptions of the world in which they live in and theorizing about (p.4). Phenomenology is also defined as a style of thinking about what people's life experiences are like, with a focus on understanding the meaning of these experiences (Powers & Knapp, 1995).

Phenomenology, according to Ponty (1962), is both a philosophy and a research approach. Phenomenology as a philosophy is a particular way of seeing the world and comprehending lived experience, while as a research method, it is a rigorous process of reexamining what Husserl (1962) referred to as "the things themselves." As a result, phenomenological investigation continues to focus on the meaning of human experience, asking, "What is it like?"

Merleau-Ponty (1962) defined four features that are called "celebrated themes" or characteristics similar to many schools of phenomenology in his famous work "Phenomenology of Perception." Description, reduction, essence, and intentionality are some of these attributes. The goal of phenomenology, according to Merleau-Ponty (1962), is to describe phenomena. Reduction is the process of suspending or bracketing phenomena to return to the 'things themselves.' Similarly, an essence is the core meaning of a person's experience that defines it. Finally, since people are always aware of something, intentionality relates to consciousness. This suggests that intentionality is the complete meaning of the object or idea, which is always more than what is shown in a single point of view.

This study is a phenomenological one that uses the approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The researcher employs IPA to investigate the lived experiences of private press journalists in Ethiopia during the reign of Meles Zenawi.

### **2.2.1.1. Phenomenology - As a research approach**

The following assumptions are stated by Smith and Dunworth (2003, p.p.183-185) to explain the development of phenomenology as a research method:

To begin with, it rejects the concept of objective investigation, preferring instead to organize presumptions through a method known as phenomenological epoche.

Second, phenomenology asserts that investigating human behavior can yield a thorough comprehension of nature.

Thirdly, phenomenology holds that people, rather than individuals, should be investigated and questioned. It is also considered that from a sociological standpoint, people can be better understood in terms of how they reflect and symbolize the society in which they live.

Fourth, phenomenologists seek to collect "conscious experience" instead of standard data, which is commonly used in scientific domains.

Finally, because phenomenology is based on discovery, its procedures are significantly less restrictive than those used in other sciences.

The phenomenological approach, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), is "an effort to grasp the meaning of events and interactions with ordinary people in particular settings" (p.23). In this case, the researcher tries to enter the participant's environment and discover how the meaning is formed from their perspective. "It is not the researcher's perception or perspective that matters," Strauss and Corbin (1998) said, "but how the research participant interprets events or happenings" (p.47).

Creswell (2007) on his part states that it is appropriate to use phenomenology as a research when a "problem or issue needs to be explored" (p. 51). That, according to Creswell (2007), phenomenology is ideal for study when a "problem or issue needs to be explored" (p.51). That is why this researcher believes qualitative phenomenological research is acceptable because the topic "requires an understanding of numerous persons' similar or shared perceptions of the event" (Ibid. 2007, p. 60).

Phenomenology, according to Moustakas (1994), aims for "clear openness or clear consciousness" (p. 90), or the ability to view things clearly and honestly as a reflection of reality. As a result, the first stage in phenomenological research is to "bracket" out—to surround to keep out or exclude—any preconceived beliefs or notions that obstruct clarity of the event under investigation. "Prejudices and unhealthy attachments that establish erroneous concepts of truth and reality can be bracketed and put out of action" as a result of this approach (Ibid. p. 90). "The challenge facing the human science researcher," writes Moustakas (1994), "is to describe things in themselves, to allow what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meaning and essence in the light of intuition and self-reflection" (p.27).

Moustakas (1994) goes on to say that phenomenology can be applied to human science research in the following ways:

1. Phenomenology is concerned with wholeness, with investigating entities from a variety of angles, perspectives, and viewpoints until a unified vision of the essence of the phenomenon or experience is attained.
2. Phenomenology seeks meaning in appearance and reaches essence through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience, resulting in ideas, conceptions, judgments, and understandings (Ibid. p. 29).

#### **2.2.1.2. Advantages of Phenomenology**

According to Denscombe (1983), there are four benefits of employing phenomenology as a research method: "First, it provides the possibility of authentic explanations of complex events." Because the social world is so complicated to grasp, phenomenology permits the researcher to interact with it.

Second, it is a humanistic research style since it is based on people's lived experiences in their everyday lives. Because it is not dependent on theoretical or philosophical assumptions of presuppositions, phenomenology has a humanistic touch to it.

Third, because it primarily focuses on in-depth interviewing, it is well suited to small-scale research. One of the disadvantages of being a researcher in Ethiopia is the financial constraints that one may experience; nevertheless, regarding phenomenological research, the advantage is that it can usually be done on a cheap budget because the researcher is the major source of funding.

The last advantage of phenomenological research is that it can convey an entertaining story through describing experiences. As it unfolds events and sensations experienced by people, a phenomenologist can express the experiences in an accessible and entertaining manner to a wide spectrum of readers (p.83).

### **2.2.1.3. Phenomenology & IPA**

Phenomenology is primarily concerned with how persons who engage in social life form it. Phenomenology, according to Denscombe (1983), considers individuals as "agents" who interpret their experiences "as people who actively establish an order to their experiences" and as "creative interpreters of events who make meaning of their environments" ( p. 79).

There are two main varieties of phenomenology, according to Crotty (1996): "the one stems from the European heritage of thought, and the other is the new phenomenology of a North American tradition" (p. 46). According to Crotty, the European tradition is more rooted in philosophy, and it owes much to Edmund Husserl's "Transcendental Phenomenology," which tries to uncover the underlying and fundamental features of human experience through "epoch" research. Although his follower Martin Heidegger constructs "Hermeneutic Phenomenology," which aims to study the substance of human experience, it is after the meaning of "being in itself."

The second type of phenomenological tradition is the Alfred Shutz-inspired North American tradition (1962, 1967). Unlike the European interpretation of disclosing the substance of experience, Shutz's phenomenology is primarily concerned with articulating how people give meaning to their experiences - "the way people understand social occurrences" (Denscombe, 1983).

This researcher employs a North American variant of phenomenology, based on Alfred Shutz's "Social phenomenology" (1962, 1967), which emphasizes "how people perceive social phenomena" rather than the European approach, which concentrates on "the core of human experience."

The researcher would be describing what is being experienced, rather than "attempting to unearth the essence of what is meant by the phrase," according to Shutz's definition of phenomenology. In this regard, the researcher aims to explore and understand the obstacles and stumbling blocks faced by private press journalists, as well as the implications for them. As the European tradition of phenomenology aims to explore, the researcher views the journalists' experience as "important facts in their own right, and not something to be set aside to find the universal essence of the occurrence" (Crotty, 1996, p.84).

#### **2.2.1.4. Criticism of phenomenology**

Critics such as Jacques Derrida (1985) point out that Husserl's form of phenomenology lacks assumptions, just like any other research approach. "Husserl's commitment to a view of knowledge as necessary, certain, and guaranteed by indubitable intuition prevented him from recognizing the falsity of this ideal even though his theories about consciousness and experience implicitly contradict it," Mambrol (2020) writes, citing Derrida's questioning of Husserl's phenomenology as a disadvantage (p.3).

"As knowledge is always perspectival and imperfect, the present relies on memory and expectancy to make sense of the world," Mambrol writes, referencing Derrida's thesis. "Elements of absence must therefore be part of presence for it to be meaningful" (Ibid. p.4). "Sense, being temporal in character, as Husserl understood, is never merely present; it is always already engaged in the movement' of the trace, that is, in the sequence of signification," Mambrol quotes Derrida's concluding remark to make the latter's criticism more evident (1985, p.85).

Scholars such as Derrida, according to Denscombe (1983), forward their criticisms, which include the following: first, they contend that phenomenology emphasizes subjectivity, description, and interpretation, as opposed to the scientific

emphasis on objectivity, analysis, and measurement. However, it is worth noting that phenomenologists oppose positivists' "one reality" approach by embracing the potential of "many realities."

The second flaw, according to opponents, is that phenomenology is connected with description rather than analysis, leading to charges that it only provides descriptions. It should be highlighted, however, that phenomenological researchers, such as those conducting this study in IPA, can go beyond description to analysis.

Finally, detractors contend that, unlike scientific research investigations, phenomenological research does not generalize. However, according to Denscombe (1983, pp.77-81), phenomenology does not generally generalize because it involves relatively few people or situations being researched.

The "possibility of suspending the common sense" is the final critique leveled about the phenomenological studies. However, phenomenological researchers (Strauss and Corbin 1998, van Mannen 1990) argue that it is not only reasonable to suspend presuppositions to gain a clear understanding of the issue under investigation, but that we must also recognize that a researcher is a member of the society in which he or she lives. As a result, the use of language in socialization makes it hard to suspend common sense in phenomenological research.

This researcher employs the philosophical and theoretical foundations of phenomenology, specifically Alfred Shutz's "Life World Theory" in studying the lived experience of private press journalists during Meles Zenawi's rule of Ethiopia, employing IPA as a methodology of study.

### **2.3.2. "Life World Theory"**

In empirical study, the ideas and concepts of life-world phenomenology were not readily applicable for long. None of the life-world phenomenologists (Husserl, Heddigar, etc.) were interested in applying life-world phenomenology to empirical study, with the exception of Schutz (Bengtsson, 2002).

Schutz's theory is of the North American Tradition and emphasizes "how people perceive social phenomena" rather than the European approach, which concentrates on "the core of human experience." Schutz, a native of Europe, immigrated to the United States a year after the German invasion of Paris in 1938. He lectured at the Exile University in New York, which later became the New School for Social Research, and established himself as an emigrant refugee scholar, just like many others did at that time. Despite his European birth, Schutz's theory was seen as a North American tradition (Walsh, 1967: p. xvii).

Schutz (1932, 1962) tried to make the notion of the life-world useful to the social sciences. However, he avoided taking a stance regarding transcendental phenomenology's claim of reducing the lifeworld to pure consciousness (Bengtsson, 2002) and he combined lifeworld phenomenology with a methodology based on neo-Kantian hermeneutics based on Max Weber.

Schutz is also known for his belief that humans attempt to typify everything; i.e., to categorize people and things to better understand them within the context of society. He believed that the various typifications we use inform how we understand and interact with people and objects in the social world.

Schutz was interested in documenting the transition from direct to indirect experience and the series of experiences in between.

According to Schutz (1967), the Life-world is a cultural life because it is made of meanings, symbols that we constantly interpret and institute through our actions and hence, it is space where life views, habits, values, customs, institutions form and solidify. As indicated by Schutz (1967), the life world is where our lived experience is created. It is where the past is deposited, the present emerges, and the future is shaped. As a result, without the life world, we cannot understand social interaction.

This researcher employs the theoretical foundations of Phenomenology, specifically Alfred Schutz's "Life World Theory", in studying the lived experience of private press journalists and that of the suffering they face due to the absence of a free judicial system during Meles Zenawi's rule of Ethiopia.

The researcher described, based on Schutz's definition of Life-World Phenomenology, what is being experienced, rather than "attempting to unearth the essence of what is meant by the phrase" that the participants were trying to describe.

### **2.3.3. Hermeneutic phenomenology – “Interpretation Theory”**

Another theoretical grounding used by this researcher in exploring the prison life of private press journalists is hermeneutic phenomenology, which is "one main theoretical underpinning of IPA" (Tuffor, 2017). For this study, Hermeneutics is defined as the "art and science of interpretation" (Ezzy, 2002, p. 24). On the other hand, according to Crotty (1998), in Hermeneutic phenomenology, there is both a theoretical perspective and a technique, or a strategy or plan that lies behind the methodologies applied in a given investigation.

Hermeneutics is originally a Greek term that means “translate, interpret” (Klien, 2000). According to Klein (2000), hermeneutics was introduced into philosophy during the ancient Greek age of civilization through Aristotle’s work “On Interpretation”, and in its lengthy history, hermeneutics was thought to be “the art and science of interpretation and meaning” (P.344) (P.344).

Hermeneutics has been used to interpret religious and sacred books since its early days (Klien, 2000) until Schleiermacher (1768–1834) explored the nature of interpretation about all human texts and modes of communication, and according to Schleiermacher, hermeneutics is "the art of correctly understanding the meaning of another person's words" (Berger, 1999, p.14).

Gadamer (2004b), another key contributor to the development of hermeneutics in the twentieth century, defines hermeneutics as "an interpretive theory and methodology" (cited in Weberman, 2000, p.47).

Martin Heidegger, a German researcher and student of Husserl, established hermeneutic phenomenology for the first time in the early twentieth century, stating that "consciousness is not separate from the world but a formation of who we are as living individuals and our being in the world presents us with a fundamental interpretative

situation that compels us to ask questions about our world" "after he published *History of Concept of Time* in 1925, and *Being* in 1927" (Kafle, 2011, pp.187).

As a result, hermeneutic phenomenology emphasizes that every event or contact requires some form of interpretation based on an individual's past and that this cannot be separated from an individual's life development (Kafle, 2011).

Hermeneutic phenomenology, according to Crotty (1998), is both a theoretical perspective and a technique, or a strategy or plan that lies behind the methodologies applied in a given investigation.

As a result, this researcher employs IPA as a methodology, using the philosophical and theoretical foundations of Hermeneutics phenomenology as a lens, specifically Paul Ricoeur's (1976) "Interpretation Theory." The theory will be used as a lens for evaluating the lived experience of private press journalists during Meles Zenawi's administration in Ethiopia.

According to Kafle (2011), phenomenology can be divided into three categories based on a close examination of the Western tradition: transcendental phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, and existential phenomenology (p.185). The basic premise of Transcendental phenomenology, according to Kafle (2011), is "its adherence to the notion that experience is to be transcended to discover reality" (p.185), and it was primarily propagated based on the idea of Husserlian phenomenology, "which is the idea of reduction that refers to suspending personal prejudices and attempting to reach the core or essence through a state of pure consciousness" (p.186).

Martin Heidegger, Husserl's student, strayed from and questioned his mentor's Descriptive Phenomenology philosophy, and "this led him to establish a theory of *Dasen*, the non-dualistic human being, which he dubbed Hermeneutic Phenomenology" (Hoy, 1993). Husserlian phenomenology contrasts with hermeneutic in that researchers bring their understanding and experiences to the research process, whereas the latter encourages 'bracketing' (Walters, 1995). "Hermeneutic phenomenology" is "centered on the subjective experiences of individuals and groups, and it is an endeavor to uncover the

universe as experienced by the subject through their life-world tales," according to Heidegger (cited in Kafle, 2011, p.186).

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1981), who solidified the connection between hermeneutics and phenomenology, built on Heddiger's concept of hermeneutic phenomenology in a more detailed philosophical fashion (Tan, 2009). "...Ricoeur linked phenomenology and hermeneutics by arguing that experience and meaning are inextricably intertwined," Tuffor (2017) writes. As a result, he considers meaning to be essential to experience" (p.52). Furthermore, "...language is not merely used for descriptive purposes but as an expressive force of experience," according to Ricoeur (Ibid, p.55).

The researcher uses Ricoeur's "Theory of Interpretation" as a lens for interpreting the lived experiences of private press journalists during Meles Zenawi's government of Ethiopia, which is one of the four influential philosophers of hermeneutic phenomenology (Smith et al. 2009). Ricoeur's "Interpretation Theory" serves as a lens for this study because it states that "interpretation is the hinge between language and lived experience" (Ricoeur, 1994c. p.66).

#### **2.3.4. “Authoritarian Democracy” as a theory**

Alabaster (1994) states that Authoritarian Democracy is a type of democracy that aims to reflect the interests of society and is run by the governing elite of an authoritarian state. As a political and economic ideology Authoritarian Democracy focuses on the idea that a ruling elite which is able to have a popular base of support is in the best interest of society. They hold democracy to be less important than the continuation of their power and the maintenance of order.

According to Alabaster (1994), the idea of Authoritarian Democracy was originally conceived by Italian fascist political theorist Giovanni Gentile and used by Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini (1994, p.48). Giovanni Gentile was a major figure in Italian idealist philosophy, politician, educator, and editor, sometimes called the “philosopher of Fascism.”

Gentile rejected individuality on the grounds that it breeds selfishness. Rather, he thought that every private action should support and further the state's goals. Gentile claimed that actualist philosophers will lead the state and establish the moral order. He was non-egalitarian and thought that there was a built-in hierarchy among humans in this. He felt that in a true democracy, the people need to be subservient to the state and did not support the parliamentary system. He thought that decisions that pertained to every aspect of life and would benefit everyone should be made by the state (Alabaster, 1994).

Soucy (1967) cited Maurice Barrès, a major fascist influencer, and asserted that authoritarian democracy was the only genuine kind of democracy, rejecting liberal democracy as a forgery. According to Barrès, authoritarian democracy entailed a spiritual bond between a country's ruler and its citizens, and real freedom was achieved by "heroic leadership" and "national force" rather than individual freedoms or parliamentary limitations (Soucy, 1975, pp. 87-90).

The core tenet of authoritarian democracy as a political and economic philosophy is that society is best served by a ruling class with broad popular support. Most Authoritarian Democrats believe that a population and a state free from the petty disputes of democracy, yet supported by the majority of the populace and guided by a visionary group, are necessary to aid the country. They hold democracy to be less important than the continuation of their power and the maintenance of order (Albaster, 1994).

Nonetheless a small percentage of Authoritarian Democratic groups genuinely wish to develop democracy once certain conditions allow this to happen. Because of their previously stated belief Authoritarian Democratic regimes generally allow certain freedoms and democratic institutions to exist if these don't constitute a threat to their dominance but instead represent a tool to popularize their regime among the masses. However they seek to squash any real opposition, frequently propping up a controlled one to give the populace an illusion of opposition (Albaster, 1994).

This researcher believes that the concept of Authoritarian Democracy can work, too, to investigate the issue under study within the context of Ethiopian politics during the era of EPRDF rule of the nation. International human rights organizations accused the

Party's chairman Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of "deceiving the world" as a democratic leader by simply putting the rights of freedom of press and speech on the paper when in reality he was a true authoritarian whose government should be accused of committing numerous crimes and human rights violations in Ethiopia (Human Rights Watch - World Report, 2002; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2002). Theoretically, this study is informed by the literature of the concept of Authoritarian Democracy in its relation to press freedom as well as by examining its contribution to the challenges and hurdles that journalists can face while performing their tasks under such an authoritarian regime.

### **2.3.5. Authoritarian Theory of the Press**

In the process of examining how the EPRDF regime can be categorized with such a type of government, this researcher is applying the Authoritarian Theory of the Press (Sibert et.al., 1984, pp. 9-38), one normative theory of mass communication, and attempts to look through the post-prison life of journalists during this era. In this regard, Authoritarian Theory argues that media must respect what authorities want, and work according to the wishes of the authorities, and must also remain subordinate to them (Ibid. p.12). To analyze the journalists' prison and post-prison experience, the researcher applies some features of Authoritarian Theory, and these are: Power is exercised to control the media, media has no power to criticize the government, its work, decisions, and policies; Punishment and threats are given to the people who try to offend the government and the powerful; and media can not offend the ruling parties in any way (Ibid. p.13-14).

In a recently published document by the American Congressional Research Service (CRS), Michael A. Weber underscores that among the various factors that are impending press freedom: Unfair or Distorted Media Environments, Harassment and Attacks against Journalists, and Government Censorship and Control took top of the list. The document also reveals, by citing a recent United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report that "approximately 85% of the world's population experienced a decline in press freedom in their country between 2016 and 2020" (Weber, 2022). According to the document, erosions in press freedom can be taken

as one cause of contributor to, and a symptom of, current global trends of democratic backsliding and rising authoritarianism.

In his discussion of how authoritarian regimes control the media, Schindler (2013) lists restrictions on communication channels, including prohibitions on private ownership in the form of state monopolies on print or electronic mass media; postproduction restrictions on media content, including censorship, license revocation, beatings, arrests and assassinations of journalists, harassment or other forms of pressure; and restrictions on means of production (Schedler, 2013).

In another recent study of how Authoritarian regimes undermine the free press in their countries, Lecee (2022) states at least four factors, which include; Legislation, Censorship, Intimidation, and Accreditation Discrimination (p.11-18). According to Lecee (2022), three countries, namely, Egypt, Turkey, and Hungary, are found to be the most authoritarian states in the world in attacking the freedom of the press and journalists life at stake, and he states that: A free and independent press is often one of the first institutions targeted by authoritarian leaders, due to its nature as a government watchdog (Lecee, 2022, p.2).

Along with the previously listed obstacles to press freedom, the researcher notes that one prevalent practice in Ethiopia throughout the EPRDF regime's rule since 1991 has been the imprisonment of journalists.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHOD**

#### **3.1. Methodology**

Methodology, according to Crotty (1998), is "a strategy, or plan of action, or process behind the selection and implementation of particular methods," whereas methods are "the techniques or procedures used to obtain and analyze data" (p.4). On the other hand, Silverman (1993) defines "Methodology" as "a broad approach" to researching research issues, whereas "method" refers to "a specific" research procedure (p.1).

This study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a methodology to investigate the lived experiences of private press journalists during the reign of Meles Zenawi. The study looks at how the journalists were seized, interrogated, and related life encounters in prison, as well as judicial procedures and life after prison, to examine the problems, hurdles, and sufferings they faced. Because IPA employs both phenomenology and hermeneutic interpretation, the researcher formulates both positive and negative questions about their lived experience. Since "the researcher will be able to obtain information from the participants' viewpoints and gain a greater grasp of their lived experiences," a qualitative phenomenological approach is recommended as a methodology (Soeker et al., 2015, p.177).

According to Alase (2017), "IPA is being used as a methodological approach in many qualitative research studies as it helps to investigate and interpret the 'lived experiences' of people who have experienced similar (common) phenomena, in addition to allowing researchers "to develop bonding relationships with their research participants" (pp.11-12).

The researcher employs a phenomenological research approach, specifically an IPA, because it allows him to "present and write the participants' lived experience as it is; i.e. quotations from participants - how they describe things and how they see the phenomenon they encounter." It also assists the researcher in "...focusing on a small

number of persons and going deep to develop the details, and exploring the problem in an open-ended fashion" (Creswell, 2013; pp.138-139).

This research study's interpretive analysis was conducted using Pietkiewicz & Smith's (2014, p.13) four practical directions or procedures for performing IPA: "...Familiarity, Theme clustering, Emergent theme analysis, and Write-up" (p.p. 13-14). The principles of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) developed by Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014) are used by this researcher since the researcher's interest leads him to ask the participants certain types of questions that steer the analytic process in a specific direction.

This researcher uses the inductive approach of IPA and applies the four key stages of phenomenological inductive analysis as outlined by Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014), which underpins the double hermeneutic, whereby the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant's sense-making activity. As a result, the researcher employs Paul Ricoeur's (1976) "Interpretation Theory" as a lens for the interpretative analysis of the data acquired through an in-depth interview process with the participants, which asserts that "interpretation is the hinge between language and lived experience" (p.66).

The researcher uses a purposive sample approach to find participants who were private press journalists who were imprisoned and subjected to various sorts of harassment and torture under Meles Zenawi's reign. The researcher conducts an in-depth interview with the participants to learn about their personal experiences with the phenomenon. The interview was done according to a protocol that was created expressly for this study.

During the data analysis phase, the researcher applies manual coding, theme labeling, and thematic description to the gathered data (Creswell, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2006), and conducts an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) on the data findings using Braun and Clarke's (2006) Qualitative Thematic Approach and Pietkiewicz & Smith's (2014) IPA analysis guide, sequentially. According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study approach will allow the researcher "...to be flexible in data processing and interpretation, as well as generating a complex understanding of the

scenario as recounted by the participants" (p.139). Qualitative Thematic Approach is also "...congruence to a qualitative phenomenological study as a means of description" (p.168), and this researcher views Braun and Clarke's (2006) Qualitative Thematic Approach to be adequate as a method of description, According to Creswell (2013), (p.168).

The researcher employed a Thematic Analysis approach together with an Interpretative analysis approach to describe the participants' lived experiences, by employing Alfred Shutz's "Life World" Phenomenology theory and Paul Ricour's "Interpretation" theory as descriptive lenses, respectively. In this regard, Shutz argues that "everyday life – rather than philosophical and scientific observation – is most important for analysis" (Shutz, 1945, p.62), while Ricouer (1976) states that "interpretation is the hinge between language and lived experience."

This component of the research methodology contains seven topics: epistemology, theoretical framework, research design, research approach, research procedure, methodological principles, and research question analysis.

### **3.1.1. Epistemology: Interpretivism**

Epistemology, according to Carson et al. (2001), "... is the link between the researcher and reality, and how the phenomena of reality can be examined or known" (p.224). This researcher takes an interpretive epistemological stance. Interpretivism is "...associated with the philosophical position of idealism, and is used to group diverse approaches, including social constructivism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics; approaches that reject the objectivist view that meaning resides within the world independently of consciousness," according to Collins (2010).

Interpretive research, according to Myers (2008), is a research paradigm based on the belief that: "...social reality is not singular or objective, but is rather shaped by human experience and social contexts (ontology), and is thus best studied within its socio-historic context by reconciling the subjective interpretations of its various participants (epistemology)" (p.122). Interpretive research, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "...

tries to interpret social reality through the subjective viewpoints of embedded individuals inside the environment where the reality is placed (p.86)."

According to Laverly (2003), the interpretive framework of inquiry "...supports the ontological perspective of the belief in the existence of not just one, but several realities that are formed and can be altered by the knower... because reality is not something that exists 'out there,' but rather something that is created locally and specifically" (p.26). Understanding "what some people think and do, what kinds of problems they face, and how they deal with them within a given socio-historical context" (Ibid. p.87) is one of Interpretivism's characteristics, and it usually focuses on meaning and may employ multiple methods to reflect different aspects of the issue.

Based on the epistemological position of Interpretive philosophy, this researcher recommends Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a study methodology, while "the two most notable alternatives of Interpretivism: Phenomenology and Hermeneutics" (Collins, 2010) are recommended as research approaches to conduct the study's description and interpretation. It should be noted that interpretive research relies significantly on qualitative data gathering and interpretation; the researcher employed interview data for the study's analysis and interpretation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

### **3.1.2. Research Design**

Research design is described by Burns & Grove (2001) as "the clearly specified framework within which the investigation is implemented" (p.223). As a study design, this researcher uses Qualitative Phenomenology, which "...uses extensive description and careful analysis of lived experiences with the goal of understanding how meaning is formed through embodied perception" (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p.173). A qualitative phenomenological approach to research is "...way of understanding people's views and viewpoints of the meaning of a given circumstance or event," according to the qualitative phenomenological approach to research (Soeker, et al., 2015, p.177).

A phenomenological study, according to Creswell (2013), is qualitative by definition, and "...is all about describing the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon," with the researcher seeking to

understand "...what all participants have in common as they experience the phenomenon" (p.76). "Qualitative research is basically interpretative," according to Soeker et al. (2015), "and comprises describing the individual and environment, examining data for themes, and eventually reaching judgments about its meaning" (p.177). "The richness and depth of description and interpretation derived from a phenomenological study design provides the hidden reality of the experience," according to Munhall (2001, p.140).

This researcher uses Creswell's (2013, p.264) qualitative phenomenological research design, which is widely relevant in such research activities. In this sense, the study tries to analyze and describe the lived experience of private press journalists, and it uses 12 journalists as a sample, all of them facing numerous problems, pains, and tribulations under EPRDF administration.

The researcher employed a purposeful sampling method, in which 12 journalists are chosen as a study sample, which the researcher believes is an adequate sample for phenomenological research (Creswell 2013 and Starks & Trinidad 2007) that necessitates a deep examination of participants' lived experiences. The researcher's participants are chosen based on their lived experience, and data is collected through in-depth interviews in a semi-structured fashion. In qualitative phenomenology research, a semi-structured interview is a typical means of acquiring data.

For descriptive purposes, the researcher uses Braun and Clarke's (2006) Qualitative Thematic Technique of analysis, and Pietkiewicz and Smith's (2014) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach for the interpretation component of the participants' lived experiences. In this study, "interpretative" refers to "how journalists view their lives at a specific time and in a specific scenario from their own perspective" (Moustakas, 1992, p.114).

The researcher is convinced that a qualitative phenomenological research design will enable him to gain a deeper understanding of the reality of the phenomena that occurred during EPRDF era in Ethiopia by examining the lived experiences of partisan private press journalists who faced various challenges and tribulations at the time.

### 3.1.3. Research approach

A research approach is chosen for its ability to assist the researcher in examining the problem, answering the research question, or contributing to the literature (Creswell, 2013). According to Soeker et al. (2015), a qualitative phenomenological study approach will enable the researcher to "...collect information from the participants' viewpoints and get a greater understanding of the lived experiences" (p.177). The researcher intends to add to the current literature, as well as represent the scenario experienced during EPRDF era through the lived experiences of twelve private press journalists blamed for partisan journalism practices at the time.

Phenomenology as a research approach, according to Creswell (2009), "...involves immersing ourselves as researchers in the life worlds and lived experiences of participants to understand the essence of a given phenomenon" (p.50), and he describes phenomenology as a research approach as follows:

Phenomenology is an approach to exploring people's everyday life experiences. It is used when the study is about the life experiences of a concept or phenomenon experienced by one or more individuals. A phenomenological researcher investigates subjective phenomena (Ibid. p. 51).

According to Creswell (2009), this approach allows the researcher to engage and interact with the participants in phenomenological interviews, resulting in rich data about their experiences. Lester (1999) on his part states that the objective of a phenomenological method of study is "...to illuminate the specifics, to identify phenomena via how they are perceived by the actors in a scenario," which is in keeping with Creswell's notion (p.11).

Because phenomenology is concerned with the study of lived experience from the individual's perspective, the researcher is involved in gathering "deep" information and translating perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussion, and participant observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participant(s) (Ibid., 1999, p.12-13).

Phenomenological approaches, according to Lester (1999), are built on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity and emphasize the relevance of personal perspective and interpretation in gaining comprehension of subjective experience and understanding of people's motives and behaviors. Teherani et al. (2015), on the other hand, define phenomenology as "... a study approach that aims to describe the essence of a thing by exploring it through the eyes of individuals who have encountered it."

The phenomenological approach, according to Bogdan & Biklen (1998), is "an effort to grasp the meaning of events and interactions with ordinary people in particular settings" (p. 23). The researcher uses a phenomenological technique to try to enter the participant's world and understand how meaning is constructed in daily life. The purpose is to comprehend the viewpoint of the participant.

According to Denscombe (1983), "...a key characteristic of the (qualitative phenomenological) approach is its emphasis on describing authentic experiences" (p.78), and what it takes to do so is "the ability to see things through the eyes of others, to understand things in the way that they understand things, and to provide a description of matters that adequately portrays how the group in question experiences the situation" (pp.78-79). This researcher advocates qualitative phenomenology as a research approach and employs the procedural principles outlined by Creswell (2013, pp.262-263) in conducting phenomenological research.

#### **3.1.4. Research Procedures**

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), "...it is not the researcher's perception or perspective that matters in qualitative research, but rather how the study participant interprets events or happenings" (p. 47).

While conducting a qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher employs the following procedural aspects, which Creswell (2013) considers critical:

- ⇒ The investigation focuses on a specific phenomenon. The researcher selects a certain concept or phenomenon to investigate.

⇒ Data is gathered from people who have witnessed the phenomenon. This is a crucial concept in phenomenology, and the people who were studied had to have witnessed the phenomenon. The number of participants can range from 3 to 15, and the data collected is in the form of a one-on-one interview. "How are individuals experiencing the phenomenon?" is the key question to be answered.

⇒ Examines the context in which the phenomenon is experienced by individuals. The researcher is interested in the question "What is the context in which the individuals are experiencing the phenomena?" in addition to studying how the individuals experience the event. The context could be a specific location where people talk, the workplace, or your own house.

⇒ Reports on the most important aspects of the experience. The essence is just people's shared experiences with the phenomenon — what they have in common (pp. 262-263).

The researcher picks each participant "...via a planned sampling technique, to meet a specified limit of 5 to 15 people" in this respect (Creswell, 2013, p.148). Each participant was chosen by the researcher based on their experience as private press journalists during the EPRDF administration. The researcher performed one-on-one interviews utilizing an interview technique and afterward used voice recordings for transcription. After finishing the transcription of the interviews, the researcher moved on to data analysis and interpretation.

The researcher went over each of the interview transcripts to look for common remarks and themes. The researcher created textural and structural descriptions of the participants' experiences after identifying common patterns. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Description, the researcher gave a detailed analysis of how and what the participants perceived the phenomenon (IPA).

### **3.1.5. Methodological Principles**

The researcher would facilitate the transition from data collection to data analysis and interpretation by focusing on Van Manen's (2016) methodological principles for

performing Phenomenological Analysis, which include "*openness, questioning pre-understanding, and adopting a reflective mindset*" (p.63).

*Openness* to the phenomenon, according to Sundler et al. (2019), entails having an open mind while looking for meaning and being attentive to the significance of the lived events in question. *Openness* also necessitates being vigilant, attentive, and sensitive to the expression of experience, and it all boils down to seeing the phenomenon in a new light to bring previously unseen components of the experience to light (Dahlberg et. al., 2008).

Second, the researcher questions preconceptions to avoid biases that could affect the analysis. *Questioning* also entails attempting to put one's own experiences and assumptions to the side as much as possible, and it is a method of maintaining a critical position when reflecting on data and phenomena (Sundler et. al. 2019).

Third, having a reflective mindset is intimately tied to questioning one's preconceptions. Rather than having a natural understanding of everyday life, the researcher will take a more self-reflective and open approach to the data (Dahlberg et. al. 2008).

The methodological concepts used in this research study can be summarized as *promoting openness, challenging preconceptions, and adopting a reflective mindset*.

### **3.1.6. Research-Question Analysis**

"In a qualitative phenomenological investigation, we ask research questions rather than offering a hypothesis," Creswell (2013) says (p.97). The researcher "attempts to reduce the focus of his inquiry and leave the questions as open-ended as possible so that diverse viewpoints emerge from the participants," according to Creswell's (2013, pp.97-98) suggestion of assessing research questions in qualitative studies.

"How did private press journalists undergo pain, ordeals, and tribulations under Meles Zenawi's era of Ethiopia?" is the core question of this research project.

The following research questions led the investigation of this study to further frame the question:

**Research Question 1:** What were the main institutional and legal obstacles that private press journalists encounter while carrying out their duties?

This question is essential to this research because it provides insight into the participants' lived experiences while working as journalists during Meles' tenure. For nearly a quarter-century, the participants shared insight into how various political institutions and legislation had contributed to the difficulties and challenges they had faced.

**Research Question 2:** How do private press journalists describe the persecution they were subjected to by the police and secret service officers as a result of practicing journalism?

The question aimed to disclose how the participants were treated by the police and Secret Service agents, as well as what role they played in their suffering at work and in prison.

**Research Question 3:** What obstacles and challenges did Ethiopian journalists face in their quest for a fair trial in the legal system?

The issue seeks to reveal how private press journalists were subjected to illegal judgments by politically associated courts and judges under Meles' reign.

**Research Question 4:** How did Ethiopian journalists tackle the challenges they ran against when they were being tried?

Here, the participants' descriptions revealed how the judiciary under Meles' administration was failing to fulfill its constitutional obligations.

**Research Question 5:** How do private press journalists portray their suffering in prison houses?

The study's examination of the participants' first-hand accounts of their time spent in various detention facilities will shed light on the authoritarian nature of the Meles era and its true scope.

**Research Question 6:** How do they describe their lives after they were released from jail, i.e., the damage that resulted in their health, and the psychological trauma they suffered in their lives afterward?

The question has the potential to show the hardship experienced by private press journalists in Ethiopia under Meles' reign, notably their trauma and the damage done to their health as a result of the poor conditions in prisons.

In general, the study questions examine the lived experiences of journalists working for the private press since the participants were able to articulate their personal and professional circumstances about the social and political climate of the period.

### **3.2. Method**

Based on their descriptions, this researcher investigates the lived experience of private press journalists who face numerous problems, sufferings, and tribulations throughout Meles' reign, as well as interprets their feelings using a phenomenological interpretative approach. Because Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) employs both phenomenology and hermeneutic interpretation, the researcher formulates both positive and negative questions about their lived experience. The responses from a recording machine were gathered and afterward transcribed from the participants' voices during an in-depth interviewing session, and the description and interpretation are solely based on those responses.

#### **3.2.1. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) state the following regarding the usage of IPA as a method:

IPA synthesizes ideas from phenomenology and hermeneutics resulting in a descriptive method because it is concerned with how things appear and letting things speak for themselves, and an interpretative because it recognizes there is no such thing as an uninterpreted phenomenon (p.8).

According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), IPA researchers try to "understand what it's like to walk in their subject's shoes..." "Make meaning comprehensible by translating it through interpretative effort" (p.13). They go on to say:

... IPA study is a dynamic process with the active role of the researcher who influences the extent to which they get access to the participant's experience and how, through interpretative activity, they make sense of the subject's world (Ibid. p.13).

The interpretative analysis job was completed by the researcher utilizing Pietkiewicz and Smith's (2014) method as a guideline for conducting a qualitative phenomenological analysis in an IPA investigation. "Multiple reading and making notes, Transforming notes into Emergent Themes, Seeking relationships and clustering themes, and writing up" are the guidelines used by the researcher (Ibid. 2004, pp.11-13).

In terms of the analytical process, IPA is frequently referred to as a double hermeneutic or dual interpretation process because, first, participants make sense of their surroundings, and second, the researcher attempts to decode that meaning to make sense of the participants' meaning making (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

"IPA aims at studying in detail how individuals make sense of their personal and social reality and the significance certain experiences or events carry for them," Smith and Osborn (2003) write (p.472). In this study, "interpretative" refers to "how journalists view their lives at a specific time and in a specific scenario from their perspective" (Moustakas, 1992, p.114).

Wilson (2005) also claimed that by knowing how people interpret their experiences, key aspects of the event can be extracted, evaluated, understood, and exposed. As a result, this researcher used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to investigate the phenomenon that participants described during the interview process based on their personal experiences.

The researcher employs Shutz's "Life World" theory as a lens to depict the participants' lived experiences in the discussion of the findings section. "Phenomenology views individuals as creative interpreters of events who, by their acts and interpretations, actually make meaning of their worlds," according to the theory (cited in Vargas, 2020, pp. 417-418).

"...from the standpoint of the phenomenologist, humans are portrayed as 'agents' who interpret their experiences and actively establish an order to their existence," Denscombe (1983) says of Shutz's "life World," which is considered a descriptive study approach (p. 78). As a result, the researcher suggests using Alfred Shutz's "Life World" theory to describe participants' lived experiences by viewing them as interpreters of their own experiences, with analysis based on their descriptions of the occurrences.

As recommended by Creswell, the researcher also considers Braun and Clarke's (2006) Qualitative Thematic Approach useful as a method of description (2013, p.168). The researcher uses the Braun and Clarke (2006) technique for selecting, analyzing, organizing, characterizing, and reporting themes, which will be produced inductively from the acquired data.

The researcher interprets the opinions of the participants through Paul Ricoeur's (1976) "Interpretation Theory," which gives a hermeneutic phenomenology approach to the study and states that "interpretation is the hinge between language and lived experience" (p.66). Ricoeur's theory of interpretation, according to Tan (2009), "...acknowledges the link between the assumptions made in the interpretation and that which is previously known, presumably by the interpreter" (p.9). "... (it) is especially so with research interviews where lived experience is communicated through language, then transcribed into a text and interpreted," Geanellos (2001) adds to Ricoeur's interpretation theory (p.114).

"Interpreting a text" implies "going beyond comprehending what it says to understand what it talks about," according to Ricoeur (1976). (p.88). "The embodied ideas in this quote are the two stages of Ricoeur's theory of interpretation: (i) explanation, or what the text says (is directed toward the analysis of the text's internal relations), and (ii) understanding, or what the text talks about (is directed toward grasping the meanings the text discloses)," says Geanellos (2001) (p.114). Ricoeur's interpretation theory "...acknowledges the link between the assumptions derived from the interpretation and what is previously known, possibly by the Interpreter" (Tan, 2009, p.9).

The researchers chose to employ Ricoeur's (1976) theory of interpretation as a methodology, which includes explanation, naive understanding, and in-depth understanding, because it is comparable to that proposed by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), and their method is commonly used in IPA research investigations. The role of this researcher, as Seymour (1999) describes, is “getting a clear picture of the things in themselves – the things as directly experienced by the people” (p.214).

### **3.2.2. Types of Data**

The type of data gathered by this researcher is primary data, which consists of texts transcribed from interviews conducted with private press journalists and is used to understand the phenomenon under investigation in this study. With this type of data, the researcher has two alternatives. The 'Face-to-face' or 'One-on-one' Interview is the first data source. The researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with private press journalists who are affected by, or know, the issue under study to acquire the essential data.

The researcher also conducts online interviews with folks who are currently living overseas. The interviews were performed using Skype or other online tools that allowed the researcher to connect with the participants face-to-face.

**Advantages:** Participants can be directly watched, historical information can be gained, and the researcher has control during questioning when data is collected through interviews. It also saves money and time (Creswell, 2016, p. 138). Furthermore, because the phenomena of interest are based on words and language, qualitative data acquired through interviewing may be employed (Ibid. 2016, p. 139).

### **3.2.3. Sampling procedures**

Purposive sampling is the most acceptable form of sampling for phenomenological qualitative investigation, according to this researcher (Creswell, 2016). The researcher uses the purposive sampling method to identify a more narrowly defined group for whom the research issue is relevant.

Purposeful sampling, according to Creswell (2016), "is the act of selecting participants for a qualitative project by enlisting individuals who can help explain the

study's key phenomena" (p.109). He continues, "...as individuals are picked because they are typical of a population or because they are available," which is considerably different from the sampling technique used by researchers in quantitative studies (Ibid. p.110).

The researcher chooses the participants in this study by considering three factors: who to choose as participants, the selection procedure to apply, and the number of people in the sample.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), according to Smith & Osborne (2007), "... takes homogeneous samples through purposive sampling, as it selects a more precisely defined group for whom the study topic will be meaningful" (p.56). "The goal of undertaking an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is providing an in-depth analysis of certain events, not generating a theory to be generalized to the entire population," Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014) write (p.9).

When utilizing IPA as a methodology, "it is inappropriate to conceive in terms of random or representative selection when one is interviewing so few individuals" according to Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014). Participants are purposefully chosen by the theoretical principles of IPA" (Ibid. p.p. 9-10).

Purposive sampling was identified by this researcher as the most essential type of non-probability sampling for identifying the primary participants. The sample was also chosen based on the researcher's judgment and the research's goals, looking for those "... who have had experiences pertaining to the phenomenon to be examined" (Krueger, 1988, p.150).

#### **3.2.4. Sample size**

According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), the researcher can employ sample data from "... Merely a few persons who have experienced the phenomenon – and who can provide a detailed account of their experience – might be enough to identify its basic aspects" when conducting a phenomenological study (p. 1374).

Starks and Trinidad (2007) stated that, rich data sets can be produced with smaller samples because a single person can come up with a lot of notions. The objectives and

purpose of the study will determine the precise number of participants required and the number of interviews required for each participant. According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), the typical sample size for phenomenological investigations is 1 to 10 people.

Flick (2007), on the other hand, claims that in qualitative studies, interview sampling, "... is frequently done to know the right persons who have expertise and relevant experience for the study" (p.234). Further, "...sampling in interviewing should mean locating the right people and the right information they bring with them," Kvale (2007) adds, "and the specific number of interviewees essential for a study depends on the nature of the research" (p.5). As a result, the researcher carefully examined each respondent's past records, paying particular attention to their time spent in prison, as well as their extensive background in journalism, particularly in partisan reporting.

In terms of the research population and sample size, Creswell (2013) stated that "it is important to determine the size of the sample you will need when selecting participants for a study," and that "the maximum number of interviewees in qualitative research methods should not exceed 15, and the selection of these participants should reflect and represent the homogeneity that exists among the participants' sample pool" (p.146).

The purpose of doing a phenomenological research study with homogeneous participants, according to Creswell (2013), is to acquire a better gauge and a "better comprehension" of the overall perceptions of the participants' "life experiences." Furthermore, "it is critical that all participants share the [same lived] experience of the topic under investigation" (Ibid. p.155). According to Creswell (2013), "...participants must be recruited from among a homogeneous sample pool of participants to comprehend the true make-up of the research subject matter in a phenomenological research study." And samples are chosen on purpose (rather than by chance) because they can provide insight into a specific experience for a study endeavor" (p. 48).

This researcher uses Creswell's (2013) idea of sample size in a phenomenological study, in which he "suggests 15 as the maximum number" (p.146). Accordingly, twelve private press journalists who suffer various forms of suffering, ordeals, and tribulations

under EPRDF rule of Ethiopia were selected as participants for this study. The study's unit of analysis is the journalist, and the researcher applied this sample of participants to the greater population of private press journalists who were working and facing various forms of persecution from Meles Zenawi's leadership.

### **3.2.5. Instrumentation**

The researcher employed a series of interview questions that corresponded to the study's objectives (See Appendix C). The researcher also followed the interview methodology outlined in Appendix D, which only includes the questions asked during the in-depth interview. Each question was designed to be open-ended so that participants could reflect on their tales and lived experiences relating to the hardships and sufferings they faced under EPRDF regime. The researcher employed a semistructured interview approach since it allowed participants to use the interview procedure throughout the interview.

The researcher created interview questions based on the literature review readings that may eventually enlighten each research question, and they included a wide range of topic themes to explain the objective of the research questions in Table 1.

**Table 1: Crosscheck of interview questions and Research Questions**

Interview questions	Corresponding research question	Anticipated data
Tell me about your profile and career history.	N/A	Gather an overview of participants' education, career history, and other key information about the participants.
Were you a member of any political party or organization during Meles' era?	N/A	Gather an overview of participants' education, career history, and other key information about the participants.
How would you recall practicing journalism during Meles' era?	RQ1. How do private press journalists express various forms of legal and institutional impediments while performing their duties?	Potential data includes participants' freedom in performing their duties and disclosing what the government interventions looked like while doing their daily tasks.
How would you describe intervention of any sort, if there was any, from the editorial board on how to write or present your story, or you never compromised your freedom?	RQ1. How do private press journalists express various forms of legal and institutional impediments while performing their duties?	Participants are expected to detail the challenges they were confronting while doing their day-to--to-day activities.
What mechanism did you follow to check whether your sources were reliable or not?	RQ2. How do private press journalists describe the persecution they were subjected to by the police and secret service agents as a result of practicing journalism?	Participants are expected to describe the ethical issues they face in discharging their responsibilities.

<p>Although freedom of expression was guaranteed under the Constitution during EPRDF era, there was continuous crying over the various laws that infringe the freedom. How do you explain the problems that journalists face due to the Press Law and the Anti-terrorism law of the era.</p>	<p>RQ1. How do private press journalists express various forms of legal and institutional impediments while performing their duties?</p>	<p>Data from this question may reveal how private press journalists were being forced to face kinds of challenges due to the prejudiced laws imposed during MelesZenawi's era.</p>
<p>What type of leader was Meles?</p>	<p>RQ2. How do private press journalists describe the persecution they were subjected to by the police and secret service officers as a result of practicing journalism?</p>	<p>The data from this question will provide the general perceptions that private press journalists have about the political situation of the era.</p>
<p>How did you get arrested? Was it by the order of the court, were you simply arrested in your office/home or on the street by the police or secret office agents?</p>	<p>RQ2. How do private press journalists describe the persecution they were subjected to by the police and secret service officers as a result of practicing journalism?</p>	<p>Data obtained from the participants may show the various forms of challenges and hurdles that the journalists were facing by the regime. It will also provide an insight into the political situation of the era.</p>
<p>How do you recall the police and secret service agents during EPRDF era in respecting the Constitution while discharging their duties?</p>	<p>RQ3. How do private press journalists describe the hurdles they encountered with the police and the judiciary in getting a free and fair court trials?</p>	<p>Because all participants in this study have undergone various forms of suffering during Meles' era, they can provide instances to disclose their lived experience that depicts the real scenario.</p>
<p>How do you describe the situation in turning you up to the court after detention?</p>	<p>RQ3. How do private press journalists describe the hurdles they encountered with the police and the judiciary in getting a free and fair trials in court?</p>	<p>It is anticipated that participants share information about how the police/secret service agents in complying with the law of the land in respecting freedom of expression, and other human rights issues.</p>

<p>What were the charges that the prosecutor filed upon you?</p> <p>How do you describe the feeling of becoming a prisoner at that time?</p> <p>What were the ordeals you faced in prison?</p> <p>How did prison affect your family life, future plan and career?</p> <p>Is there any health-related problem that you faced as a result of being imprisoned, or the torture you endure in jail?</p> <p>What do you anticipate about the prospects of journalism as a profession in Ethiopia in the future?</p> <p>What laws and regulations do you recommend to be abolished or revised in order to improve the situation?</p>	<p>RQ4. How do private press journalists' portray their suffering they undergo in prison houses?</p> <p>RQ4. How do private press journalists' portray their suffering they undergo in prison houses?</p> <p>RQ5. How do they depict their family life and professional carries affected while they were in prison houses?</p> <p>RQ6. How do they describe their lives after they were released from jail, i.e., the damage resulted on their health, and the psychological trauma they suffer on their lives afterward?</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>N/A</p>	<p>Participants may reveal the charges that private press journalists were commonly accused of during Meles' era while practicing their ession.</p> <p>Participants may disclose the hardship and the tribulations of becoming a journalist during Meles era.</p> <p>Participants may reveal the various forms of tortures they experienced during their prison life.</p> <p>Participants may share their ordeals they undergo after being released from jail.</p> <p>Participants may disclose problems which affect their health as a result of being ill, treated or tortured in prison houses or at various detention centers.</p> <p>Participants will share their hope or despair that journalism as a profession in Ethiopian holds in future.</p> <p>Data gathered from this question may disclose how specific laws and regulations affect the practice of journalism. The data may also reveal how forces beyond their control can influence journalism output.</p>
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The interview questions were constructed in such a way that the participants could speak freely without being influenced by the researcher. According to Creswell (2015), interview questions should be "unconstrained by any opinion of the researcher of previous findings, as it elicits responses from participants without establishing any prejudice to them" (p.216).

### **3.2.6. Data gathering method – Semi-structured interview**

As a data collection method, this researcher recommends a semi-structured interview. According to Creswell (2009, 2013), the semistructured interview is the most acceptable and adequate data collection strategy in qualitative phenomenology research since it allows the researcher to closely study the research participants' lived experiences.

"...in a phenomenological study, the goal of the interview is to elicit the participants' story without any interference from the interviewer, as the researcher asks questions to encourage the participant to elaborate on the details to achieve clarity and to stay close to the lived experience," according to Starks and Trinidad (2007, p.1375). Furthermore, Gill (2020) says that in a phenomenological study, data is typically collected using semi-structured interviews, which allows the researcher to "...ask probing questions that convince the participants to divulge their lived experiences in a more thorough manner" (p.14).

On the other hand, Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) stated that the primary concern of phenomenological researchers is to elicit rich, detailed, and first-person accounts of the experiences and phenomena under investigation; and "the most popular method to achieve that is semi-structured interviews as it allows the researcher and the participant to engage in a dialogue in real-time, as well as give enough space and flexibility for original and unexpected issues to arise, which the researcher may investigate in more detail with further questions" (pp. 10-11).

"Semi-structured interviewing is a method of data collecting "...that is compatible with numerous methodologies of data analysis, such as discourse analysis, grounded theory, and interpretative phenomenology," according to Willig (2008, p.23). According to Smith et al. (2009), a semistructured interview allows the researcher and participant to

engage in a dialogue in which the investigator can examine intriguing and relevant areas that arise as a result of the participant's responses to the initial questions.

The researcher uses a semi-structured one-on-one interview to collect data from private press journalists who have encountered ordeals and suffering during EPRDF era, to answer the fundamental question: "How were private press journalists perceiving the phenomenon?" As a result, the interview was designed to allow the participant to tell their own story and reflect the lived experience of their history.

### **3.2.7. Interview procedures**

This researcher applies Reushle's (2005) principles of Connectivity, Humanness, and Empathy (CHE principles) for the ethical and methodological advantages of semi-structured interview research practices used to gather data. Brown and Danaher (2019) elaborated on Reushle's CHE principle, in which: "Connectivity is accomplished by being attentive, by acknowledging the participant's answers, by maintaining eye contact, and by using body language suggesting they're open to discussion. Humanness refers to the researcher "...providing feedback, being engaged in conversation, and expressing his or her humanity" (p.78).

"A researcher could include the humanness principle in a conversation by employing an informal tone, sharing a personal tale, and injecting humor," Brown and Danaher (2019) added (p.80). Empathy is the final principle. "A researcher exhibits empathy by displaying humility and listening to the participants without casting judgment," according to Brown and Danaher (2019). (p.81). In general, this researcher (interviewer) will employ CHE concepts to establish a rapport with the participants and make them feel at ease.

### **3.2.8. Interview protocol**

According to Creswell (2016), an interview protocol should be created "...to assist the interviewer in minimizing the questions so that there is no need to read the protocol verbatim" (p.130). Accordingly, the researcher used Creswell's (2016, p.p. 130-131) interview protocol in a phenomenological study, and the following steps were chosen from the list to be used in the interviewing process: basic information about the

interview; introduction about the researcher and the purpose of the study; opening questions, content questions, including probe and follow-up questions; and finally closing instructions.

Because the interview is face-to-face (one-on-one), the researcher draws on his experience as a journalist for over eighteen years. To persuade the participants to communicate and share their lived experience, good probes are used.

### **3.3. Interview invitation letter**

According to Creswell (2016), in a qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher must send an invitation letter to the research participant to obtain his or her consent. The researcher drafts an interview invitation letter and sends it to each participant to obtain their consent and desire to take part in the interviewing process.

The researcher attaches and sends each participant an invitation letter based on Creswell's (2016) proposed format, as well as a consent-to-participate form (p.107) (See Appendix I.)

### **3.4. Informed consent agreement**

The researcher has used Creswell's suggestion of using a consent-to-participate form (2016, p.107). According to Creswell (2016), "it is "essential to secure participants' written permission to be researched" in a phenomenological research study where all participants have encountered comparable phenomena (p. 154).

In addition to obtaining formal consent from the participant, Creswell (2012) remarked, "...it is also vital to select people or sites that can best assist you in comprehending the central phenomenon" (p. 206). According to Willig (2008), the interviewees constitute the unit of analysis because of their "informed consent" and "...it is therefore required to establish a specific informed consent "agreement" to get informed consent from participants" (Cited in Creswell, 2016, p.156). Before beginning the study, the researcher seeks and obtains the subjects' agreed 'informed consent.' (*See Annex II for more information.*)

### **3.5. Subjectivity issue**

The researcher will apply three solutions provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to prevent subjectivity issues in selecting participants for interviews, which is a common obstacle in qualitative research: trust, confidentiality, and expertise.

*Trust* refers to the person's background on the issue under study. In qualitative research, the interviewer is not a passive player in the interview, but an instrument using his abilities, experiences, and competencies in the interview situation;

*Confidentiality* is about establishing confidence that the responses from the perspective of the participants are true, credible, and believable;

*Expertise* refers to the academic, professional, and scientific knowledge or experience that the respondents acquire about the issue under study (pp. 301-327).

### **3.6. Research method validity**

Validity is defined by Creswell and Miller (2010) as "...how closely the account portrays participants' realities of social processes and is trustworthy to them" (p. 126). The goal of qualitative research is to learn from a few people and study them closely in their settings, rather than generalizing from a sample to a population, as is the case with quantitative research. Validity in qualitative research, according to Creswell & Miller (2010), indicates "...something different, i.e. the findings are correct, and accuracy may be assessed through the eyes of participants, readers, and reviewers of the study" (pp. 129-130).

In this regard, the researcher used a variety of methods to assess the study's validity, as indicated by Creswell (2016), Marshall et al. (2011), and Creswell and Miller (2000).

"*Triangulation*," according to Creswell (2013), is one of the three approaches to check the validity of this study. Interviewing journalists is one of the primary methods for acquiring data in this study, and the researcher will analyze if participants' responses to the researcher's questions are similar or dissimilar.

“*Member checking*” is another validity-checking mechanism used by the researcher. The researcher will select respondents for the study with great care, ensuring that they are people who have first-hand knowledge of the problem.

“*Peer debriefing*” is another method of ensuring the research’s validity. It is another approach the researcher can employ to enlist the help of journalists who are familiar with the topic under investigation or the central phenomenon being investigated.

“*Thick rich descriptions*”, which Creswell (2016) utilized to allow the reader to think “that they have experienced, or could experience the events being recounted in the study,” are another validity checking mechanism recommended by Creswell (2016). (Ibid. p. 4).

Since this study is a qualitative phenomenological study, the validity procedures used include “*triangulation*”, “*member checking*”, “*peer debriefing*” and the *thick rich description* strategy of Creswell (2016, pp.156-157). Based on the above-listed validity checking mechanisms, or by employing at least two, the researcher compiles a report in an appendix of the dissertation for others to review.

### **3.7. Data analysis approach**

This researcher uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a methodological approach to describe and analyze the qualitative theme method's participants' perspectives. People are assumed to be self-interpreting beings' (Taylor, 1985), and these individuals are actively engaged in interpreting the events, objects, and people in their lives. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is primarily concerned with investigating how individuals make sense of their experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), IPA employs phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography to investigate how people describe and understand their experiences. However, while utilizing IPA as a methodology, this researcher believes it is more acceptable to apply methods and principles of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics Phenomenology to sequentially describe and understand the participants' actual

experiences. The reason that the researcher excludes ideography is that Phenomenology (Husserl, 1945 ) and Hermeneutics Phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962) are both concepts concerned with attending to the way things appear to individuals in their lived experience, in contrast to ideography which focuses on studying a single phenomenon based on an individual experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014, Creswell 2016).

According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), a researcher can employ phenomenology and hermeneutics phenomenology ideas in IPA studies for both descriptive and interpretive purposes: IPA synthesizes ideas from phenomenology and hermeneutics resulting in a descriptive method because it is concerned with how things appear and letting things speak for themselves, and an interpretative because it recognizes there is no such thing as an uninterpreted phenomenon (p.8).

The researcher used a Thematic Analysis approach to describe the participants' lived experiences. According to Creswell (2016), a qualitative phenomenological investigation as a method of description "... is comparable to a qualitative thematic approach" (p.168). The researcher uses Alfred Shutz's "Life World" theory of phenomenology as a lens for analyzing and documenting the participants' lived experiences. According to Shutz, "ordinary life – rather than philosophical and scientific observation – is most significant for analysis" (Shutz, 1945, 1962, pp. 208, 209).

Schutzian theory of the life-world stratifies the life-world into three dimensions, according to Dreher (2011), in which "...Shutz defines a space, time, and social structure of the life-world; furthermore, he divides the life-world into multiple realities, in reality, spheres of finite meaning structure; the individual is constantly confronted with given boundaries through this stratification of the life-world" (p.496).

Ricoeur's "Interpretation Theory," which gives a hermeneutic phenomenology approach to the study, will be used as a lens by the researcher for the interpretive analysis. Ricoeur (1994c) asserts that "interpretation is the hinge between language and lived experience" (p.66). "... (it) is especially so with research interviews where lived experience is communicated through language, then transcribed into a text and interpreted," Geanellos (2001) says of Ricoeur's interpretation theory (p.114).

"Interpreting a text" requires "going beyond comprehending what it says to understand what it talks about," according to Ricoeur (1976a) (p.88). "...the embodied idea in this quote is the two stages of Ricoeur's theory of interpretation: i) explanation, or what the text says (is directed toward the analysis of the text's internal relations), and (ii) understanding, or what the text talks about (is directed toward grasping the meanings the text discloses)," Geanellos (2001) adds (p.114).

The interpretative analysis was conducted utilizing Pietkiewicz & Smith's (2014, p.13) four practical guides for performing IPA, which are mentioned under the interpretative approach of the analysis of this chapter.

### **3.7.1. Thematic approach of analysis**

To describe the interview data, this researcher uses the thematic approach of analysis – a frequently used strategy in qualitative phenomenological research – among the numerous analysis approaches (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). In this study, a thematic analysis approach is employed to describe the participants' lived experiences using the IPA's phenomenological concept. Interview data from the journalists' life experiences are required for the analysis. The procedure is related to an explorative phenomenological approach that focuses on understanding, description, and/or interpretative meaning-oriented topics since the analysis comprises a reflective process aimed to illuminate meaning (Dahlberg et.al. 2008; van Manen 2016).

Because "...the notion to be used as frames in qualitative phenomenology will be obtained from the interview transcripts," the researcher will employ an inductive technique to conduct the thematic analysis utilizing "particular frames" (Yin, 2011, 207). The idea of the intentionality of consciousness is intimately tied to understanding the lived experiences of journalists, who claim to have experienced all problems and tribulations while performing journalism in Ethiopia during Meles Zenawi's reign.

According to Thomas (2006), the general inductive approach "...provides an option for those evaluators who seek a simple, nontechnical means to carry out qualitative analyses" (p. 245), whereas the phenomenological inductive approach "...will give in-depth descriptions and interpretations of the research participants' 'lived experiences' vis-

à-vis how the phenomenon under study has impacted the research participants' lives" (p. 245). (p.243).

The researcher plays an active role in the creation of themes, as Braun and Clark (2014) suggest, "... themes are constructed, created, generated rather than simply emerging. Prevalence or recurrence is not necessarily the most important criterion in determining what constitutes a theme; themes can be considered important if they are highly relevant to the research question and significant in understanding the phenomena of interest" (p.p.185-186).

Unlike framing analysis, the thematic approach method employed in this study is limited to "particular frames," which only provides information from a theme analysis standpoint, and the researcher uses thematic analysis to address the following research questions: How do private press journalists express various forms of legal and institutional impediments while performing their duties? How do private press journalists describe the persecution they were subjected to by the police and secret service officers as a result of practicing journalism? How do private press journalists describe the hurdles they encountered with the judiciary in getting a free and fair court trial? How do private press journalists' portray the suffering they undergo in prison houses? How do they depict their family life and professional careers affected while they were in prison houses? How do they describe their lives after they were released from jail, i.e., the damage resulted in their health, and the psychological trauma they suffered on their lives afterward? The samples are interview data from journalists' lived experiences, and the themes obtained from the analysis will be data-driven, i.e., the participants' lived experiences.

### **3.7.2. Interpretative approach of analysis**

In addition to the descriptive analysis step, this researcher uses an interpretative approach to analyze the participants' lived experiences. The interpretive analysis is based on the IPA's hermeneutics phenomenology principle (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), according to Willig (2008), is a methodology that uses an inductive approach to data analysis that differs from the typical inductive

approach used in qualitative research. "...the basic objective of the inductive technique is to allow study conclusions to arise from the frequent, dominant, or noteworthy themes inherent in raw data, without the restrictions imposed by organized methodologies," says Thomas (2006). The qualitative data is analyzed using a generic inductive approach to uncover themes in the text data that are connected to the evaluation objectives (Ibid. p.p. 238-242).

The researcher analyzes the interview data using an interpretative technique because it is a qualitative approach that focuses on the participants' lived experiences (Smith et al. 2012). Because IPA has its data analysis stages that are more aligned with hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher uses Pietkiewicz & Smith's (2014) double hermeneutic technique of analysis to analyze the participants' lived experiences. Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014) suggest that the researcher can achieve two functions by using interviewees' own words to illustrate themes, which are: "firstly, it enables the reader to assess the pertinence of the interpretations, and secondly, it retains the voice of the participants' personal experience and gives a chance to present the emic perspective" (p.12) (p.12). As a result, the Finding chapter also includes "... both the participant's account of his or her experience in his or her own words, and the researcher's interpretative commentary" (Ibid. p.13).

In this regard, the researcher, by using IPA as a method, interprets the research participants' responses which are generally based on the following research questions: How do private press journalists express various forms of legal and institutional impediments while performing their duties? How do private press journalists describe the persecution they were subjected to by the police and secret service officers as a result of practicing journalism? How do private press journalists describe the hurdles they encountered with the judiciary in getting a free and fair court trial? How do private press journalists' portray the suffering they undergo in prison houses?

How do they depict their family life and professional careers affected while they were in prison houses? How do they describe their lives after they were released from jail, i.e. the damage that resulted in their health, and the psychological trauma they suffered in their life afterward?

### **3.8. Data Analysis Procedure**

#### **3.8.1. Thematic analysis procedure**

Thematic analysis is a technique for identifying relevant categories or themes in a large amount of information (Fulcher, 2010). It's also thought to be the best method for explaining participants' sentiments, emotions, experiences, and wants through their narrations because it lets the researcher properly define the links between concepts and compare them to repeated data (Namey et al., 2008).

Thematic analysis is defined by Daly et al. (1997) as an interpretive process in which "... data is systematically searched to identify patterns within the data to provide an illuminating description of the phenomenon" (p.612), and Howitt & Cramer (2010) as "...the task of identifying a limited number of themes that adequately reflect their textual data" (p.612) (p.314).

Thematic analysis, on the other hand, is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as "... a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns of themes within data" (p.78), and it can be used with any theory the researcher chooses, whereas other methods of analysis are tightly tied to specific theories.

"Themes are defined as patterns of shared meaning across data items, supported or linked by a fundamental concept, that are significant to the understanding of a phenomenon and pertinent to the research question," according to Braun and Clarke (2006). (Ibid., 2006, p. 85).

There are a variety of approaches to conducting a thematic analysis in a qualitative phenomenological study like this one, but this researcher uses the principles of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) developed by Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014) since the researcher's interest leads him to ask the participants certain types of questions that steer the analytic process in a specific direction.

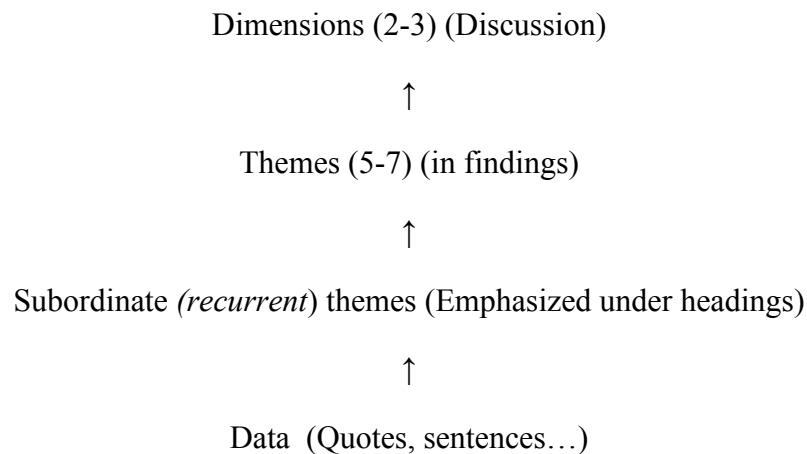
This researcher uses the inductive approach of IPA and applies the four key stages of phenomenological inductive analysis as outlined by Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014), which

underpins the double hermeneutic, whereby the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant's sense-making activity.

### **Theme identification**

The researcher identified seven major themes based on literature review readings and twenty-one recurrent and emergent themes based on the participants' responses during the interview session. The researcher then produced a passage for each of the themes, following Creswell (2016)'s "four levels of evidence in qualitative data analysis" model:

***Figure 1: Four levels of evidence used in qualitative analysis:***



*(Taken from: "30 essential skills for the qualitative researcher", John W. Creswell, Fig. 20.1, p. 175)*

This researcher identifies a short and conceptually interesting theme label, as well as subordinate themes that provide evidence for the theme, and quotations that provide the voices of the major participants in the research study, namely twelve private press journalists, which can add realism to the theme passage as it approaches its interpretative stage.

**Table 2: Table illustration for themes, subordinate themes, and quotes**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subordinate theme</b>	<b>Examples of Quotations</b>
Practicing journalism	"Interfering with editorial autonomy"	"...a period of struggle for private press journalists to free the Ethiopian people from oppression and bring true democracy to Ethiopia..."
Political leanings	"No man can serve two masters"	"Why are journalists barred from using their civic rights to join political parties when others do?"
Journalism's ethical considerations	"To be or not to be" - prejudiced!	"...regime's classification of the private press as a whole as "unethical and unprofessional" aggravated the problem"
Interfering with editorial autonomy - Overview	"Interventionist tactics"	"...the threat of government intrusion into journalists' editorial freedom came not only from politicians, but also from publishers, in the context of the then-private press."
Strategy for discovering the truth	"In Pursuit of the Truth"	"...the only option we had was to publish a one-sided tale, or sometimes tried to check it from inside sources."
Interference by politicians	"We will kill you!"	"The regime never accused us of defamation or incorrect reporting, but it utilized claims that could not be proven in court..."
Constitutional Liberties	"We have a constitution, but not constitutionalism"	"...the Meles dictatorship had been reducing freedom for more than two decades by enacting various laws and policies that opposed the spirit of the principles established in the Constitution."
Impeding laws to press freedom	"A poison disguised as honey"	The law not only restricts journalists' freedom, but it also tries to dismantle the institutional foundations of media freedom.

Was Meles Zenawi an authoritarian leader?	"The mastermind behind all the mayhem"	"Meles is an authoritarian who figured out how to deceive the world by posing as a democratic leader..."
Ignorance of the Constitution	"Forget the Constitution"	"When you fall into their hands, all of the rights and advantages guaranteed by the constitution become meaningless."
Unlawful behavior	"They undermined justice"	"They showed there at any time, morning or night, as it didn't matter to them, with no court warrant in hand and only a Kalashnikov to detain us."
Freedom of the judiciary	Political operatives dress up as judges	"All judges were appointed based on their political and ethnic affiliation with the regime."
The proceedings	"I knew you were innocent!"	"I was never given the opportunity to defend myself in court throughout my two months in prison."
The Judgments	"I was punished without being charged"	"They were well aware that they were not practicing law on seriousness, and that they were not honoring their pledge in all of the court procession..."
Getting into prison	"Getting into Hell"	"The walls and roofs of the prison houses were built with corrugated iron sheets, and during the mid day hours it got heated till they felt melting down into vapor."
Tortures and Afflictions	"A place to lose humanistic demeanor"	"The heat inside was conducive to bedbugs and lice got swarmed the area every few seconds. Then they nourished themselves sucking prisoners' blood."
The Impact of Prison	"My family's psychological torture"	"It was a tormenting experience for me not to be able to play with and feed my son for the whole eight years."

The Impact of Prison	“Every damages done on my health”	“...my right ear problem aggravated in prison, and finally got deaf.
The Impact of Prison	“They destroyed my vision, dream, and ambition”	“When I asked him the reason for my dismissal, he told me that government secret agents came to his office that day and they ordered to fire me.”
“A gloomy future to the press”	NA.	“...role that the private press had played to bring democracy and good governance in Ethiopia seem to be a thing of the past.”

- *The qualitative themes are considered by this researcher as results or findings of the study that present evidence for the central phenomenon of this research.*

### **3.8.2. Interpretative analysis Procedure**

"A good analysis is one that combines phenomenological description with insightful interpretation, and that grounds these interpretations in the participants' accounts," Smith et al (2009) write in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (pp.98-99). As a result, the interpretative approach will be centered on "...extracting meaning through close analysis of extracts taken from the transcribed responses of the participants...and the researcher, during the data collection and data analysis process, will simultaneously take into account a double hermeneutic approach, in which the researcher and the participants play the interpretative roles of the phenomenon" (Ibid. p.100).

"The overarching objective of a phenomenological study relies on reading the participant's perception of the experience," according to Gill (2014), "...and what follows is an analysis that reflects on what has been captured, and interpreted from the emergent themes" (p.123). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), according to Willig (2008), is "a methodology that employs an inductive approach to data analysis" that differs from the general inductive approach used in qualitative research.

"The basic objective of the inductive technique," according to Thomas (2006), "is to allow research findings to arise from the frequent, dominant, or noteworthy themes inherent in raw data, without the restrictions imposed by organized methodologies" (p. 238). "A general inductive technique will be utilized to examine the qualitative data to discover themes in the text data that are connected to the evaluation objectives," Thomas explained (Ibid. p. 242).

According to Thomas (2006), the general inductive approach "provides an option for those evaluators who seek a simple, nontechnical means to carry out qualitative analyses" (p. 245), whereas the phenomenological inductive approach "...will give in-depth descriptions and interpretations of the research participants' 'lived experiences' vis-à-vis how the phenomenon under study has impacted the research participants' lives" (p. 245). (p.243). In this regard, this researcher interprets the lived experiences of private press journalists in Ethiopia during Meles Zenwai's reign, which means that their suffering, ordeals, and tribulations would be the study's analytical focus. "...here is when the researchers' interpretative involvement with the text becomes clear," writes Creswell (2016, p.178).

According to Osborn and Smith (1998), interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) plays a "double hermeneutic" role in data analysis: "...as a result, the interpretative phenomenological analysis does not claim to produce a definitive, or 'true', reading of participants' accounts; rather, the results of such analysis are necessarily 'a co-construction between participant and analyst' in that it emerges from the analyst's engagement with the data in the form of interpretation. (p. 67).

The principles of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) developed by Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014) are used by this researcher since the researcher's interest leads him to ask the participants certain types of questions that steer the analytic process in a specific direction.

This researcher uses the inductive approach of IPA and applies the four key stages of phenomenological inductive analysis as outlined by Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014),

which underpins the double hermeneutic, whereby the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant's sense-making activity, in the following manner:

The researcher **first** scans each transcript for familiarity, then looks for emergent themes, annotating key areas, and condensing their notes into short themes that convey the 'core nature' of the respondent's views.

**Second**, the researcher creates master (super-ordinate or recurrent) themes by grouping connected or related concepts.

**Third**, the researcher iteratively applies the emergent themes from the first transcript to the examination of subsequent transcripts. A final table of super-ordinate themes is created once each transcript has been evaluated.

**Fourth**, the analytic process produces a narrative account in which "the researcher's analytic interpretation is presented in depth alongside verbatim quotations from participants" (pp. 13-14).

In general, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) provides the best opportunity for this researcher to grasp the innermost deliberations of research participants 'lived experiences,' gain an understanding of the essence of their experiences, make sense interpretively, and acquire a true and deeper understanding of the participants 'lived experiences' using an inductive approach to data analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

The process of identifying themes for analysis and interpretation is heavily influenced by the study's emphasis. "The researcher's decision on which themes should be preserved and which should be abandoned is invariably impacted by his or her interests and orientation," according to Willig (2017). (p.280-282). As a result, to evaluate and analyze the private press journalists' lived experiences during Meles Zenawi's reign in Ethiopia, the researcher focuses on the themes that show the problems, pains, and tribulations they face.

### **Interpretive Theme identification**

Based on the thematic analysis performed to explain participants' lived experiences, this researcher first selects topics for interpretive purposes. Van Manen (1990) claims that

any description of a lived experience "is a viable source for unearthing the theme components of the phenomenon it depicts" (p.92), and he offers three methods for identifying and isolating thematic aspects of a phenomenon. *The Wholistic or Sententious method*, the *Selective or Highlighted approach*, and the *Detailed or Line-by-Line approach* are the three options. He goes on to say that the approaches are as follows:

The researcher uses *the holistic reading approach* to examine the text as a whole and look for a sententious phrase that captures the text's basic meaning or essential significance. The message will then be represented through the use of such a phrase.

The researcher listens to or read a document numerous times and look for statement(s) or phrase(s) that seem particularly important or illuminating about the phenomenon or experience being reported by the participants using *the selective reading approach*. The researcher will then highlight, underline, or circle statements.

We look at every single sentence or sentence cluster in the *detailed reading approach* and try to figure out what this sentence or sentence cluster reveals about the phenomenon or experience being described (Ibid. p. 93).

"As ideas and thematic statements accumulate, thematic statements can be grouped into phenomenologically sensitive paragraphs." These theme collections, as paragraphs, emerge from structured language alterations through the process of writing and additional reading, thinking, and writing" (Ibid, p.93). This sequence is "a creative, hermeneutic process: generating and interpretative," according to Van Manen (1990). (p.94).

This researcher utilizes a *selective or highlighted technique* since it is more relevant to the study and allows the researcher to select sentences or sections of sentences from the transcribed text that appear to indicate themes of the participants' lived experiences.

### **3.9. Conclusion**

The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological approach to collect data for this study, as proposed by Creswell (2013), to learn more about how private press journalists

in Ethiopia during Meles Zenawi's reign experienced various forms of pain and challenges. The researcher used a series of interview protocols, which were detailed in this section, to conduct one-on-one, in-depth interviews with each participant.

The interview questions were created to investigate (a) how private press journalists describe the various forms of persecution and arrest they faced during Meles' era; b) how they express the various forms of legal and institutional impediments they faced while performing their duties; c) how they describe the obstacles they faced in obtaining a free and fair trial; d) how they portray their sufferings in prison houses; e) how they describe their family life and professional careers were affected while they were in prison, and f) how they describe the health consequences and psychological anguish they experienced subsequently.

A phenomenological approach was used to analyze the interviews, which included identifying significant themes, layering themes, textural writing, and composite writing. All themes were created by the researcher to explore the journalists' lived experiences and provide an understanding of the experiences that the participants revealed during the process. The researcher provides extensive reporting on the findings from the data collecting and interpretative analysis sections of this study in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **4. FINDINGS OF INTERPRETATION**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents findings through interpreting the lived experiences of the participants by imploring Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the themes and subordinate (emergent and recurrent) themes prepared from the data collection process in a series of breakdowns that enable the reader to identify the connections between participants' lived experiences, and the political phenomena that were existed during EPRDF era of Ethiopia. The discussion of the findings of the results is reported “thematically across the individuals” (Carlsson, 2011; Ferm, 2004; Friberg, 2001), therefore the presentation and interpretation of the findings are based on the themes designed for the data gathering process.

The researcher describes and interprets the interview data gathered from the participants using both the thematic analysis and IPA with a qualitative phenomenological approach to the study. This researcher mainly employs the inductive approach of IPA by using Pietkiewicz & Smith's (2014) four key stages of phenomenological inductive analysis, which underpins the double hermeneutic, in which the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant's sense-making activity.

*Familiarity, topic grouping, emerging theme analysis, and write-up* are the four steps of analysis established by Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014, p.p. 13-14) and used by the researcher in this section

#### **4.2. Participants' demographics**

This study identified 12 private press journalists available to participate in one semistructured in-depth interview between December 2020 and January 2022. The researcher drew on the lived experiences of the participants with their demographic data described below.

**Table 3:** *Participants Demographic Breakdown during Meles Zenawi’s rule of Ethiopia*

No.	Name	Gender	Newspaper/Magazine	Title/position	Remarks
1	Iskender Nega	M	“Menelik”	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
2	Temesgen Desalegn	M	“Fetih” / “Fact”	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
3	Wubeshet Taye	M	“Awramba Times”	Editor	Imprisoned
4	Riyot Alemu	F	“Fetih”	Editor	Imprisoned
5	Befekadu Moreda	M	“Tomar”	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
6	Sileshi Hagos	M	“Ethio Mihidar”	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
7	Wosenseged G/Kidan	M	“Ethop”	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
8	Elias Gebru	M	“Awramba Times”	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
9	Habtamu Minale	M	“Jiret”	Deputy Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
10	Eyuel Fisseha	M	"Addis Geste"	Deputy Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
11	Befekadu Hailu	M	“Zone 9” (Blog)	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
12	Mahlet Fantahun	F	“Zone 9” (Blog)	Editor	Imprisoned

### **4.3. Participants’ profiles**

Each participant in this study shared their thoughts on their lived experiences in Ethiopia under Meles Zenawi's administration. The researcher noted that each participant's account of their lived experiences throughout the specified period helped to develop a description for a better understanding of the broader experience that private press journalists blamed for partisan journalism had during that period.

The researcher believes that showing participant profiles might help people comprehend their unique experiences, such as their educational background, professional experience, and other credentials. The researcher believes that highlighting each participant's history is crucial since it helps to put the findings of the talks, as well as the interpretative analysis portion in context.

#### **Iskinder Nega**

Iskinder was born and raised in Arat Kilo, Addis Ababa, in 1974. He went to one of the capital's private institutions and completed his primary and secondary studies there. He eventually moved to the United States to continue his schooling and earned a master's degree in economics. Iskinder went home after the Derg dictatorship fell apart and the

EPRDF rose to power, joining the private press with the weekly "*Ethopis*", which was once a popular publication in the country. Later, he founded the publications "*Menilik*", "*Satenaw*", and "*Ethop*", but his journalistic career came to a stop after he was sentenced to 18 years in prison for giving coverage to Ginbot 7, a political movement designated as terrorist by the EPRDF dictatorship.

Iskinder was accused nine times by the EPRDF regime on charges relating to his journalistic coverage and sentenced to more than ten years in prison. Iskinder recounted being in the United States when "Woyane" assumed control, and then returning home to investigate the prospect of joining in the country's development efforts. Within a few days of arriving in Ethiopia, Iskinder noticed a proliferation of private press outlets, newspapers, and magazines in the city.

"Even though their numbers were growing by the day, I couldn't find anyone brave enough to cover the country's current reality and tell the truth to the public. Remember, I came from a country where press freedom was greatly valued and the First Amendment was given top priority in political culture." He examined the contents of some of the publications, such as "*Tobia*", "*Tomar*", and others, and found that their coverage was satirical "... devoid of exposing the regime's authoritarian tendencies and the evil desire, its leaders were promoting to disintegrate the country's unity through ethnic politics."

"My lived experience had then become quite different from that of other private press journalists, as my observations led me to believe that they were afraid of reporting the truth boldly by exposing the regime's malicious acts without fear, whereas I chose to practice journalism in the opposite," Iskinder said. So, he decided to form his own "free press" and participate "in the effort to bring a democratic government to power in Ethiopia" because of two factors: the private press' lack of bravery in their coverage and the authoritarian type of government that came to power in Ethiopia in 1991.

### **Temesgen Desalegn**

Temesgen was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, in 1978. He grew up and received his education at Menilik Junior and Senior Secondary Schools, which are located next to

each other in the Arat Kilo area. Later, he enrolled in and received a diploma in accounting from the Commercial and Business College. Temesgen, who was determined to further his studies, enrolled in AAU's Social Science College and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in history.

He became a journalist shortly after the 1997 E.C. (2005 G.C.) national election fraud, in which the ruling party – EPRDF – was declared the winner while the Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (CUD) beat it. According to him, during the 1997 E.C. (2005 G.C.) election, the private press played a larger role in educating the public about the importance of voting on the EPRDF. However, the EPRDF's refusal to acknowledge the loss has sparked widespread outrage and protest in several parts of the nation. The government was accused of killing about 200 people during that time, though the exact number varies depending on different reports from local and international organisations that demonstrated in Addis Ababa's streets against the state's deceit, remembers Temesgen. Several political figures and journalists were also imprisoned by the regime.

Temesgen recalls that the private press was engulfed in fear after several journalists were caught while performing their trade with complete freedom. There were reports all over the place that several private press journalists had been kidnapped from the streets or their homes by security officers and detained as criminals without a court order or actual evidence that they had committed crimes. Temesgen had resolved to join the private press and oppose the regime with his writing at that point in time.

Temesgen entered the private press and began by publishing a weekly newspaper called "*Feteh*" (literally means Justice). Eventually, *Feteh* became known as the private press's most read newspaper, according to Temesgen, and it was also one of the few private press journals that managed to survive the government's year-long campaign of crackdowns. Temesgen, however, faced accusations of more than a hundred journalistic transgressions and made multiple court appearances before to being sentenced to three years in prison and being locked up. For years, Temesgen served as editor-in-chief and publisher of the weekly magazines *Fact* and "*Addis Times*", as well as the newspaper "*Leilina*" (Literally means Integrity).

*Temesgen also wrote a book called "Gize Lekulu," which means "there is a time for everything," in which he analyzed the overall political and social crisis that he had been witnessing in Ethiopia for a long time during EPRDF era.*

## **Wubeshet Taye**

Wubeshet was born in Fiche Town, Oromiya region, in 1970 E.C. He and his family moved to Assela town in the Oromiya region, while he was a child, and he had his primary and junior-level education there. Wubeshet had no choice but to accompany his family as they relocated to Zeway town again. He enrolled at Zeway Senior Secondary School and completed his high school career there.

Wubeshet, an avid reader, worked as a freelance writer for several publications. Later, he enrolled at Unity University and earned a journalism and communication diploma. Wubeshet has been interested in literature since he was a child, and he learned Geez language in their Ethiopian Orthodox Church parish, where he also served as a deacon. He had also learned Arabic, which allowed him to become more familiar with Arab literature.

Wubeshet had the opportunity to read different Marx and Lenin ideological works at an early age, as such publications were readily available throughout the Derg era. His love of reading and passion for writing led him to join the press profession, where he began his career as a journalist for the then-weekly magazine "Focus." Wubshet later worked for several newspapers and magazines in various positions, including "Hadar," "Mesenazeria," "Habesha Journal," "Google," and "Negaderas." He had been the editor-in-chief of the popular "Awramba Times" weekly newspaper until Meles Zenawi's administration imprisoned him.

Wubeshet received the Helman Hamet Award from Human Rights Watch in 2012, as well as the C.N.N. African Journalist Award in 2013. *He produced an Amharic book called "Mogach Ewenetoch" (Challenging Truths) in which he recounted his hardships and sufferings while imprisoned in various Ethiopian prisons.*

## **Reiyot Alemu**

Reiyot Alemu was born in 1978 in Nazareth (Adama), a city around 80 kilometers from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital. She had her elementary and secondary education at various schools in the cities of Nazareth, Arba Minch, and Addis Ababa, all while traveling with her father, a judge. Reiyot continued her education at Addis Ababa University's Foreign Language and Literature Department, where she got her BA degree in 2000. She then obtained a second degree in theatre arts from the same university.

Reiyot, an avid reader, has taken several short-and long-term journalism courses both at home and abroad. She had previously worked as a senior reporter and columnist for the prominent newspaper "Fiteh" and the monthly magazine "Image" in various roles.

## **Sileshi Hagos**

Sileshi Hagos was born in 1973 E.C. in Shasemane Town, Oromiya Region, 250 kilometers from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital. He grew up there and received his primary and secondary schooling. He enrolled in Kotebe University College after finishing his senior secondary education and earning his Bachelor of Arts degree in literature. Sileshi studied dramatic arts at Addis Ababa University to pursue his boyhood passion of becoming an actor. After a while, he was obliged to modify his ideas "because of the awful scenarios" he experienced in Ethiopian theatre and film, and he eventually became a journalist.

Sileshi subsequently went to work for "*Addis Ketema*" (New City) newspaper where he stayed for a few years. Sileshi decided to join the private press after the 1997 E.C. election, which was rigged by the EPRDF, which claimed victory. Sileshi recalls being appalled by the election's undemocratic process, which culminated in the deaths of nearly two hundred innocent citizens in Addis Ababa alone. "When I discovered the EPRDF's plot to rig the election results, I made the bold decision to join the private press and battle the regime with my pen until it falls," adds Sileshi.

Sileshi began his career as a correspondent for the Habel weekly newspaper. He then became deputy editor-in-chief of the prominent *Ethio Mehidar* daily. Sileshi had

worked for a variety of newspapers and periodicals in various positions during his fifteen years in the private press. "I would never be a journalist if I wasn't Ethiopian." Meles Zenawi's corrupt political system, which regrettably coincided with my adolescence, led me to become a journalist. Although the agonizing memories of the harassment and torment I endured still haunt me, I was relieved to see the regime fall," says Sileshi.

### **Wosenseged Gebrekidan**

Wosenseged was born in Addis Ababa around the French Legation in 1958 E.C. He went to Higher 12 senior high school for his elementary and secondary studies. During the Derg era, he served in the national military service, which was necessary for all 18-year-olds, and then returned after his term was over.

Wosenseged took several journalism-related short courses. Wosenseged, a self-taught avid reader and writer, began his journalistic career as deputy editor-in-chief of the prominent newspaper "Ethop" at the time. Wosenseged rose up the ranks to become editor-in-chief, a position he held for seven years. "Ethop", according to Wosenseged, was once the most widely circulated newspaper in Addis Ababa and throughout Ethiopia. Wosenseged has also served as editor-in-chief of the four-month-old weekly "Addis Zena."

*During the EPRDF administration, he was imprisoned for multiple charges relating to his journalistic work at Ethop. Wosenseged wrote a book called "Yeqaliti Mistroch" (Secrets of Qaliti Prison House) in Amharic, in which he described some of his experiences and problems there.*

### **Befekadu Moreda**

In 1955, E.C. Befekadu Moreda was born in Illubabor Region. He grew up in a household that moved around a lot, so he had to go to a lot of different schools throughout the region for his primary and secondary schooling. Befekadu finished his senior secondary school at Gore and then went on to Kotebe Teachers College, where he earned an advanced diploma in literature. He had previously enrolled in Addis Ababa

University to further his education but was forced to drop out and flee to Kenya to seek refuge due to Meles Zenawi's regime's continued harassment and threats.

Befekadu began his career as a correspondent for the Ethiopian Armed Forces Radio Station. Later in life, he took various professional development courses and training. When the EPRDF came to power in 1991, the radio station was shut down, and Befekadu and other journalists at the station were sacked. In 1993, he joined the free press and founded his weekly newspaper, *Moged*, which was once a popular publication among Ethiopians. Befekadu served as Editor-in-Chief of the journal for more than a decade before fleeing the country and seeking shelter in Kenya following the regime's lengthy crackdown on the free press, which damaged him and his newspaper. Befekadu has been arrested a total of nine times.

### **Elias Gebru**

Elias was born at a facility of the Holeta Agricultural Research Center in Holeta town, around 70 kilometers from Addis Ababa. He grew up there and received his elementary and secondary schooling. Elias' father worked at the Center as a researcher. Following his secondary school education, Elias enrolled at the Wondo Genet Campus of the then Debu University (now Hawassa University), where he studied Forestry Science and received a BSc degree. However, his desire to be a journalist led him to relocate to Addis Ababa and enroll in a private college to study journalism for a year. He joined the private press after finishing his studies there and served in various capacities for a long time.

Elias began his journalism career as a reporter for the weekly newspaper "*Mesenzeria*" and was later elevated to editor. He then became the editor-in-chief of the once-popular weekly newspaper "*Awra Amba Times*". In his years, as a journalist, Elias served as Editor-in-Chief of the monthly magazine "*Inqu*" as well as other media publications.

### **Habtamu Minale**

Habtamu was born in Addis Ababa's Bole neighborhood in 1983. He went to Ayer Amba Junior and Senior Secondary Schools for his primary and secondary studies. Admas

University awarded him a BA in marketing and sales. He also obtained diplomas and certificates for several journalism training courses. Habtamu was a devout Orthodox Christian who had long served as a Sunday school teacher at the church. He was raised in a Christian home and has always had a passion for literature. He was actively engaging in a variety of literary contests at school and in Addis Ababa.

Before becoming a full-time journalist, Habtamu began writing pieces for newspapers and magazines as a freelancer. His journalistic career began with the weekly "*Kedami Geste*" (Front Page). After a few years there, he became deputy editor-in-chief of the previously popular magazine "*Jiret*" (Stream) and afterward the newspaper "*Ethio Mihidar*" (Ethio Scenario). He was also an associate editor at "*Qimisha*" (A Taste), a magazine published in Dubai.

### **Eyuel Fisseha**

Eyuel was born in Addis Ababa, Bole vicinity in 1983. He went to School of Tomorrow for elementary and junior high school. He went to Addis Ababa University's Commercial School after finishing his senior school studies at Dandi Boru High School and earning a BA in business administration. In addition to his attention to reading and writing since elementary school, Eyuel, who was passionate enough to be a journalist, later attended several journalism courses.

Although his academic education did not aid him in pursuing a career in journalism, his work as a freelance journalist for several newspapers and magazines helped him gain employment as a reporter for the weekly newspaper "*Finote Nestanet*" (The Way to Freedom). Later on, he worked as an editor. He later became deputy editor-in-chief of another weekly newspaper, "*Addis Geste*" (New Page). Eyuel was apprehended in a pub where he was having a wonderful time with his companions and held captive for a year by EPRDF regime security agents.

### **Mahlet Fantahun**

Mahlet was born in the Addis Ababa suburb of Saris in 1980. She went to Nifas Silk Primary and Senior Secondary School for her elementary and secondary schooling,

respectively. Mahlet was accepted to Hawassa University in the then South Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region after achieving the highest in her Matriculation exam. She earned her BA there after studying applied mathematics and computer science. Mahlet was an active member of the university's media club during her time there, and she discovered her true calling of being at least a freelance journalist in the future.

Following graduation, Mahlet worked as a statistics officer for several governmental and non-governmental organizations while also practicing journalism as a freelance journalist for various print media publications throughout the Meles era. However, Mahlet gained popularity among Ethiopians after she and her other eight companions created a blog page called "Zone 9" on the internet. The page's name comes from their regular visits to journalists in Kaliti, where they discovered that journalists were imprisoned in eight different zones within the prison. As a result, they chose the name Zone 9, which has since become well-known for its content.

Mahlet, the deputy editor of the site, was actively engaged in publishing various news and pieces on the blog until she and her other eight pals were detained by the EPRDF administration on unfounded terrorism allegations. Three of them were able to depart the nation, while Mahlet and the other five were captured by the federal police and secret agents and spent years in various jails throughout the city.

### **Befekadu Hailu**

Befekadu was born in the Addis Ababa suburb of French Legation in 1979. He went to Tigil Lenetsanet (formerly Tsigie Beshah) and Miazia 23 schools for his primary and junior secondary education, respectively. At Kefetenga 12 Senior Level School, he completed his senior secondary education. After finishing high school, he enrolled in Zega Business College and earned a BA in Management Information.

Befekadu began writing posts on many websites as a blogger until he joined Zone 9 blog post with his other eight buddies. Befekadu has previously worked as a production manager for Addis Ababa FM 96.3. He also worked for the channel as a producer and presenter of IT news and programs. Befekadu also worked as an editor for the monthly

magazines "Inqu" and "Wuyiyit", as well as the weekly newspaper "Addis Maleda". He also contributed to the prominent weekly newspaper "Addis Admas" regularly.

#### **4.4. Interpretation of Findings**

This researcher attempted to respond to six study questions aimed at gathering data from participants to aid in the description and interpretation of private press journalists' lived experiences during Meles Zenawi's administration of Ethiopia. The data associated with and utilized to support each of the research questions is shown in the findings related to each research question. For each study topic, the data acquired during the interview and reflection phase provides insight and evidence.

The findings of the results of conversations on themes related to each of the study topics are largely based on the hardships they had as a result of practicing journalism, while they acknowledge that there were also drawbacks on their part in terms of remaining ethical and professional while executing their duties.

##### **4.4.1. Interpretation of Findings of the First Research Question: Institutional and legal Obstacles Encountered by Private Press journalists**

**RQ1: What were the main institutional and legal obstacles that private press journalists encounter while carrying out their duties?**

This is an important question that is answered by the information provided in the accompanying themes identified and categorized by the researcher. In this regard, this research question has nine key themes: (a) *Practicing journalism*, (b) *Political leanings*, (c) *Journalism's ethical considerations*, (d) *Interfering with editorial autonomy*, (e) *Strategy for discovering the truth*, (f) *Interference by politicians*, (g) *Constitutional Liberties*, (h) *Impeding laws on press freedom*, and (i) *Was Meles Zenawi an authoritarian leader?*

The researcher categorized the subordinate themes under the nine emergent themes listed above, which are: (a) "If I weren't an Ethiopian, I wouldn't be a journalist," (b) "No one can serve two masters," (c) "To be or not to be" - prejudiced! , (d)

Interventionist tactics, (e) "In Pursuit of the Truth," (f) "We will kill you!", (g) "We have a constitution, but not constitutionalism". The following is an analysis of the findings of the results of these subordinate themes, which were highlighted by the participants' narration. The interpretation is based on their descriptions of their lived experiences during the Meles era, which are described in great detail in Research Questions 2-3.

#### **4.4.1.1. Practicing Journalism**

Journalism during the Meles era can be divided into three broad groups. The first is referred to as "A period of anarchy," and it spans the first seven years (1991-1997) after the EPRDF assumed control. Following the introduction of the Press Freedom Law, former Derg propaganda cadres and military personnel began publishing magazines and newspapers to combat the dictatorship that had won them militarily through their writings. They were, of course, successful in making the regime shudder by exploiting their media outlets. In the same way that we see today on social media, war propaganda and the creation of lies and fake news were common.

The youngsters and city boys on their part opened magazines and newspapers which gave coverage to pornographic materials, and successfully sold out thousands of copies per week. In general, during the first era, tabloid press outlets reigned over the country. It is also important to remember here that there was no school or center in the country that gave training or educated journalism as a profession.

The second era was called "The Golden Era" which spans from 1998-2005. During this period, credible and highly readable newspapers such as Addis Admas, Reporter, and business-oriented publications like Fortune and Capital began circulation. Although few, there were also other newspapers starting to publish their outlets. During this era, the private press reached a maturity level and became successful in accomplishing to refute the state media propaganda.

The third era was named "The era of depression", and it came after the 2005 election chaos which resulted in the massive arrests and harassment of private press journalists. By then it became difficult to get a publishing license as the previous times, and many journalists were persecuted by secret service agents of the regime, and as a

result, they started to flee from the country. Due to this happening the development of the profession was stunted and began to move downward.

On the contrary, during this time many journalism training schools became operational. The government gave a new approach to its media by calling it Developmental Journalism. The media was targeted to propagate only good and positive things about the administration. The government labeled its journalists “those who herald the development news”, while it labeled the private press journalists as “those who preach the sad news”. But, in the latter group, many journalists called themselves “Revolutionary journalists”, and some began to operate from abroad after opening a satellite television. Although there were FM radio stations that began to air their services at that time, they all were afraid of giving coverage to political issues, rather than focusing on entertainment aspects (Ethiopian Mass Media Profile, 2006).

To provide a general picture of the cost of practicing journalism during EPRDF era of Ethiopia, this researcher interpreted the views and positions of the research participants to provide a general picture of the cost of practicing journalism during the stated period in Ethiopia. The participants' descriptions of the difficulties they faced while pursuing their profession during EPRDF reign can be summarized as "an agonizing and severe lived experience."

***“Being a journalist for the private press during the EPRDF era...”***

"...even in authoritarian governments, journalists can discover ways of disseminating risky material," Hem (2014) writes. This occurs because “authorities do not have complete and comprehensive control over the media, either because they cannot or do not need to, but also because journalists take advantage of censorship regime flaws" (p.1-2).

This study aims to learn first-hand accounts of the participants blamed for partisan journalistic practices about the overall scenario and challenges they face while imprisoned during EPRDF era of Ethiopia. Of course, as participants went through similar agony and sufferings, one might expect a similar description of the issue from them, but this researcher purposefully designed the theme “Practicing Journalism” first to

understand their motivation for practicing journalism, whether it is motivated by their ideological orientation, political hatred, or purely professional interest.

“One badly lived event” can be regarded as Iskinder Nega's experience as a journalist under Meles. He was the first journalist from a private news organization to be "incarcerated, tortured, and tormented for openly criticizing and opposing Meles' government" and publishing news critical of political authorities. According to him, after the first two or three editions of "Ethiopis" were published, the authorities imprisoned and tortured him and the editor-in-chief, Teferra Asmare.

Then arresting and torturing journalists became "a common occurrence in Ethiopia." Meles' regime exacted vengeance on individuals who questioned its methods of governance by detaining and torturing them. For Iskinder, working as a journalist during the Meles era was a very different experience, as "the regime had been arresting, intimidating, and torturing journalists for nearly a quarter-century," and all horrific stories about the private press began with his wrongful detention.

Temesgen, in a similar vein, described the difficult situation he faced as a journalist during Meles' reign as "a life experience whose memory still agonizes his spirit." Temsngen claims that his drive to reveal "the dictatorial essence of Meles' regime" cost him a lot of money. "I was completely fearless. Of course, there were constant threats and harassment, which culminated in those security guys specifically assigned to the private press crackdown operation placing me in jail. The administration had also been gently assaulting the press, which it saw as a way to force us to resign."

Sileshi Hagos was another participant who shared Temesgen's viewpoint. Sileshi recalls being appalled by the undemocratic nature of all of Meles' elections, particularly the 2002 election, which resulted in the deaths of over a hundred innocent civilians in Addis Ababa alone. As a result, he resolved to join the private press and use "his pen" to combat the regime.

He claims that he would not be a journalist if he were not Ethiopian. Sileshi was compelled to become a journalist by the corrupt political system of Meles' dictatorship, which regrettably coincided with his youth. The horrific memories of the harassment and

torture he endured continued to haunt him, yet he was relieved later when the dictatorship fell apart.

For Wubeshet, the Meles era was "a terrible time in his life" that he lived through for about a decade as a result of his profession as a writer. For him, reporting in Ethiopia is like the Israelites' trip through the wilderness to escape the Pharaoh's servitude in Egypt. He compares Meles' treatment of them to Pharaoh's treatment of the Israelites. Pharaoh released the Israelites, but only for a brief time. And, according to Wubeshet, this is exactly what he did over the private press regularly.

Riyot Alemu criticized both Meles' regime and the private press for all the heinous events that occurred in Ethiopia during the specified period. According to her, the majority of the private press is prone to sensationalism and fabrication of lies, but Meles' rule had begun to be harsh in all respects, similar to the harshest authoritarian regimes in history.

According to Reyot's assessment of the situation, the EPRDF regime cannot be held solely responsible for the harassment, intimidation, and suffering that it has inflicted on private press journalists, but how the majority of the private press journalists have conducted themselves has also contributed significantly to their suffering.

On the subject of "lack of accountability" on the side of the press, Wosenseged Gebrekidan agreed with Riyot's assessment, as it has contributed to the bleak situation faced by journalists under Meles Zenawi's tenure. "...Most journalists in the private press failed to adhere to journalistic professionalism and other ethical values. "Rather than functioning as professionals, the journalists were acting as freedom warriors," Wosenseged remarked. So, in addition to the regime's negative attitude toward journalists, his depiction suggests that the unprofessionalism shown by the journalists themselves was a major factor in the private press's quagmire.

On the other hand, journalist Befekadu Moreda described the situation in practicing journalism during the Meles era in general as "a period of struggle for private press journalists to free the Ethiopian people from oppression and bring true democracy to Ethiopia," while Elias Gebru described practicing journalism during the Meles era as

"an experience...similar to walking on thorny ground, or living on an island surrounded by fire."

Another research participant, Habtamu Minale, described working in the private press during the Meles era as "working in a very challenging and fearful environment," while Eyoel Fisseha stated that "no profession was as such not so fearful to join other than becoming a journalist of the private press during Meles era."

Mahlet Fantahun laments that being a journalist in an impoverished nation like Ethiopia, where you need to make a living, would be a difficult job to devote full time to. As a result, she began writing for several newspapers and journals on a freelance basis, focusing on social and political issues. Mahlet's pieces were mostly on politics, and she formed a group with other writers with similar interests to launch a blog. They subsequently started the now-famous "Zone 9" blog, which was inspired by their Kaliti jail mates who were imprisoned in the Zone 8 room and were also nine in number.

Befekadu Hailu divides journalism during the Meles era into three broad categories: "A period of anarchy," which spans the first seven years (1991-1997) after the EPRDF took control, and it was controlled by mainly former Derg propaganda cadres and military personnel began publishing magazines and newspapers to combat the dictatorship that had won them militarily through their writing; "A period of the order," which spans the first seven years (1991-1997) after the EPRDF took control, and he confesses that by leveraging the state's media outlets, they were able to make the regime tremble, much as war propaganda and the propagation of lies and fake news were commonplace on social media in the past.

He dubbed the second era "The Golden era," which lasted from 1998 to 2005 and saw the introduction of respectable and highly reading newspapers like Addis Admas and Reporter, as well as business-oriented journals like Fortune and Capital. Of course, they were few, but they demonstrated that the private press had matured and was capable of effectively countering state media propaganda.

The third era, which began after the 2005 election upheaval and resulted in huge arrests and persecution of private press journalists, was dubbed: "The Era of Depression"

by Befekadu. He was distressed by the overall situation, which included the difficulty in obtaining a publication license, as well as the harassment of numerous journalists by regime secret service operatives. The development of the profession has been stymied as a result of these events, and it has begun to decline, Befekadu lamented. During this time, he acknowledged one encouraging development: numerous journalistic training colleges became functioning.

The researcher concluded from the participants' descriptions and depictions of their lived experiences while practicing journalism during the EPRDF era that the regime had drawn a line in the sand for the press when it came to covering political issues, and that journalists could not enjoy the freedom guaranteed by the constitution without first looking behind them, especially when covering political issues, and that led them to practicing partisan journalism.

A journalist who chooses to criticize the government, its policies, and laws, or attempts to reveal corruption practices, has undoubtedly crossed a perilous line that could land him or her in prison. Of course, numerous journalists carried out their journalistic duties in an unprofessional manner, especially that of practicing the profession in a partisan manner, which contributed to the bleak situation that existed under EPRDF era.

#### **4.4.1.2. Political leanings**

In Matthew 6, verse 24, Jesus cautions his disciples not to be lured in by the devil's deceit and begin serving him as well, when their actual purpose was to serve God. Similarly, this researcher asked the participants if they were members of any of the opposition political groups active during Meles Zenawi's tenure, while also working full-time as professional journalists.

The purpose of asking the participants this question is to help the researcher understand and interpret whether their political stance and views during the Meles era influenced them professionally in supporting or opposing political parties or ideologies in some way and to see if it conflicted with their professional responsibility and duty. The interpretive side of this topic would also help the researcher comprehend how political

affiliation can influence journalists' output while performing their duties, leading them to engage in unethical behavior while performing their duties.

In this context, Tilak (2020) identifies various ethical issues that political reporting faces, one of which is transparency and privacy, in which journalists must constantly identify themselves as reporters rather than politicians. Another concern on the list is Social Accountability, which requires the journalist to consider how he contextualizes political incidents, trends, and even the portrayal of political people in his reporting.

According to Tilak, another crucial aspect is Neutrality, in which the journalist learns about the prejudices he brings to a topic and whether or not he is aware of how they are affecting his reporting. Fact-checking is another ethical concern that "journalists must examine as they are compelled to flag out misunderstood facts, or blatant lies, in reporting" (pp.458-459).

For example, the researcher discovered The New York Times Company Policy on Ethics in Journalism, titled "Ethical Journalism," which supports employees' rights to participate in civic and political activities (such as voting). However, the company's policy regarding journalistic participation in politics was changed in the following way:

"Neither our company's nor our business unit's or publication's good name belongs to any of us. No one has the right to use it for personal gain. As a result, the firm places restrictions on other forms of political participation.... Journalists are not involved in politics. While employees have the right to vote and register for party primaries, they must avoid doing anything that could jeopardize their professional impartiality or that of our journalistic operations (2004, pp. 69, 89).

We can deduce from this reputable worldwide newspaper's policy that its journalists are not permitted to join any political organization because this would jeopardize their neutrality in all of their professional operations.

The participants in this study were receptive to the issue and obstacles of becoming a member of a political party. However, they could not deny that they had their

political preferences. Throughout his interaction with them, the researcher interpreted their position and stance in connection to being a journalist while also being a member of a political party.

***“Regarding becoming into a political journalist”***

According to Craig (2007), print media "...remains as a dominant form of news media and persistently continues as a politically powerful medium (p.90)" despite the advent of the Internet and competition from television. It was true that print media played a role in advancing political problems in Ethiopia as well.

The researcher wonders if journalists were affiliated with political organizations at all or not at all. In this regard, the participants have responded to the above inquiry with their various perspectives.

Even though Iskinder endorsed the idea of being politically neutral as a better alternative to follow, this researcher recognized from his explanation that it should not be considered a required responsibility for all journalists. Iskinder Nega was a member of the All Amhara Unity Organization (AAUO) for a brief time "to assist in its reformation process," and then he quit on his own will. According to Iskinder, most newspapers and magazines in industrialized countries are controlled by political parties, which means that journalists are directly or indirectly promoting or propagating the principles of the political party that owns their media business.

Temesgen Desalegn has never been a member of a political party, but he sees no reason why journalists should. For him, the most important thing for journalists to accomplish is to provide everyone with an equal platform and to serve them ethically. For him, the idea that being a member of a political party will make journalists less ethical in their reporting does not hold water (Tilak, 2020, p.258). "Why are journalists barred from using their civic rights to join political parties when others do?" he inquired.

However, according to Wubeshet Taye, becoming linked with a political party would not be "a good option," even though journalists have every right to do so. The researcher has learned from his argument that even if they could have carried out their

professional duties in an ethical manner, their reporting would instill skepticism in their audience.

Riyot Alemu, a former member of the Unity for Justice and Democracy Party (Andinet Party), believes that journalists should be able to join whatever political party they like. She backed Iskinder and Temesgen's arguments that it is their right as citizens to join one.

Sileshi Hagos, another research participant, was a member of the "Andinet party" (Unity Party), and he sees no conflict between being a journalist and being a member of a political party. He used CNN and Fox TV's recent coverage of the US presidential election as an example of how media institutions, let alone their journalists, openly endorse political parties.

A journalist, for Sileshi, is a professional in the same way that a carpenter offers service with his woodwork; the journalist also provides information to the public. The journalist, like the carpenter, has the right to join any political party of his choosing. According to Sileshi's reasoning, journalists who do not respect their professional ethics in their reporting do so owing to a lack of information, not because of their political or ideological affinity. It is clear from Sileshi's logic that a professional journalist handles his job and his political interests separately.

When Wosenseged Gebrekidan was a journalist, he was never a member of any political organization. Being a member of a political organization, in his opinion, would open a loophole that would jeopardize the audience's confidence and credibility, which is critical for any media business's survival.

Befekadu Moreda was aware that he had every right as a citizen to join a political party, but he chose not to do so. He didn't hide the fact that there were political parties whose plans and philosophies he supported, but he preferred to stay impartial. He argued that being linked with a political party would influence a journalist's reporting and push them to take a favoring approach.

Journalists Elias Gebru, Habtamu Minale, and Euel Fisseha all agreed that the Meles regime had accused them of being members and supporters of opposition political groups even though they had never joined any. Instead, they were covering the activities of opposition political groups since they had no other options, whereas the regime had its mouthpieces, such as ETV and Addis Zemen. The regime's accusation, according to all three journalists, was a blatant concoction of lies intended to tarnish their efforts and professional contributions. They were, however, forthright in their assertion that a journalist had every right as a citizen to join any political party of his or her choosing.

Mahlet had never joined a political party but had attended party events and conferences. She wrote and posted political analysis and reporting on her blog using the knowledge she gained there. Attending political events was an excellent opportunity for her because it allowed her to gain a better awareness of the issues and struggles Ethiopians endured under Meles Zenawi's regime. However, the regime's leaders did not appreciate her reporting, accusing her of inciting terrorism in Ethiopia. According to this scholar, Mahlet's work mostly focused on denouncing the regime for different human rights violations that occurred around the country.

Befekadu Hailu has never been a member of any of the political parties that existed at the time. He further claims that just because he agrees or disagrees with a political party's political doctrine does not mean he was a member or opposed it. He insists that being a member of a political party is not a problem for him because it is a right that all citizens have. He does, however, believe that being neutral is the greatest way for journalists to gain trust in their reporting.

After carefully observing and analyzing the responses of the participants, this researcher concluded that, while journalists' rights to join a political party of their choice, like those of other citizens, must be respected, it is equally important for them to avoid becoming a political party member for the sake of neutrality - an ethical task that journalists must perform daily.

#### **4.4.1.3. Journalism's ethical considerations**

The newspaper participates in the political process through the advocacy of specific causes, writes Craig (2007), "and this occasionally culminates directly in triggering political action" (p.77).

Media bias is one of the most contentious issues in journalism, particularly when it comes to covering political matters (D'Alessio et al, 2000). Media bias stems from journalists' uneven treatment of two parties involved in political conflicts, as well as their "writing biased news that benefits one side" (Entman, 2007). This researcher conducts a lengthy talk with the participants about the importance of ethical standards in their work and how to prevent prejudiced reporting issues.

During Meles Zenawi's presidency, the private press was accused of "bias" in political reporting and of "deliberately" ignoring ethical journalism principles (Hallelujah, 2007). The majority of the participants dispute the charge, claiming that because the regime had closed its doors to the private press, they had no choice but to relay information gathered from opposition political groups. However, some of the panelists recognized that private press journalists engaged in unethical tactics, particularly when reporting on political problems.

This researcher questioned participants whether they were advocating a political goal that they believed was ideal for Ethiopia, or if they were seeking to follow journalistic ethics and conventions.

***“To be or not to be” - biased!***

Iskinder Nega, who is in the majority, agreed that journalists must be devoid of any political attachment to gain the trust of their readers, but this does not apply to how journalism is performed around the world. He said that in the United States and Europe, various newspapers and magazines openly promote the agenda and goals of political parties that they admire and support.

However, according to Iskinder, the situation in Ethiopia was considerably different, with no single political party capable of even paying its office rent, let alone

supporting the private press to play a role in political action or aid in the continuation of the regime's struggle.

Temesgen Desalegn takes a distinct approach to ethical journalism, arguing that "...what journalists had been taught for a long time was how Western journalism had progressed in terms of professionalism and ethical principles, but not in reality." He had believed that while practicing journalism in Ethiopia, journalists must adhere to certain ethical values, but during his time in the profession, all press outlets took a revolutionary stance by boldly condemning the regime as authoritarian and pleading for its overthrow.

According to Temesgen's interpretation of the term, "revolutionary" refers to the task that the private press had been assigned, which was not to assist, advise, or criticize the regime's policy or administration in a positive sense, but rather to demand a government change through a democratic election process.

To Wubeshet Taye, ethical journalism practice during the Meles era was unimaginable. The regime was the primary factor that prevented journalists from adhering to the profession's ethical values. They were denied their right to access information, which is protected by the Constitution. Journalists who have been denied their basic right to acquire information will almost certainly fabricate their own story. And this had made journalists accountable for being unprofessional and unethical, according to Wubeshet's interpretation of the situation because there was no other option when one found himself under an authoritarian government like Meles Zenawi's.

It was difficult for Riyot to adhere to the professional and ethical ideals of journalism when she was under the dictatorship of Meles Zenawi since the regime officials were adamant about not accepting any type of criticism or condemnation of their actions. According to her interpretation, they were portraying the press as an anti-peace and anti-democratic force, which led to their administration being autocratic and totalitarian.

Riyot acknowledged that there were print sources that disseminated false information or fabricated lies. However, the regime's classification of the private press as a whole as "unethical and unprofessional" aggravated the problem. According to her

perception of the fact, it would be absurd to ask or even expect private press journalists to be ethical in an environment where they were classified as enemies of the state and denied their right to obtain information.

Sileshi viewed the situation as dismal for journalists at the time since the administration had already labeled the private press as anti-development and anti-democratic agents from the start. So, whatever attempt the journalists made to be ethical in their reporting, it had little possibility of being accepted by the regime because they had already been designated as a key enemy (by the regime).

According to Wosenseged of the "Ethop" newspaper, adhering to the principles of professionalism and ethical values of the profession was interpreted quite differently by Meles and his cohorts, who believed that journalists who understood ethics had to report good things about the regime, as the state-owned media had done for years. However, he claimed that the concept of ethical journalism for private press journalists is "reporting the truth and the facts."

He and his colleagues were adamant that "...journalists must reveal malpractices, maladministration, and other criminal activities performed by the regime's officials and their accomplices," and they believed they had already paid the price.

Befekadu Moreda compared how Mandela was once regarded as a terrorist by Western countries to how Meles' dictatorship regarded the private press, criticizing and branding the free press as a gutter press and those who undermined the nation's peace. Mandela, on the other hand, was revered as a liberation fighter and liberator by his people and supporters. Similarly, the Ethiopian public praised the private press as someone who waged a good fight to bring and blossom freedom and democracy in the country.

Befekadu Moreda didn't deny that some of them performed unethical journalism, but he argued that their actions shouldn't even be labeled as wrong. His problem was: a lack of opportunity to receive proper training at least once during their careers, whereas government media journalists were sent abroad to further their studies; in addition, the regime had only granted access to information to its media, while free press journalists were denied access. For him, the only option left for most free press journalists was to

produce news based on local sources or repeat what foreign sources had to say about Ethiopia.

As a result of the authoritarian nature of the dictatorship in power, journalists Elias Gebru and Habtamu Minale couldn't abide themselves or examine the ethical norms of journalism. In addition to the regime's refusal to recognize them as media organizations, the private press had no access to information, which posed the greatest obstacle in terms of upholding the profession's ethics, as they were executing their obligations in an embarrassing situation.

It had been a regular effort for Mahlet and the other bloggers on the team to double-check every detail before publishing it on their website. Though it was their key condition to write and post on their blog that they examine ethical standards in journalism, it was often difficult to acquire easy access to material from the government side. Mahlet stated that it had contributed to the challenge of balancing the contents of the items they were posting to some extent.

Her expression of admittance says it all: “We were using an electronically devised system of communication didn't mean that we ignored the issue of accountability. So, we used every access at hand to verify facts and check the truth before posting it. Unfortunately, that couldn't frequently happen due to the authoritarian nature of Meles regime which had been refusing to give information to anyone, except the government media.”

Even though numerous people provided him with various forms of information, Mahelet's team leader Befekadu Hailu claims that he never used or published anything until he verified the source. Because his job required him to spend most of his time assessing and interpreting facts rather than just using them, Befekadu constantly double-checked their veracity with additional sources.

The participants' responses revealed that there were frequent problems with their reporting, as many did not practice ethical journalism, but they placed the blame primarily on Meles' regime for at least the following reasons: the regime refused to give private press journalists access to information; the regime did not recognize the private

press as a media institution; and the regime classified the private press as an enemy and anti-democratic organization.

#### **4.4.1.4. Interfering with editorial autonomy**

According to Kassirer (1999), editorial autonomy or independence is the concept of editors' authority or influence over the editorial content of their publication. In this regard, editors have complete control over "what is published, what is not published, when items are published, and what (if any) amendments are made before publication," as well as the right to "decide what is published, what is not published, when items are published, and what (if any) amendments are made prior to publication" (Malone, 2002, p.314). Editors, on the other hand, are compelled to "operate within social, legal, and ethical contexts that limit their independence" (Bereza, 2002, p.1231).

One of the most important rights that journalists must have in their daily work is "editorial or journalistic autonomy." Journalistic autonomy is "A professional concept among journalists that they should not be swayed by interested parties, especially whether they stand to lose or gain by a story," according to the Oxford - Dictionary of Media and Communication. "This includes criticism or advice from managers outside of the media profession or from other groups in society" (Chandler & Munday, 2011).

Journalistic autonomy is also defined by Weaver et al., (2007) as "the latitude that a practitioner has in carrying out his or her occupational tasks" (p. 70)., On the other hand, Reich & Hanitzsch (2013) define journalistic autonomy as "the extent to which journalists can make decisions free of demands from management, financial factors, and other forces that exist inside the news ecosystem" ( p. 135).

Another subordinate subject on which this researcher tries to understand participants' reactions is interventions on editorial freedom or independence while private press journalists were exercising or practicing journalism during Meles' tenure, as well as how they dealt with the pressure. To better understand the challenges and obstacles faced by private press journalists in determining what to publish and what not to publish, the researcher thought it useful to interpret their lived experiences to illustrate, in a sense, the phenomenon they were compelled to endure. The following is the interpretative analysis

of the participants' responses regarding the extent to which they were able to use their editorial freedom throughout the EPRDF era.

***“The move came from the regime”***

It is absurd, according to Iskinder Nega, to think of opposition political parties or leaders interfering with the free press' daily routine duty, because the political engine throughout the EPRDF era was operated by the free press, and not by the opposition political parties. Comparing the EPRDF era to the Emperor era, in which the students' movement played a big role in overthrowing the monarchical state, he argued that the private press, not the political parties, had a major role in overthrowing the EPRDF rule.

If there were any interventions on their editorial independence, it was imposed by the regime, not by outsiders. The regime openly displayed its authoritarian nature by imposing various restrictions on them, argued Iskinder, and later "...revealed its interferences by harassing, arresting, and torturing free press journalists," in addition to closing their offices and confiscating whatever they owned and using to run their jobs.

Temesgen Desalegn doesn't recall anyone interfering with his editorial independence or telling him how to report or present a story. Temesgen, who was the editor-in-chief of one newspaper and four magazines, *Feteh*, *Addis Times*, *Leilina*, *Fact*, and *Feteh*, explained that his editorial staff employed an opinion format for the problems covered in all of the media, rather than a new one. He emphasized that his editing team, and no one else, made all of the decisions on what kind of information should be included and what should be ignored. However, he also stated that the EPRDF regime used the state media as a propaganda machine and that opposition parties use the private press "to some extent" as a platform to reach out to the public in the same way.

Wubeshet Taye admits to having crossed the line set by various groups and individuals for their editorial liberty. He dealt with such acts of intervention using two mechanisms: reviewing the editorial policy of the media and agreeing to the terms mentioned in it before joining one, or resigning from his position whenever he was confronted with any form of interference. The interventions, according to Wubeshet, came not only from political officials but also from his editors. He resigned from his job

after the editor-in-chief of the newspaper where he was working as an editor refused to print a story that he had been investigating for months without giving him a good rationale for his decision. That was another way for the journalists of the time to "deal with such editorial autonomy boundary crossings."

Riyot Alemu had never allowed someone to force his or her will on her, forcing her to do things that went against her principles. She did agree, however, that both the regime and publishers engaged in interventionist methods. While conducting their jobs, she and her colleagues had exercised "relative freedom," and she stated "relative freedom" because the pressure came not only from government officials and security officers but also from the publishers' side. For example, the day after Riyot reported on how secret service agents were falsely accusing people of being terrorists, she was arrested. When asked about Riyot's case during his presentation to the parliament regarding his government activity, Prime Minister Meles, the leader of the EPRDF, allegedly said that she was not a journalist but rather a criminal who was advancing a certain political interest.

Of course, the regime continued to threaten the publishers, and she couldn't blame them for their reluctance to publish her findings or pieces. However, she persisted in resisting any attempts at interference by security personnel and members of the regime, such as making her report exclusively on non-political matters or stopping her criticism of the government, until she was detained and taken into custody.

Interferences for Sileshi Hagos mainly came from publishers, especially when it came to political news or pieces. According to him, the administration saw the majority of private press journalists, particularly those who worked for political newspapers and magazines, as "state enemies", and as a result, publishers were constantly afraid. They sometimes refused to publish political stories "...after the reporter/editor had worked tirelessly to investigate the issue". Even after providing evidence to their publishers, journalists were sometimes subjected to restrictions on their editorial freedom. Sileshi believed that the threat of government intrusion into journalists' editorial freedom came not only from politicians but sometimes also from publishers, in the context of the then-private press.

Wosenseged Gebrekidan was the type of guy who fought outside interference in his editorial independence, to the point where no one had ever requested him to create a narrative in their style and had it published. Of fact, he had been using political figures like Professor Mesfin Woldemariam to "give him information to investigate," but he had never been told how to report or present a story by anyone.

However, he points out that there were instances of interference from the publisher of the newspaper where he was serving as editor-in-chief, which prompted him to resign. The publisher intervened by publishing a series of stories accusing the then-President of the Orthodox Church of various offenses without first obtaining his editorial approval. Wosenseged understood that he was the one who was being held responsible for tales based on unfounded information. He resigned from his work because the publisher failed to listen to his request not to interfere with his editorial independence and continued to publish additional similar tales of the same type. According to Wosenseged, he recognized that the publisher had acted not only on his behalf but also on the behalf of the author.

Befekadu Moreda had never tolerated any interference in his journalistic independence, whether from government authorities or opposition party leaders performing their professional obligations. Naturally, he said, he had been contacted by both regime representatives and some political figures to produce articles supporting their agendas. One instance he can think of is the article he wrote on how Illubabor Zone residents' rights are violated by government authorities. The very following day, a high government official contacted and threatened to put him in jail unless he published a piece refuting it. But Befekadu, more than everything, he valued his freedom to investigate the truth and report it without fear of bias or favoritism. However, he did not deny that his team had obtained information from members of opposition parties, which they had used in their reports, and that interferences like halting the publication process and threatening journalists to stop looking into issues pertaining to the the people who are in power, had occurred as a result of EPRDF regime's hostile approach against the free press.

Advertisers were frequently the source of such interferences, according to Elias Gebru. They tried to persuade them to publish tales that were favorable to their business or planned activities regularly. Publishers were also attempting to impose their political will on editors, particularly in terms of how to write or display tales to readers. Elias admitted that there were tendencies of interferences with their editorial independence, such as hindering materials from publishing or editing them according to their political interest, when it came to explicitly supporting opposition political groups.

Habtamu Minale had complete freedom to write or report on any subject "as long as he kept his publishers safe from the regime's wrath of anger," because whenever they smelled a threat of allowing him to cover his story, or felt it would jeopardize their business, they avoided publishing it or prevented him from doing any further investigation. Those wealthy individuals who had put their money into the print media, according to Habtamu, wanted nothing more than a handsome profit.

According to Eyuel Fisseha, editorial autonomy or freedom is determined by the editorial policy that a media company puts into practice, as well as the professional integrity of the editors who work there. So, before opting to join any media, he had always examined the specifics specified in the editorial policy of the media and understood the terms contained there regarding practicing the profession. He was fortunate to have skilled editors who respected him and allowed him to exercise the freedom that comes with the job. However, he had been subjected to repeated government intrusion, which intimidated him and his pals. They were threatened with detention and harsh punishment if they published anything critical of the regime, but they refused.

Opposition political parties did not interfere with Mahlet Fantahun's or her colleagues' ability to publish materials that promoted them. On the other hand, the regime was enraged by what the opposition was reporting and posting on their site, even though the opposition never attempted to interfere with their daily editorial independence. Following repeated threats from the regime, its secret operatives and police officers detained Mahlet and her colleagues, and imprisoned them accusing them of publishing information and news acquired from opposition political parties.

Mahlet confessed that they were providing extensive coverage to the opposition because they were willing to provide information and respond positively to any type of criticism. After consistently warning them, the regime ultimately intervened in their editorial independence, arresting them, shutting down their site, and accusing them of promoting a terrorist agenda with the intent of overturning the state by force. This incident was extensively covered on a number of websites, including The Guardian news paper's April 2014 edition.

Befekadu Hailu argues that his involvement in politics (democracy) led to his entry into the writing profession and that as a result, all of his pieces, which were published in a variety of media outlets as well as on his blogs, represented the activist objective and purpose. As a result, whenever Befekadu joins a media company, he makes it a priority to assess if the institution is favorable to attaining his objectives. He doesn't recall ever having his editorial independence questioned in this regard.

According to Deuze (2005), journalistic autonomy, along with objectivity, immediacy, and ethics, is a basic building component of modern journalism. Three sorts of interferences were characterized by the research participants as interfering with their editorial autonomy. The first is a sort of intervention that stems from the regime's hostile attitude toward the independent press. As a result, secret service officers and police had been following them and imprisoning them for publishing tales that were critical of the regime.

Then the interference from their publishers follows. Private press publishers who use the media to promote their political or commercial agenda frequently interfere with the editorial team's autonomy. The majority of the participants in this study resigned because the publishers interfered with their editorial independence and crossed over their professional ethics.

Advertisers were the third and last category of interfering party. Advertisers, according to the participants' accounts, tried to stifle their editorial independence by telling them how to write and where to disseminate news or articles about their company. Because the print media is so reliant on advertising revenue, most publishers have ceded

their editorial independence and integrity to the marketers' desires and interests. Finally, the burden falls on the editors, who oversee the day-to-day operations of the media and are forced to give in to marketers' demands at the risk of their professional autonomy.

After the researcher conducted interviews and discussions with study participants, it became evident that the participants' jobs were likely being impacted by various forms of government interferences, such as preventing them from accessing information, harassing them for publishing political stories, and threatening them for looking into political issues, as well as by publishers and editors who have pursued their own political and personal interests.

#### **4.4.1.5. Strategy for discovering the truth**

"Journalists must develop a sense of evidence and forthrightly acknowledge the limits of available information... dissect slogans and abstractions, and refuse to withhold the news or put moral uplift or any cause ahead of veracity," says Walter Lipmann (1922, p.134), one of the strongest proponents of objective journalism.

Shudson (1978) expands on Lipmann's approach, asking journalists to "...combine professionalism with claims to neutrality" (p.151). Jones (2009), for example, states that "Journalists' mission is not to convey the truth, but to help the public decide what is real" (p.83), and he applauds journalistic efforts to "discover a practical truth, not an abstract, flawless truth" (ibid, p.88). In a similar vein, Rhaman (2017) concurs with Jones' assertion, stating, "...the truth journalists seek is a functional one" (p.82).

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in its inaugural declaration that was adopted in Tunis also defines journalists' duties and rights regarding ethics. And in this declaration, which also serves as a code of professional conduct, states that the first duty of journalists involved in gathering, transmitting, disseminating, and commenting on news and information in describing events, is "respect for truth and the right of the public to truth" (IFJ, 2019).

This researcher conducted in-depth interviews with study participants to learn why the government had accused them of publishing fabricated news and lies, and the majority of them refuted the accusations by describing the various mechanisms they used

to verify the reliability of the information they obtained, as well as the challenges they faced in doing so. The participants were asked about the procedures they use to verify the reliability of their sources; as well as how they accept the information they obtain as true. Based on the responses of the participants, the researcher attempted to analyze the gap between "what they considered to be true and the objective truth on the ground."

### ***“In Pursuit of the Truth”***

Iskinder Nega is adamant that they (his editorial team members) have never lied; or that they have never lied on purpose to deceive the public with their reports. On the contrary, he accused the dictatorship of supporting newspapers and publications that published deceptive lies to undermine the private press's public reputation. Even though they were up against such a difficult task, his team had access to sensitive information thanks to inside sources from the government and members of opposing political groups.

However, according to Iskinder EPRDF authorities dubbed them "the gutter press," and they were imprisoned, tormented, and tortured for publishing and exposing the truth to the public. Iskinder refused to accept the government's accusations that they were "fabricators of lies," arguing that they "...make the tales readable using spectacular headlines or incendiary contents to arouse public outrage." Their goal in releasing news was not to spread misleading information, but to "initiate public outrage against the regime by employing well-founded truth."

It had been a challenging test for Temesgen Desalegn and his crew to continuously verify the reliability of the information they obtained from sources. Of course, other professional approaches were utilized to get at the truth, such as cross-checking collected information with other sources; or digging deeper into the topic by spending sufficient time. But according to him, there was no need to be suspicious of the fact that the information collected was backed up by documents.

Wubeshet Taye and his team, according to him, were concerned about establishing the truth before releasing the material to the public. They used a variety of check methods to ensure that the information they had obtained was accurate. They did cross-check the information with other sources, despite the regime's refusal to grant them

access to information. "I frequently send the material to my lawyer for review, and he comments on whether or not the issue makes me culpable in a court of law," Wubshet said. Despite completing the difficult process of truth-verification mechanisms in the Ethiopian media at the time, Wubshet was sentenced to fourteen years in prison for a crime that the judge was unaware of.

Before reporting and releasing the information, Reiyot Alemu attempted to use all available means and ways to check or verify its accuracy. She used an investigative questioning strategy to verify material gathered by oral or written means, as well as to cross-check the information's credibility with other sources. According to her, the biggest issue was the regime's officials' animosity toward them, as they were unconcerned with the time-consuming procedure of verifying material before releasing it. Every news article enraged them as if journalists were deliberately criticizing or attacking them. "It would have been easier for them to deliver us the information we were seeking," she says, rather than getting rapid answers.

In a similar vein, Sileshi Hagos described the numerous processes they use to verify the accuracy and dependability of the data they collect. For example, if the material obtained appeared to disrupt public order or gave them the sense that it jeopardized the state's national security, they did not disclose it. They also frequently double-check the information they get from other sources before posting it. However, during EPRDF era, they were confronted with a paradox: "...the regime's expectation that whatever information provided by the government, but not from neutral or opposition source, be published."

Wosenseged described the situation about truth-seeking as follows: "Within his team, we went beyond the traditional and ethical manner of journalism and approached people inside the government, or we checked the facts from other publications that we believed had better access to government sources." Wosenseged cited the newspapers "Addis Zemen" and "Reporter" as good examples of how they verified the truth. However, Wosenseged did not deny that the majority of the private press was concerned not with adhering to professional norms or procedures for fact-checking, but with obtaining materials that could be easily sold in the market. And, in the long term, such

journalistic methods likely led to the public's loss of faith in the private press, since some of them began to publish news based on fabrications.

Befekadu Moreda was repeatedly arrested for spreading misleading information based on unverified sources. However, he claimed that his team had done all possible to validate the information they had obtained from various sources. Of course, they ran across issues, such as the regime's refusal to give them access to information. He claims that the regime had closed its doors to them, leaving them without any way to examine or validate the material they were getting, whether it was accurate or not, before releasing it.

On the other hand, Elias Gebreu claims to utilize a variety of procedures to verify information, including cross-checking with other sources, verifying documents, and attempting direct contact with the person or group in question. Though he acknowledged that some private press outlets have a history of inventing articles, he insists that his staff followed stringent guidelines and followed the profession's ethics in investigating the truth before publishing it. He accused the regime's officials of being adamant about not providing any information to the private press or responding to any questions or clarifications they sought from them.

The most challenging duty for Habtamu Minale in pursuing the truth during Meles' tenure was to verify sources. As the administration shut down the private press's ability to provide information or refute evidence, the only option they had was to "...publish a one-sided tale, or sometimes try to check it from inside sources."

Eyuel Fisseha shared a similar perspective on his team's truth-seeking method, in which they attempted to check and balance the information they received with information from other sources. Though it was impossible for the government to check and balance, he employed every other available tool to verify the facts. Eyuel, like his colleagues, believed that their efforts to uncover the truth had been fruitless due to the regime's refusal to open its doors to private press journalists. According to him, they were left with the choice of discarding or publishing the information at hand, and Eyuel frequently selected the latter.

Before opting to post anything on their site, Mahlet Fantahun claimed that her team had always tried to verify the facts by contacting multiple sources. They had a rigorous rule not to post any material obtained from hearsay, instead attempting to establish the issue. She claimed that being a blogger had one significant advantage: the reporter could submit not only his or her materials but also images and videos that might be used as proof of reality. Mahlet and her team had been posting stories of numerous opposition lawmakers and private press journalists being held in various detention centers across the nation, as well as several human rights violations perpetrated by the regime's secret service and police officers, with accompanying proof. The reality, on the other hand, had annoyed and outraged the regime officials, who retaliated by labeling their reporting a terrorist act.

Befekadu Hailu was never accused of distributing misleading information since he, like his colleagues, took truthfulness and impartiality seriously. They all sought to double-check the facts by contacting their various sources before deciding to post something on the site, according to him. He claims that this merely implies they didn't post based on rumor, but instead did everything possible to establish their point.

"...the fundamentals of our society and democracy would be destroyed if we are no longer able to discriminate between accurate and incorrect information," writes Balding (2007). (p.10). This researcher wanted to figure out "where the truth lies" by looking at the participants' descriptions of how they went about finding the truth and evaluating their approaches to truth-seeking and reporting.

Journalists have different methods of comprehending the truth, according to Godler (2020), "which is primarily founded on and interpreted according to their own experience," yet their experience has taught them how to exist in a world of partial factual determinations (p.181). Godler (2020) notes the Agreed Upon Truth Theory, which is a popular concept in the media studies literature that defines truth as "...merely a type of solid societal consensus around one or another viewpoint" (Ibid. pp.171-172). If society agrees that a belief is true, according to Godler (2020), "then journalists can easily draw on this belief without the need for any extra proof or evidence" (Ibid. pp.172)

Based on the responses of the participants, this researcher has understood that the journalists gained information and reported it as truth as long as it corresponds to their pre-existing ideas and that imposes upon the society to adopt the same attitude toward the regime, as Godler states in his Agreed upon Theory.

#### **4.4.1.6. Interference by politicians**

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression," states the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. "This right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference, as well as the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers" (UNHRC, 1948).

In the yearly report of Article 19, Daniele & Jagne (2002) describe the following about the attitude of the Meles regime and its officials towards the private press:

Political forces within the government of Ethiopia and the ruling party do not accept the private media as a legitimate player in the socio-economic and political development processes in the country. One indication of these attitudes is a series of reports of attacks on journalists from the private sector, along with repeated statements with officials, including the Prime Minister, portraying the private press as irresponsible, politically motivated, incompetent, illegitimate, and lacking in credibility (p.32).

"...to sustain healthy connections between citizens and leaders of a given society, the media must be free of commercial and political intrusion," Ztunç & Pierre write (2021, p.1). One of the numerous forms of hurdles to media freedom and independence in the globe, according to Ztunç & Pierre (2021), is "political power interference," which has a detrimental impact on media freedom and editorial independence (p.4).

Urbániková (2021) also points out that the majority of research that looks into what journalists do when their autonomy is threatened "... focus largely on cases of external political interference that occur in imperfect democracies and authoritarian or hybrid regimes" (p. 94).

Participants were asked to describe how political intervention by officials from Meles' government affected their day-to-day activities, as well as the challenges and

obstacles they faced as a result. Based on the responses of the participants, this researcher conducted an interpretative analysis to gain insight into how journalists deal with various types of government interferences, which are primarily classified by ztunç & Pierre (2021, p.9) as follows: Physical interferences such as beatings, arrests, and torturing, as well as Non-physical methods of external interferences such as verbal pressure and abuse, intimidation, and defamation.

***“Meddling in the freedom to pursue the truth!”***

According to Iskinder Nega, the regime began surreptitiously paying individuals to produce their publications at the time, which aided Meles and his cronies in defaming and attacking the private press' reputation. They were given orders to spread lies and phony news to the general public. As a result, the regime's initial stage of meddling in Iskinder's life was to ridicule and ruin their reputation. (Iskinder cites an article and news story from the weekly daily "Iftin" that was published by Zerihun Teshome, who he claims is a devoted supporter of the EPRDF and is the spouse of FM 96.3 Radio owner Mimi Sibhatu, as one example to bolster his argument.) Then came the intimidation, which was intended to make them fearful of the dictatorship and discourage them from pursuing their goals. They were imprisoned at the third stage, and their offices were shut down. Their valuables were seized, and they were sent to a location where they only saw the light of day once every three days. The regime had finally started tormenting them, both physically and mentally. Those were the steps of intervention carried out by the EPRDF dictatorship to eliminate Ethiopia's free press, Iskinder stated, his voice tainted.

Temesgen Desalegn has a series of examples of how the regime was utilizing a covert technique to eradicate the private press. For example, the high tax imposed on enterprises importing paper from other countries, as well as the rising cost of print, became unsustainable for many publishers, forcing them to close their newspapers or magazines. Temesgen recalls having to sell his mother's gold jewelry to cover the expense of the printing company that publishes the "Feteh" newspaper. Temesgen discovered that the dictatorship had been detaining and harassing journalists deemed to constitute a threat to its rule. The regime had a habit of interfering with journalists' freedom of expression and threatening them with legal action if they published opinions

or news that were critical of its officials or institutions, such as “the Defense Ministry and Companies with huge investment capitals, such as Ethiopian Airlines and Ethio Telecom”.

Temesgen was a notable example in this sense, as he was found guilty and sentenced to three years of severe imprisonment for just expressing his views. "The regime never accused us of defamation or incorrect reporting, but it utilized claims that could not be proven in court, such as instigating violence or promoting animosity among nations and nationalities." (Temesgen mentions the conflict in Gambella, which has claimed thousands of lives, and his magazine "Fiteh," which was accused of inciting violence, for covering the tragedy in its 2007 issue.) Is there any better way to demonstrate its interference in our work than this?" Temesgen wondered.

The regime, according to Wubshet, engaged in three sorts of meddling. To begin, its administrators made phone calls and conducted negotiations to offer funding for their publication. It was akin to bribing or purchasing them not to report or reveal any concerns that may have cast an unfavorable light on the regime. They then threaten them with non-physical techniques such as verbal abuse or harassment to persuade them not to disclose corruption, maladministration, or power abuse.

The regime's third method of meddling, according to Wubshet, was just grabbing people off the street or from their workplaces and dumping them in one of the city's many prisons. He had several such encounters. In 2002, for example, he was detained three times in a row after being seized from the street by security officers. In one of these incidents, he was kidnapped by three men while walking to his office, and the "hijackers" took me down to a dark room with just a wooden chair.

They bound his legs and arms to the chair and walked out of the room without saying anything, locking the door behind them. He sat there for two days and nights. With his legs and arms strapped to that chair, he was on the verge of death when they arrived. They untied him and began spitting on him and thrashing him with a stick. He was held captive in the dark room for three days and nights before being liberated. That

was one occasion in which Wobeshet recalled how government meddling in the activities of the private press had become a daily occurrence.

For Reiyot, the dictatorship had used a variety of coercive tactics to frustrate and push them to back away from their commitment to the truth. For example, the regime's secret operatives harassed or intimidated journalists who were critical of the government at all hours of the day and night, following them wherever they went. (Reiyot narrates her experience under police and secret service interference, as well as prison experience section of this research study.) Journalists were being detained without a court warrant or were being accused of significant crimes they didn't commit. Every government action was intended to make them fearful of carrying out their professional responsibilities confidently. Reiyot also remembered with sadness the government's ultimatum to self-censor before releasing any story that might be seen as critical of the regime or its officials.

Sileshi Hagos recalled the different types of interference, which were often accompanied by savage attacks carried out by regime officials and security officers. He sobbed as he remembered a coworker who had perished in one of these situations. While performing their duties, the regime had normally used a two-pronged interference strategy. The strategy was known as "the carrot and stick technique," in which they attempted to bribe them first. Sileshi claims that only few journalists consented to their terms and were readily bribed monetarily, and (he mentioned Anteneh Abraham, the then editor-in-chief of *Iftin* weekly newspaper as one example.) However, the majority group, to whom he claimed to belong, protested and refused to accept their offer, and the stick was then used against them. "For the same purpose, they had been arresting, harassing, and torturing countless journalists."

Wosenseged Gebrekidan called government intervention "a common phenomena" that was invariably accompanied by harassment or threats from the regime's security officials. He recalls security agents coming to his office and asking where they could find Wosenseged on multiple occasions. They didn't even identify Wosenseged by face because they were merely doing their job like a mafia gang. "It would have been considerably easier for them to arrest me if they had respected the law of the land and had

a court order." But I usually told them that Wosenseged had left his office a few minutes before they arrived." When he saw them enter the front door on other days, he hid in the back. "I had no peace of mind for years as a private press journalist during the Meles era, because the regime's security guys were hunting me day and night," Wosenseged remarked, his voice gloomy.

Befekadu Moreda recalled that the government had repeatedly interfered and that it had become commonplace to observe the regime's secret service officers as well as the police harassing and threatening private press journalists regularly. He was also used to encountering such situations on a regular basis, in which he would sometimes magically escape them, but on other days he would fall into their trap, be arrested, and assaulted. Or they threatened him verbally with their usual nasty language to frighten and frustrate him.

Government interferences had been a common occurrence for Elias Gebru while doing his regular duties as a government security agent. When the government anticipated them to disclose sensitive matters or issues that were of concern to the regime, interferences occurred in a varied and sophisticated manner. According to Elias, they frequently had their phone lines hacked or obstructed, allowing them to listen in on every discussion they had with others. They occasionally dug up every update on the stories they covered in their next issue before it was distributed to the general public.

"I wrote a news article once on Feteḥ newspaper exposing the death of Meles Zenawi, and the editor-in-chief submitted it to the print agency to get published for the next day," Elias recalled one instance of meddling. That day, however, security personnel descended on their business and instructed them to halt the printing process. They threatened to detain them for spreading false information to the public, which might jeopardize the country's peace. They, on the other hand, took a firm stance and refused to do what they requested. They had proof of Meles' death in the form of physical evidence. Then they left their office and headed to the printing agency late at night, escorted by two federal police patrols armed with Kalashnikov rifles. While they stood in the compound's middle, they instructed the print controller to bring thirty thousand copies of the newspaper (Feteḥ) and stack them in front of them. They then summoned the editor-in-

chief (Temesgen Desalegn) to come over and witness his newspaper being burned and reduced to ashes.

When Elias was working for the "Awramba Times" newspaper, he conducted an interview with Jawar Mohammed, but secret operatives showed up at his office and took the twenty thousand copies that were scheduled to be distributed the next day. Secret agents followed him and verbally attacked and harassed him on multiple occasions, as well as threatened him with their pistols. They used to call and threaten to arrest or maybe kill him regularly. They also sent him notes via email, urging him not to write any critical reports on the regime. The government media did intervene in news reporting, including documentary programs, aimed against the private press in an attempt to discredit the widespread public support they had already received.

Security forces intimidated and threatened Habtamu Minale regularly, according to him. They pursued them at all hours of the day and night, and they were occasionally jailed for a few days before being freed on bond. Interference frequently occurred when they published stories that were critical of the government or exposed corruption and nepotism among its officials. Not only had they been harassed and intimidated, but so had their relatives, friends, and coworkers. Habtamu, for example, brought his mother to hide for fear of being labeled as the mother of a terrorist son by the regime, which had previously accused him of being part of a terrorist act.

Eyuel Fisseha reflected wistfully on his time as a private press journalist, which had once been a daily occurrence of interfering with their everyday routines. According to his account of events, the authorities saw them as state enemies. So it's no surprise that the regime has become worried and agitated in whatever they do, investigate, or report on. The harassment and intimidation they were subjected to were sometimes hard to bear, as they used all means at their disposal to make them fearful and desperate. "They tried everything they could to bring us down, but we stayed firm. That infuriated them to the point where they decided to throw us in jail and do whatever they wanted without being held accountable to the law or their conscience," Eyuel recalls, his voice sorrowful.

For Mahlet, the EPRDF era was the most terrifying period in history, not only for private press journalists but also for bloggers who posted many reports and articles opposing or criticizing the dictatorship. The regime's secret operatives followed them everywhere they went, including cafés, shops, restaurants, and even movie theaters. They had become accustomed to their intimidation and never flinched when they were threatened. They were hacking into their phones and e-mails, as well as spying on them at all hours of the day and night. Their site had the most followers in the country at the time, making them vulnerable to any form of threat or injury from the dictatorship, which eventually happened to all of them (members of the group called Zone 9).

Befekadu Hailu expressed his displeasure with the administration's meddling policy, which he claimed was aimed at suffocating the independent press. Befekadu emphasizes the fact that Meles' dictatorship had gained a monopoly and the upper hand in the delivery of public information, as well as control over the dissemination and storytelling of its agenda. As a result, propaganda was used as the first stage of its involvement.

Second, Befekadu stated that the authorities had threatened and harassed journalists who were writing or reporting on any exposés regarding the administration. Even though censorship is outlawed under the constitution, he claims the administration utilized a variety of approaches to persuade private press journalists to censor themselves. According to Befekadu, the administration used several measures to suppress the press, including adopting laws restricting the constitution's right to free expression, imposing exorbitant tariffs on paper and printing, harassing and intimidating journalists, and closing down newspapers, among other things.

Various sorts of government interventions were mentioned by the researcher throughout his interactions with study participants, and they were hurting their jobs regularly. Physical techniques of interference, such as beating, arrest, and torturing, as well as non-physical methods of external interference, such as verbal pressure and abuse, intimidation, slander, and other forms, were frequently mentioned by the participants. Non-physical interference was the most prevalent type of interference mentioned by respondents.

Institutional interferences, according to the participants, were acting through the courts, media rules and regulations, or the use of government media. Economic interferences were also used to try to sway journalists with unfavorable economic consequences, such as raising printing costs and raising taxes on imported papers and inks needed for the work.

#### **4.4.1.7. Constitutional Liberties**

In comparison to previous constitutions, the FDRE constitution, which was passed in 1995, did a good job of protecting the public's core human rights. Article 29, paragraphs 1 to 4, under the topic of Democratic Rights, provides unrestricted freedom of expression, prohibition of any kind of censorship, and other rights relating to it.

The constitution in Article 29 of the Constitution, from No. 1 to No. 4, titled Democratic Rights, states the following:

1. Everyone has the right to hold opinions without interference. • Freedom of opinion/thought/conscience
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. Freedom of the press 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 (p.19).

Even though the Constitution mentions such fundamental human rights, many people have questioned the document's viability (Andargachew 2006, Alemayehu 2003).

"...Press freedom may be most successful only when such freedom is fully utilized by the media, rather than in a prejudiced or unbalanced fashion," Amartya Sen, a prominent Indian economist, philosopher, and Nobel laureate, once stated (2013, p.8) Though Sen is most recognized for arguing that press freedom is critical for development, he has also emphasized that maintaining press freedom without bartering it for political or economic gain is equally important (Sen, 1999b.).

This researcher asked survey participants to describe how the constitution articles had been implemented in terms of press freedom and other democratic rights during Meles Zenawi's presidency and assessed the participants' responses to the extent to which the freedom afforded by the FDRE Constitution, Art. 29, allowed them to enjoy their independence while doing journalism, as well as the challenges of covering matters deemed sensitive or secret by the government.

***“We have a constitution, but not constitutionalism”***

According to Iskinder, the constitution grants journalists "nothing, or even the public for that matter." He accuses the regime of abusing the constitution to stay in power for as long as possible. He claimed that the Constitution was written in such a way that it was difficult to put into reality in everyday life.

Iskinder bolstered his case by claiming, "... I was not a journalist for TPLF cadres, but rather an Amhara. They had been classifying everyone according to their ethnic background in a similar way so that they could have complete political and economic control over their lives and professions. So, what good was it to have a constitution that guaranteed freedom of speech if journalists were treated based on their ethnic background rather than their professional merit?" He argued that ethnicity, which also showed up in politics, is one element that influences the news agenda.

Even though the FDRE constitution guarantees freedom of expression and opinion, Temesgen accuses the dictatorship of doing the exact opposite. He didn't deny that having this freedom recognized in the Constitution is a significant step forward in the

political arena, but he didn't see it going any farther than that. For Temesgen, the administration included that provision in the constitution just to seem to the outside community as having accepted one of the world's democratic values.

Temesgen claimed that there were gaps in people's knowledge of constitutional freedoms, which led to abuse by some members of the private press. However, such issues may be addressed by the country's Criminal or Civic Codes, which were in effect until the emperor's reign. "...on the contrary, the Meles dictatorship had been reducing freedom for more than two decades by enacting various laws and policies that opposed the spirit of the principles established in the Constitution."

Wubshet emphasizes that the Constitution is extremely important to everyone since it protects freedom of expression and thought. When confronted with a circumstance, he finds it even more respectable to assert his "constitutional right". Due to the freedom afforded to him by the constitution, Wubshet accepted that he had every right to denounce government leaders. But, he claims, it was not the constitution that caused all of the issues during the Meles era, but rather the bureaucrats in charge of putting it into effect.

Wubshet used one good example to demonstrate how the Constitution was not the cause of his issues during the Meles era. He wrote two books while incarcerated, and with the help of the guards, he was able to smuggle copies to his publishers. His publishers had no qualms about publishing or disseminating the information because the Constitution allows them to do so without censorship or other forms of institutional examination. "But it doesn't imply the bureaucrats would let you live in peace after you reveal their dark secret," Wubshet sarcastically said.

The Constitution played a significant part in allowing people to express themselves freely and without fear of censorship from the outside world, and Riyot Alemu saw it as a good contribution to the development of Ethiopia's private press. Unfortunately, the regime, on the one hand and a large number of private press publishers on the other, were both limiting their freedom. Riyot accused the administration of enacting a slew of subsidiary laws that limit journalists' ability to fully exercise their

constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, thus undermining the constitution's guarantee of liberty.

Similarly, a vast number of private press outlets have been producing and transmitting fake news and inaccurate information to the general population. The regime's authoritarian nature, combined with a lack of professionalism and unethical conduct on the part of the private press, has weakened the Constitution's rights and privileges, Riyot stated depressingly.

Silesh Hagos acknowledged that a free press survived during Meles' reign, despite the problems, stumbling blocks, and obstacles and that this was owing to the constitutionally guaranteed right to appreciate freedom of expression and thinking. Sileshi praised Meles for including freedom of expression in the country's constitution. However, it is also evident that this constitutional right was nearly superseded by other subsidiary legislation ostensibly enacted to supplement it. Journalists from the private press have been harassed, imprisoned, tortured, or forced to flee the country because they were suspected of exercising their constitutional rights, according to Sileshi, while the government has accused us of violating other laws intended to supplement the constitution. When someone decided to become a journalist during Meles' government, private press journalists assumed he was deciding to become one of them — someone who was determined to be harassed, intimidated, imprisoned, or tortured by the dictatorship.

According to Wosenseged Gebrekidan, the constitution guarantees the right to freedom of expression, which has aided the growth of Ethiopia's private press. However, there is no example of how far freedom could be pushed in actuality. He gave me an example of Shimeles Kemal, the former minister of state for government communication.

Shimeles was imprisoned for voicing his viewpoint in a publication before joining the EPRDF and becoming anointed with its Revolutionary Democracy philosophy. They threatened him with treason charges, which might have resulted in him being found guilty and sentenced to 25 years in prison. The prosecutor dismissed the prosecution once he agreed to work for them. He was later assigned to several government roles, including

that of prosecutor general. He realized that he had every right to express his viewpoint under the constitution's guarantee of freedom for all citizens, but he also understood that the constitution would be impotent to save him from prison unless he agreed to the regime's demands.

The constitution, of course, prohibits any form of censorship, but other regulations force them to censor themselves before publishing any item or news to the public. Wosenseged emphasized that the government, as well as private press journalists, had exploited the freedom.

The Ethiopian Constitution had never been fully implemented by its authors, who wrote it solely to appear to the Ethiopian populace and the world community as proponents of democratic ideas. But, in actuality, Meles and his officials were tyrants and dictators who were unconcerned about the Constitution or anything else. Even though the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, Ethiopia ranked first in the world in terms of arresting and harassing journalists during Meles' reign, according to Befekadu Moreda.

One benefit that the Constitution provided to journalists, according to Elias Gebru, was the elimination of censorship. The public, too, had shown admiration for and begun to cherish the constitutional freedoms from the start. However, the EPRDF grabbed them all back for fear of political implications, and instead imposed various limits and produced additional subsidiary laws that restricted them all.

When Habtamu Minale hears that Meles' dictatorship permitted freedom of expression to be placed in the constitution for the first time in our political history, he is disappointed and refuses to accept it. For him, placing the piece served as a good pretext for Meles' dictatorship to manipulate the Western world into viewing him as a democratic leader. Of course, the population saw a glimmer of hope at first, but things began to shift, particularly following the regime's defeat in the 2005 national election, which it refused to recognize. They enacted harsher laws and procedures that infringed on the constitutionally guaranteed freedoms.

Eyuel Fisseha acknowledged that Meles' rule was the first in our political history to grant constitutional sanction to freedom of expression and eradicate censorship.

However, the dictatorship reclaimed it by enacting additional subsidiary legislation, fearing that the private press would begin to play a significant role in the political atmosphere. Meles began dubbing the private press "the gutter press," and his propaganda minister Bereket Simon once said, "We snatched their Kalashnikov, but they continue cursing us with their pen." (This quote from Bereket is in line with EPRDF claims that most private press journalists were once part of the Derg army.)

According to Mahlet, press freedom in Ethiopia only existed on paper and was non-existent in practice. Mahlet stated that one benefit she and her colleagues had over the private press was that the regime couldn't shut down their blog page or office, as it had done to others. "But the fact that it didn't imply we were permitted to carry it out freely as it was stated there," Mahlet enraged her when ever she listened to Bereket Simon's saying that the Constitution allowed the private press to practice freedom of speech and thinking. The barriers and challenges were enormous, and the regime officials had frequently threatened to end our lives."

The distinction between issuing a law and executing it was always significant for Befekadu Hailu, because throughout the EPRDF era, the constitution protected freedom of speech, but it was not implemented on the ground. Befekadu expressed his sadness by saying that such behavior was obvious not only in the domain of press freedom but in all other areas as well.

A constitution, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is "a compendium of fundamental principles or established precedents by which a state or organization is governed". A constitution, according to this definition, is a type of agreement or contract between those in authority and those who are subjected to that power. A constitution establishes citizens' rights and responsibilities, as well as the mechanisms that hold those in power in check. Any further laws enacted by the government must be by the constitution (Maru, 2009).

Maru (2009), on the other hand, contends that constitutionalism is more important to the constitution (p.358). He described constitutionalism as "...the ideology that determines the validity of government activity," and it suggests "...much more essential

than the idea of legality, which requires official conduct to follow pre-determined legal standards" (p.358) In other words, constitutionalism examines whether a government's actions are legal and whether officials carry out their responsibilities in line with laws that have been pre-determined.

According to the preceding definition of constitutionalism, having a constitution does not assist in the acquisition or establishment of constitutionalism. To put it another way, practically every nation/state in the world may have a constitution, but it does not mean they all follow it. "Constitutionalism is significantly more important than a constitution in this regard" (Ibid. p358).

Based on the comments of the participants, this researcher understood that the majority of them agreed on the constitutional freedom guaranteed to them, but only on paper. Naturally, having a constitution that protects freedom of expression and thinking is a significant advancement in Ethiopian political history. However, the provisions outlined in that constitution did not serve as a guide or a means of following, suggesting that constitutionalism lag a lot behind to exist in Ethiopia during EPRDF reign. Of course, some of the participants put the blame on the journalists as they were not abiding themselves while doing their reportings on professional and ethical manner. Of course, it goes without saying that some of the participants held journalists accountable for their failure to conduct themselves with integrity and professionalism when reporting stories.

#### **4.4.1.8. Impeding laws to press freedom**

Andargachew (2006, p.140) mentions Proclamation 34/1992 as one subsidiary law that has hurt the constitutionally granted freedom of expression in Ethiopia in his article on subsidiary laws that are hindering the growth of investigative journalism in Ethiopia. Professor Andargachew (2006) claims that Proclamation 34/1992 is a subsidiary law that restricts access to information, citing Article 8 (1), which states that "the press and its agents have the right to seek, obtain, and report news and information from any government source." However, Sub. Art. 3 of the same Article lists many types of information that are exempt from this provision" (pp. 140-141).

This researcher asked the research participants about the various government-issued laws that they claimed to affect or hamper their professional operations. From the discussions with the participants, the participants mainly identified three laws that hurt their professional activities: Proclamation No. 34/1992 on Press Law, Proclamation No. 590/2008 on Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information, and Proclamation No. 652/2009 on Anti-Terrorism Law. These restrictions, the participants explained, were harming not only their job but also their personal life.

***"Poisons wrapped in honey"***

Iskinder Nega's description aided this scholar in understanding that these laws may be required, if at all, to qualify rather than replace the Constitution. They were created to serve when additional clarification was required beyond what was written in the Constitution. However, Iskinder maintained that "the TPLF regime had utilized this legislation to limit the constitutionally guaranteed liberties".

He highlighted an instance in which he could not have been imprisoned for a single day if he had been permitted to defend himself under the Constitution. "However, the dictatorship and its judicial officials devised additional means of punishing me, such as the Press Law and the Anti-Terrorism Law, which were conceived by Bereket Simon, the then Minister of Government Communication" Iskinder said. The legislation, according to Iskinder, was written to eliminate free press journalists and opposition politicians. At 10 different points in his life, Iskinder was imprisoned and convicted. On his most recent court appearance, the judge sentenced him to 18 years in prison for a transgression of the Anti-Terrorism Law.

According to Temesgen, the fundamental flaw in the press law is that it holds not just journalists accountable, but also media owners/publishers, distributors, and street vendors. Because publishers and media owners are business people who invest their money to make a profit, not to play politics, Temesgen sees this as plain evidence of how the government wanted to remove the private press. Most people refused to get engaged in any media enterprise after such proclamations went into effect. They were also held liable for materials published in or transmitted through the media as a result of the laws.

Newspaper and magazine distributors, as well as street vendors, were affected by the rules.

Temesgen mentions, for example, that a journalist cannot write or report anything concerning political organizations listed by the dictatorship as "terrorists" under the 2009 Anti-Terrorism Law, which contained articles that may be interpreted in several ways. If the journalist reports on them, he or she will be charged "as a terrorist" in a court of law. The law is concerned not with the report's content, but with the organization about whom the media reports. The statute also generated ambiguities about who constitutes a terrorist, contradicting the international definition of terrorism.

For example, after making an official statement of opening a military facility in Eritrea, "Ginbot 7" openly declared war on the regime. Members of this group claimed to be freedom fighters rather than terrorists, and they did not engage in clandestine movements like other terrorist groups. A journalist who reported on terrorist organizations, and "Ginbot 7" was on the list, will be charged with performing a terrorist act, according to the legislation.

Wubeshet Taye listed several issues with the Press Law and the Anti-Terrorism Law that he has observed. A journalist should not report or write by endorsing any political party, according to the Press Law of 1992, which contradicts the Constitution. Its articles made it illegal to freely express one's views or take a position in support or opposition to a political party, its ideology, or its program. It was a direct violation of Article 29 of the Constitution, as well as its sub-articles.

When Wubeshet was editor-in-chief of the weekly "Google" newspaper, he was charged with defamation and imprisoned for more than a year. His offense was releasing an official letter from the Bethel Protestant Church Synods sent to his office. The Church revoked Itefa Gobena's priesthood, and the priest accused Wubeshet of slander under the Press Law Proclamation No. 34/1992. However, after serving a year in Kaliti jail, the court cleared him of all charges. Even though the law stipulates that a journalist will be released immediately after the police have taken down his statement, Wubeshet was

arrested and subjected to a great deal of suffering for simply reporting an official letter received to his office.

One hilarious provision in the press law indicates that if the public might have read or interpreted the journalist's story differently, the journalist will be held liable for committing a crime under the Anti-Terrorism Law (*Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation, FDRE Negarit Gezetta, No. 590 of 2008, art. 43.*). How can a journalist know, or even estimate, what his or her audience thinks about his or her report?

According to Reyirot Alemu, the administration utilized the subsidiary laws as a pretext to kill private press journalists, particularly those who were denouncing and condemning the regime's policies and immoral activities. According to her assessments of the situation at the time, bills like the Information Act Law of 2002 and the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2009 were good examples of their reign. The regime used the legislation to stifle and restrict journalists' freedom, as well as harass, torture, and imprison them.

According to Sileshi Hagos' explanation, the Press Law has numerous limits since it restricts the liberties guaranteed by the Constitution. The law not only restricts journalists' freedom, but it also tries to dismantle the institutional foundations of media freedom.

For example, one of its articles states that if you own a newspaper, you cannot publish a magazine. According to another article, if an individual owns a 15% share of a newspaper, he or she is prohibited from working as a journalist for that publication. As a result, such stories, as well as many others of a similar sort, were purposefully written to frustrate the private media business and force it to adhere to the regime's will and agenda.

The researcher also learned from Sileshi's testimony that the Anti-Terrorism Law has the same feature, in that it targets persons and political groups who have been deemed "enemies of the state" by the administration. In comparison to the Press Law, the Anti-Terrorism Law is even more absurd, as it states strict rules to journalists in reporting on terrorism, politics, the economy, or even social issues. Simply looking at how Sileshi was

charged with terrorism for reporting about bread and oil shortages in Addis Ababa is a good illustration of this narration. Under the heading "people queue for food and oil as of dawn," he described what he had seen in Addis that day as *"...since dawn, this reporter saw a long queue of people anxiously waiting to buy bread and oil for their daily consumption in the streets of Addis Ababa at Arat Kilo and Cherkos."* The regime accused him of terrorism, and he was imprisoned in a dark room for four months without receiving a proper judicial trial. What kind of news could one possibly post without fear if reporting on a food shortage led to someone being labeled a terrorist? The rules appear to be aimed at undermining the free press rather than combating terrorism. Sileshi expressed his displeasure by asking that the anti-terrorism statute be renamed the Anti-Journalists Law.

Wosenseged Gebrekidan has no objections to "the relevance" of both the Press Laws and the Anti-Terrorism Law, but he does have a problem regarding the clauses included there that limit journalists' freedom. One of the provisions in the Proclamation of Mass Media Freedom and Access to Information, for example, states that an individual can obtain a license to print a newspaper or magazine if he or she meets certain standards, such as having a standard camera. Officials from the dictatorship refused to believe that the individual had a camera in his phone unless they saw a professional camera that cost thousands of dollars. To start publishing a newspaper, an individual must deposit 15 thousand birr in a closed bank account, according to the law. This merely permits people with money to exert control over journalistic freedom. The Constitution provides freedom of speech, but other regulations restrict that right in various ways.

Security personnel have the right, according to Wosenseged's explanation of the Anti-Terrorism Law, to arrest, torture, or do whatever they choose to someone they suspect of being involved in a terrorist attack. Security officers have been effectively employing this law to detain and abuse persons they despise, including private press journalists. Wosenseged remarked the following, which this researcher believes exemplifies how those subsidiary laws were utilized as machines to reduce the constitutionally guaranteed freedoms: "... Before the implementation of the Anti-Terrorism Law, I was charged with violating the Press Law, and the prosecutor

demanded a sentence of 25 years in prison." I would have been put to death if the Anti-Terrorism Law had been passed by then."

The press law and the anti-terrorism law, according to Befekadu Moreda, are "poisons wrapped in honey." Though he couldn't deny their importance, he couldn't deny that they were developed with malice in mind to attack and remove opposition politicians and private press journalists. He said that the press legislation had first weakened their freedom and that the Anti-Terrorism Law had subsequently killed them to put an end to it. For Befekadu, the 2005 national election, which resulted in Meles' regime's collapse, prompted the regime to enact the Anti-Terrorism Law, which resulted in many journalists being imprisoned and the remainder fleeing the country for fear of persecution and death.

The implementation of the Press Law and the Anti-Terrorism Law, according to Elias Gebru, was a display case that demonstrated how the EPRDF government could do everything in its ability to stay in power. The regime's dedication to democracy was put to the test several times, most notably during the 2005 election, and those laws revealed the regime's real totalitarian nature when it began using them as a pretext to imprison, harass, and torture private press journalists who refused to flee their posts.

The researcher, like the other participants, comprehended Habtamu MInale's argument that the regime issued the Press Law and the Anti-Terrorism Law to eliminate opposition politicians and private press journalists. According to Habtamu, the authorities had been utilizing certain pieces that were well-crafted and aimed to put journalists in prison on purpose. Those regulations were thought to be deciding elements in the destiny of private press journalists, as many of them were detained and held in prison for years, while others were able to abandon the nation and seek asylum in Western countries.

The exposition of the Press Law and the Anti-Terrorism Law by Euyel Fisseha gave this researcher the impression that these can be cited as reasons for the reintroduction of the yoke of censorship on the shoulders of journalists. Journalists from the private press, who were staunch supporters of the constitution's unequivocal guarantee of freedom of speech, were forced to edit their work at some time for fear of being imprisoned or suffering at the hands of the regime's thugs. According to Euyel, the

Anti-Terrorism Law, which primarily targeted opposition politicians and private press journalists, caused the latter to be fearful of carrying out their professional obligations. Eyuel is certain that the administration arrested and imprisoned several politicians and journalists on the pretense of breaking these rules.

Mahlet Fantahun, one of the "Zone 9" bloggers, claims that she and her colleagues published numerous reports and articles to expose how Proclamation No. 590/2008 of Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information, as well as the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2009, were antidemocratic and designed to stifle Ethiopia's struggle for freedom and equality. She recalled, in addition to posting numerous articles, launching a polling campaign in which opposition political parties and journalists participated, calling on the regime to halt and amend certain articles that targeted politicians and private press journalists before they were ratified by the parliament. Instead, the administration turned a deaf ear to their concerns and pushed legislation to put the plan into effect.

Due to an essay Mahelet wrote for their site that violated the Anti-Terrorism Law, she was detained and accused of supporting terrorists. She is confident in claiming that the Meles administration used such subsidiary laws, which went into effect after the constitution, to "get rid of its political opponents, as well as silence or suffer the free press journalists."

Even though both the press and anti-terrorism laws have had a significant impact on the private press, Befekadu Hailu says that the anti-terrorism law has shattered the cornerstone of freedom. According to him, authorities have been arresting and torturing journalists under the cover of the anti-terrorism act, which has resulted in a variety of inconceivable sufferings for many private press journalists. He bemoans the fact that the rules made it hard for journalists to criticize or reveal the regime's wrongdoings by instilling fear and panic in them. As a result, Befekadu said, the number of journalists who either leave the country or end up in prison has increased dramatically since the regime adopted these rules.

According to Andargachew Tiruneh (2006), "...journalists have the right to seek ideas and information and pass them on to the public, and to do so, they have the right of

access to information of public interest,... and that their right to seek information and express them cannot be limited by the content or effect of the point of view expressed" (p.139).

The participants have described how subsidiary laws, such as Proclamation No. 34/1992 on Press Law, Proclamation No. 590/2008 on Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information, and Proclamation No. 652/2009 on Anti-Terrorism Law, which came into effect during Meles' era to purposefully restrict their freedom, impacted them while performing their professional duties.

The majority of the participants, according to this researcher, believe it is necessary to amend and adjust the three subsidiary laws under discussion in this topic, namely, Proclamation No. 34/1992 on Press Law, Proclamation No. 590/2008 on Freedom of the Press and Access to Information, and Proclamation No. 652/2009 on Anti-Terrorism Law. Some participants opposed making changes to the laws and instead advocated for their repeal.

The participants describe the Anti-Terrorism Law (2009) and the Proclamation of Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information (2008) as the key sources of charges leveled against them. Leading a terrorist organization, becoming a member of a terrorist organization, providing support to a terrorist organization, propagandizing for a terrorist organization, and reporting a terrorist organization's statements as news were among the most common accusations and political cases leveled against private press journalists.

#### **4.4.1.9. Views of Meles' administration held by journalists**

One reason for taking the present study as a focus is the point raised by Robert Dahl in his well-acclaimed book "On Democracy", who stated that because of the appeal of democratic ideas, in the twentieth century, despotic rulers have often cloaked their rule with a shadow of "democracy" and "elections" (Dahl, 2000, p.49).

Unquestionably, Meles was the first leader in Ethiopian history to recognize press freedom in the country's constitution, even though he is widely seen as "authoritarian."

The researcher deduces if the participants think of Meles as an "Authoritarian" leader or anything else based on their comments.

***"The broken promise of press freedom"***

Iskinder describes Meles from two perspectives: first, from the beginning until a certain point in time, particularly until his party suffered a defeat in the 2005 election, he saw him as an autocratic leader. He then tended to fall between between an authoritarian and a totalitarian leader. Iskinder believes that Professor Mesfin's description of Meles, "...a brilliant individual who knows well how to play the dirty game," is sufficient to convey his genuine leadership style. According to Iskinder, Meles promised freedom to the people in the constitution but denied and failed to deliver it in practice, as authoritarian leaders do. But, according to Iskinder, Meles went further and refused to exercise the allowed freedom by issuing more subsidiary laws, making him a totalitarian.

Temesgen Desalegn claims that the country has never had an authoritarian leader like Meles Zenawi, who is incomparable to Mengistu and Emperor Haileselassie. With a single decree, Mengistu outlawed all democratic rights, including freedom of expression and thought. During his nearly half-century reign, the Emperor did the same thing. They were not, as Meles said, pretenders to democracy. Meles pretended to be a democratic leader who permitted all democratic rights to be written into the constitution. However, by enacting other subsidiary laws, he effectively outlawed all of those privileges. Temesgen maintains that Meles was the brains behind all of Ethiopia's current disarray and havoc.

Meles was an autocratic leader, according to Wubeshet Taye. He repeatedly demonstrated his authoritarian mentality by stating, "If he doesn't like the color of your eyes, he will remove anyone from Ethiopia." An authoritarian ruler has no qualms about lying to his subjects. An authoritarian leader will not accept criticism from anyone since it would be interpreted as an insult. Wubeshet recognized that Meles did a lot of excellent things for Ethiopia during his 21 years in office, but the political and economic issues he left behind much outweighed them.

Yes, according to Reiyot, Meles was an authoritarian leader with a subtle demeanor in his actions. She recalls him being questioned in parliament about her case and that of another imprisoned journalist, Wubeshet Taye. She was watching him on TV from prison at the time and was taken aback by how he painted her with a "crime" she was not even charged with in court and managed to persuade House members. Reiyot is equally sure that by telling his well-researched fictional story about opposition leaders and the private press, Meles may persuade even the international community. She believed he possessed a deadly mentality capable of portraying or perhaps destroying anyone he despised. Of course, his oppressive actions and dictatorial mentality were hidden by his ostensibly democratic rules, but in reality, he was a tyrant who couldn't stand even simple journalistic criticism, according to Reiyot, who cites herself as an example. In this context, she remembers an incident in which Meles called her name in the parliament during the delivery of a report during a parliamentary session, labelling her as a terrorist.

Sileshi disagreed with naming Meles an authoritarian, arguing that such a label would be insufficient because he went beyond it. Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki is an authoritarian leader in Sileshi's eyes. Issaias' authoritarian reign is manifested in his complete abandonment of freedom of expression in his country. If Meles is regarded as an authoritarian leader in the same way that his former buddy Issias was, then he is also equal in his demeanor. Meles was a very dangerous authoritarian figure who seemed to be a democratic leader on the outside but masked his true nature on the inside.

Meles was well-versed in democracy, which put him on par with the ancient Greeks. He and his associates knew how to construct a constitution that appeared to be democratic on the surface, but it was well-designed to further their political ambitions. Sileshi thinks that the most dangerous authoritarian leaders are those who can conceal their true identities and that it is easier to live with an authoritarian leader than it is to live with someone who pretends to be democratic, such as Meles.

Meles was, without a doubt, an autocratic leader, according to Wosenseged. One may easily grasp his rule by looking at the laws and policies he issued and ratified, as well as the positions he took with opposition political parties and the private press. When

Meles spoke something on a particular topic, his followers took it as gospel and promoted it as if it were a divine commandment. Wosenseged recalls Meles' public statement that "all private press journalists are criminals."

During his reign, the parliament backed the proclamation of freedom of the press and access to information, but Wosenseged claims that there was never a time in the country's history when every institution closed its doors to private press journalists. During the Meles era, a journalist was abducted from his office by security personnel and placed naked on the top of one of their detention camps for two days and nights, according to Wosenseged. Meles was well aware of such brutal treatment of journalists, but he feigned to be unaware of it subsequently.

Meles was described by Befekadu Moreda as a man with two personalities: on the one hand, he was a man who could show a bird's character by showing wings to people who were convinced, and on the other hand, he was a man who had developed the experience to change his birdies' character into a rat by showing his tooth to persuade people. People were sometimes perplexed while describing his true nature because when they thought of him as a bird, he showed them a rat's tooth, and when they thought of him as a rat, he showed them a rat's wings.

By preaching about democracy on every forum he made available to himself, he was able to gain the support he desired from Western countries. Meanwhile, he clung to power by preaching how "growth should come before democracy," referring to China's communist system of government. The reason, according to Befekadu, is that the IMF and World Bank's annual 11 percent progress reports haven't been seen as a reality in the lives of Ethiopians, except Meles Zenawi's allies. Meles was merely an authoritarian leader with a shrewd personality that could be changed or acted upon depending on the correct moment and situation. For Befekadu, this made Meles a more dangerous figure than previous and current authoritarian dictators.

Meles is portrayed by Elias Gebru as an authoritarian who figured out how to deceive the world by posing as a democratic leader. For the world to believe in him and his dedication to democracy, he enabled freedom of expression and ideas to be

incorporated into the Constitution. Then, by passing additional subsidiary laws, he subtly pulled it back. Elias claims that Meles did not slay his opponents in the open sky as his predecessor Mengistu did, but rather that Meles was extremely calculated in forcing his opponents to commit suicide. Once he had psychologically tortured his opponents enough, they would either quit their nation or die a supposedly natural death. According to Elias, Meles-like figures were in control in several countries, posing a threat not only to their citizens but also to democracy itself.

If Meles is to be praised for permitting press freedom in Ethiopia, then Meles' history of arresting and torturing journalists during his reign must also be highlighted, according to Habtamu Minale. In Habtamu's interpretation of Meles, he is depicted as a guy who was able to stay in power by using his nuanced character of rule to conceal his authoritarian nature. He allowed freedom of the press and other democratic rights to be enshrined in the constitution, which he then abrogated with other laws. For Habtamu, Meles was a leader who managed to pass himself off as a democracy for a time, but whose true nature was exposed later, particularly when the EPRDF was defeated in the 2005 national election.

During his time in power, Meles had never had positive intentions toward the private press. He tried everything he could to suppress criticism and the private press, and Habtamu feels Meles was considerably more dangerous than other authoritarian leaders throughout the world. Meles was not only an autocratic leader in Eyuel Fisseha's eyes but also a man with a cruel personality. His political philosophy and point of view perplexed his party members. He planned and executed things as a leader not out of conviction, but to extend his reign of terror. Meles is depicted by Eyuel as "a man who murdered someone, hid the body, and then joined the search for it".

Meles is described by Mahlet Fantahun as "not simply an authoritarian, but a dictator." She'd heard some positive things said about him, but she's convinced that doesn't affect his genuine character or authoritarian demeanor. She holds Meles responsible for all of Ethiopia's current woes. He ruled our country in an undemocratic and authoritarian manner for about a quarter-century. Meles, in Mahlet's opinion, was a man who knew how to play the dirty game to ruin his political opponents.

Meles Zenawi, according to Befekadu Hailu, had a totalitarian personality. Meles was not a dictator like Issaias Afewerki, but rather a dictator who ruled subtly. Though Meles was praised as "a strong leader with a significantly more Marxist mindset and a lot of eloquence in his speeches," as well as a "brilliant political strategist," Befekadu dismissed this as "a mere fact," claiming that Meles' name was added to a list of dictators dubbed "election dictators" as a result of this. He stated that even if they staged elections in their country, they would know they would be rigged since no one would accept them at first.

Meles and his ilk, according to Befekadu, tried to gain formative legitimacy by deceiving the public into believing that they would bring progress to the people, even though they were fully aware that they had never held elections democratically. According to Befekadu, the regime attempted to create competition between the United States and China on the international stage, but instead chose a middle ground by joining, on the one hand, the global anti-terrorism fight to prevent the world from turning against them, and on the other hand, standing alongside China in economic endeavors. Befekadu describes Meles, quoting *The Economist* magazine noted after his death, as: "a leader who strove to acquire recognition to authoritarianism on the world arena".

#### **4.4.1.10. Summary**

According to Dahl (2005), democracy involves more than just elections; it also necessitates respect for freedom of expression, access to information, and association (pp. 187-197). Based on the responses obtained by this researcher, the participants accused of Meles' administration for retaliating against them by carefully crafting fake allegations and crimes that, according to them, "that were never committed". However, the researcher came to the conclusion—based on the participants' accounts of their actual experiences working as journalists during the EPRDF era—that the regime had set a boundary for the press's coverage of political issues and that the journalists had crossed it and turned partisan. As a result, they were unable to take advantage of the freedoms given by the constitution without first turning around, particularly while discussing political matters.

A journalist who chooses to criticize the government, its policies, and laws, or attempts to reveal corruption practices, has undoubtedly crossed a perilous line that could land him or her in prison. Of course, some of the participants admitted that there were journalists who carried out their journalistic duties in an unprofessional manner, and that contributed to the bleak situation that existed under EPRDF era.

#### **4.4.2. Interpretation of Findings of the Second Research Question**

##### **RQ2: How do private press journalists describe the persecution they were subjected to by the police and secret service officers as a result of practicing journalism?**

This question centered on the hardships and obstacles that participants had faced as police and secret service men under EPRDF rule.

Participants in this study were asked to recount their lived experiences with the challenges and obstacles they faced during the EPRDF era when the administration publicly expressed its contempt and hatred for them. The researcher chose three themes from the participants' reflections for this purpose: *a) Drama surrounding the arrest, b) Ignorance of the Constitution, and c) Unlawful behavior.*

The researcher categorized three subordinate topics embraced under the three themes for interpretation, which are: *(a) "No judicial order to arrest us" (b) "Forget the Constitution", and (c) "They undermined justice"*. Below is a summary interpretation of these issues, which highlighted participants' narration.

The interpretation is based on a description of their lived experiences about their arresting drama, as well as the pain they confront in jails from Meles' regime's secret agents and federal police, with extensive detail expressed under Research question 5.

##### **4.4.2.1. Drama surrounding the arrest**

"...governments did not recognize that the press should be free to report on politics or that it is a watchdog; rather, governments have argued that it is the press that needs watching," writes Okigbo (1994) in his critical analysis of African governments' attitudes toward the press (p.46).

The exact question posed here focuses on how the participants were arrested, as well as the problems and roadblocks they encountered during the events. "No person shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, and no person shall be held without a charge or conviction against him," says Article 17, No. 2 of the FDRE Constitution (p. 82) as each situation showed a unique drama of its own, the participants' narrative of how they were detained had caught this researcher's thought and desire to analyze.

The participants have described the persecution and arresting drama they were subjected to by the police and secret service officers at the time, and the researcher analyzed it as follows:

***“No judicial order to arrest us”***

Iskinder Nega had been imprisoned for an indeterminable amount of time. It used to be a regular occurrence for him to get arrested for a week or two. According to him, in total, he spent more than 10 years in prison, meaning he was imprisoned for six months to a year or more at each prison house around the country under EPRDF era. Iskinder was only arrested once, based on a court order, and the rest of the time he was taken from the street, his house, and his office by the police force. While detained, he was frequently beaten severely by security agents.

"I went for a jog at 6:00 a.m., and I was unexpectedly surrounded by two patrols with scores of police officers," Iskinder said, describing one such incident. "For weeks, secret spies had been listening in on me and had determined when I would perform my physical activities in that particular location. That morning, I was surrounded by federal police, who were followed by secret agents. I was taken to the Central Investigation Office and had my wrists and legs chained. They threw me inside a two-by-one-meter, pitch-black room and kept me there for three weeks."

According to Iskinder, when relatives and friends inquired about his whereabouts, they were denied. As a result, no one came to see him for three months, and even the jail guards had no idea he was there because the secret operatives had snuck him away. Every night for the next three weeks, they hung him upside down and flogged him underfoot until his flesh tore apart. He was unable to walk for several weeks after that, and he soon

learned that he had been concealed from his friends and families so that what they had done to him would not be noticed.

Iskinder's visit to the Central Investigation Agency was almost like a second home for him since he was a regular visitor nearly immediately after each issue of his newspaper. He recalls being arrested while walking to his office once. They were covert operatives who seized his hands on both sides and tossed him around like trash in a sack. Then one of them slammed his heavy boots into his chest, while the other punched his nose, which began to bleed immediately. He was on the verge of passing out from the ache in his chest and was unable to breathe properly. When he awoke from his coma, he discovered himself lying on a cement floor in a small, dark room. The discomfort in his chest persisted, and he had been unable to breathe for several days. They abandoned him for three months to suffer.

Temesgen Desalegn's tale exemplifies the pain he endured while imprisoned in the Kaliti and Zeway prisons. He recalls the prisons he visited for the first time appearing to him to be a horror on earth. He was arrested while going about his business at the office, and "they" obtained a court order to detain him.

Wubeshet Taye was well aware that the regime's secret agents were pursuing him at all hours of the day and night. He recounted being at home that day, joking and playing with his wife and new infant boy, when he was surrounded by many police officers and secret operatives. They searched his house after obtaining a court warrant for his arrest. His computers and other documents were taken to the central investigating agency with him. That day marked the beginning of the eight years of sorrow and tribulation that lay ahead of him.

Reyiot recalls being arrested in her office while going about her normal business. Several Secret Service operatives and federal police officers arrived unexpectedly that day to take her to prison. When she asked them to show her a court warrant, one of them pulled a piece of paper from his pocket with a list of numerous names on it. He just displayed her name at the top of the list, and that was the end of it. They then snatched her hands and dragged her away to prison.

Sileshi Hagos was arrested one night while sitting at home reading a book. His house was raided by federal police and secret service operatives led by Chief of the Central Investigation Agency. The guy who chained his hands was a senior government official, not an ordinary police officer. Furthermore, the police entered his home late at night, in violation of the constitution, which prohibits police from invading individuals' homes after 6:00 p.m. "The commander was not wearing a uniform, had no court warrant, and refused to show me his identification. He was armed with a pistol and surrounded by federal police officers wielding Kalashnikovs".

Wosenseged Gebrekidan was arrested nine times, each of which resulted in the creation of a court file. When he was first imprisoned, the complaint leveled against him was for his coverage of the Tigray Hotel explosion, which accused a top government official, of being present at the time. According to Wosenseged, "the official was having fun at that hotel the night of the explosion, and I mentioned his name in my news reports since he might have been one of the perpetrators of the bomb incident. Next day, I was taken into custody." Wosenseged then spent the next two years in a bar without even offering any evidence to the court that he had committed a crime. He then took his case to the Supreme Court, where he was found not guilty and discharged.

He was also detained for writing an editorial against the concept of waging war against Eritrea. "I was continuously arguing about it. For both sides, the war later proved to be a pointless and useless exercise. On both sides, almost a hundred thousand people died for no reason. They did, however, detain me for voicing his opinion". The Ethiopian Press Law expressly stipulates that an editor cannot be prosecuted for expressing his or her viewpoint in an editorial. However, the prosecutor charged him with treason, and he was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

Wosenseged was also imprisoned with leaders of the Coalition for Democracy and Unity (CDU), who had been given arrest warrants by the court. Although he had never been a member of any political organization, he was imprisoned for years because the authorities suspected him of being a CDU member.

It had become routine for Befekadu Moreda to be abruptly apprehended and sent to prison by either secret service agents or federal police. They generally picked him up from his workplace, home, or even the highway. He was arrested nine times, with each arrest lasting anywhere from a few days to six months. Except for one time during all of the arresting drama, the cops had never produced a court order to him. He was simply apprehended if they were dissatisfied with his newspaper coverage, or when an official became enraged by his critical reporting or expose of maladministration and corruption. Occasionally, a police officer would call him to pay him "a visit," and he would be sent to prison the moment he arrived.

The regime imprisoned Elias three times, and the cause for his detention was news he wrote about a certain military general who was accused of plotting a coup against Meles Zenawi. The prosecutor claimed in court that he published the news to misinform the public about the case. The judge then issued an arrest warrant for him, and federal officers arrived at his home that night to surround him and transport him to the Central Investigation Center. He was bailed out with 5,000 birr after being imprisoned for two weeks.

Elias was also imprisoned, after writing a piece that portrayed Emperor Menelik II as a strong leader who vanquished all of his adversaries and gave Ethiopia its current borders,. "After two months, a police officer summoned me by phone to the federal police headquarters, imprisoned me for three months without allowing to appear in court, and eventually freed me with a bond of two thousand birr".

Another instance occurred when Elias was detained for the third time while drinking with his companions at Romina Bar in Kazanchis. "...I recall the day two police patrol cars surrounded the pub and numerous police officers entered the area where we were sitting. Then an officer ordered that my hands be chained and that I be taken out." Elias was first taken to the Gerji Police Station, where he was detained for six months without being charged with a crime and was just transferred from one prison to another. After that, they accused Elias of terrorism and took him to court. The judge ordered his transfer to Kaliti jail, where he would be free to continue to follow his case. "I spent

another six months in Kaliti prison on suspicion of a terrorist act I did not know of until today,” he said.

Being pursued by security personnel was a daily occurrence for Habtamu Minale. The agents followed them everywhere they went, including to a bar where they used to unwind with friends. He recalls them arriving at his house late at night, about 9:00 p.m., and encircling it. His sister was giving him food at the time, and he was eating with his mother. Suddenly, they knocked and pushed the door open, and they walked inside when it opened for them.

Several federal police officers and security agents, equipped with heavy machine guns, entered the house, while the rest of the gang blocked the road in front of his house with two police patrol cars. His mother began screaming and pleading with them not to harm her kid while his hand was ironbound. He requested that they change his pajamas, and the commander let me dress in front of them. Finally, they loaded him onto one of the patrol cars, while his family cried and begged them to tell them where he was being taken. Nobody responded to their cries or responded to his crime, but they wrapped a black rope across his eyes and drove quickly towards the main road.

According to Habtamu, his detention demonstrated how the EPRDF regime disregards citizens' fundamental rights and privileges. They first entered his home after noon, searched it, and arrested him without providing a court warrant. Finally, they threatened and tormented him in front of his family.

Eyuel Fisseha was pursued by security agents at all hours of the day and night to prevent him from performing his professional duties. He was arrested while boozing in one of his favorite Piazza pubs on a Friday afternoon. Even though one of his pals suspected the two men seated next to them were security officers, the rest of his buddies continued to laugh and dance.

After a few beers, Eyuel ordered the bartender to tell the DJ to turn off Neway Debebe's music and play Hachalu's song instead. Neway, a singer at the time, was considered an EPRDF supporter. Then one of the secret agents approached their table and told him to follow outside. As he approached the bar's front gate, numerous police

officers surrounded him, tied his hands, and placed him into a patrol car, which proceeded quickly to Arat Kilo. That day, I was arrested, and the police informed me that I was detained because they discovered I had ties to terrorist organizations such as Ginbot 7 and OLF.

Mahlet Fantahun describes how she was arrested by secret operatives who had been tracking her for quite some time. She recalls it being a Friday afternoon, and she was rushing to finish her typical office work so she could go to her friend's house for their weekly get-together. She worked as a program analyst for the Ministry of Health at the time. She was alone in the office since her coworkers had left early when her door was slammed shut and three Secret Service agents and several federal police officers armed with Kalashnikovs and handguns stormed in. She was screamed at by one of the three Secret Service agents to stand up and face the wall. They bound her hands and began searching the office, the computer, and what she had been doing at the time, but they were unable to uncover anything useful to indict her.

Mahlet was then transported to her home, where she was surrounded by several police officers and two patrols. While on her walk, she noticed how everyone stared at her as if she were a dangerous criminal arrested after a long police chase. While entering my residence, the secret agents led her and the cops followed. They looked in every room of the house but couldn't find what they were looking for. When Mahelt's parents arrived home, she began screaming and begging them to set her free when she noticed an iron chain on her daughter's hands. But they slammed the door in her face and dragged Mahlet back to their patrol cars, which were speeding towards Piazza. They turned on Belai Zeleke Road after a half-hour drive, and she realized they were taking her to the Central Investigation Bureau, where she languished for months.

Befekadu Hailu was arrested four times, and on three of those occasions, the police did not show him a court warrant before he was taken to prison. They grabbed him twice from his office and once from his home. Except for the one time when they came with a court order to arrest him, he was not charged in any of the four arresting incidents.

In his well-known essay *Resistance to Civil Government*, also known as "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" or "Civil Disobedience" for short, Thoreau (1849) argues that individuals should not allow governments to overrule or atrophy their consciences, as they have a responsibility to avoid allowing such acquiescence to enable the government to make them agents of injustice.

This researcher attempted to investigate the issue based on the participants' personal experiences, and many of them were apprehended and arrested in similar ways that violated their constitutional right to personal security, such as being taken from the streets, being abruptly arrested from their homes or offices, and being apprehended from places where they were having leisure time. In most of the cases, the police failed to provide a court warrant to arrest them. Secret agents investigated their homes and offices frequently without a court warrant.

All of this demonstrates how the dictatorship did not follow the law and did not respect citizens' rights. And similar illegal activities were frequently perpetrated against journalists working for the private press at the time.

#### **4.4.2.2. Ignorance of the Constitution**

According to Dicey, as cited by Mark (2012), just recognizing rights in a constitution does not safeguard or ensure an individual's rights. When the rights guaranteed by a constitution and other laws are violated, they must be maintained or defended in court.

"Everyone has the right to protection against cruel, inhuman, or humiliating treatment or punishment," according to Article 18, Verse 1 of the FDRE Constitution (p.82). The participants told this researcher how the regime's law enforcement officials turned a deaf ear to the journalists' complaints about their unlawful imprisonment and their ongoing demand for a fair trial, as guaranteed by the FDRE constitution, as well as by the constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

#### ***“Forget the Constitution”***

According to Iskinder, “the administration had used the constitution as a pretext to deceive the populace”, as it had created several other laws and enacted them to further its

bad cause. He recalls that even judges, much alone police officers, were uninterested in hearing constitutional arguments. “Of course, there were good police officers who treated inmates kindly but were unaware of citizens' rights and benefits as written in the Constitution. They simply followed their superior's orders and carried them out without fail. The secret agents, too, had no understanding of the Constitution, and I suffered greatly as a result of their actions. In this aspect, what I learned from my personal experience was that ignorance had rendered them lawbreakers, as well as nasty and terrible in their behavior” Iskinder said.

Temesgen recalls the regime's security organ harassing and torturing civilians, particularly journalists from the private press. Without a court order, security forces shut down his publication "Feteh," then he created "Addis Times," and they stopped him again. Then he started the weekly "Leilina," which he ran for a year before it was shut down. Then he created the well-known "Fact" magazine, which was shut down and he was imprisoned. Temesgen replies angrily, "They don't even realize we have a constitution, let alone respect it?"

Wubeshet saw himself as a witness to how the police and secret service personnel had abused citizens' fundamental rights throughout the Meles era. Journalists have been detained at any time and in any location, in violation of the constitution and other regulations. They were imprisoned even after making statements to the police. Many citizens and professionals, including him, were imprisoned without going through any formal or legal channels. For eight months, he was held in a dark room of the Central Investigation Agency, where he was interrogated every night. He spent over eight years in numerous prisons across the country without receiving a fair trial. “When I see the Constitution, I get upset because it serves as a justification for them to impose their harsh intentions and desires on the residents of this country”.

Reyiot Alemu recalls: “the Constitution was used as a scapegoat to deceive the public about the regime's inhumane treatment of political prisoners and journalists, such as ours. Many people have been tortured and abused by police and secret service personnel for years, both physically and mentally. When one fall into their hands, all of the rights and advantages guaranteed by the Constitution become meaningless”.

Reyiot was refused access to medical assistance, books or any other reading material, and even the ability to communicate with guests other than her parents. “I was severely tortured in a way that degraded my humanity. Citizens have the right to protection against cruel, inhuman, or humiliating treatment or punishment, as specified in the Constitution, but I was subjected to all of them, in violation of my constitutional right. You may have a democratic constitution, but it does not ensure you will have a democratic administration”, according to Reyiot.

According to Sileshi Hagos, Meles' dictatorship manipulated the constitution to deceive the populace into abandoning its quest for democracy and freedom. The constitution is like a delectable fruit that you can look at but can't eat. With a piercing tone of emotion, Sileshi remarked, "I was imprisoned unlawfully and tortured unfairly while this same constitution considers me a citizen with all democratic rights to enjoy in my nation."

Wosenseged Gebrekidan, on the other hand, acknowledged that the constitution offered the people what they had wanted for a long time, but questioned why the EPRDF rule had been accused of breaching basic human rights on an international level. For him, the answer seemed easy, as: “Meles and his associates wielded power by gun, and they had never demonstrated any intention of delivering true democracy to Ethiopia. I resembled the constitution as a toothless lion. There was a slew of other legislation enacted by the regime that was more substantial and robust than the constitution. I've been placed in jail nine times for expressing my civic rights, let alone being allowed to practice his profession, all of which are outlined in the Constitution. The Constitution couldn't save him, at least, for once”.

For Befekadu Moreda, “the Constitution had aided EPRDF and its officials in disguising themselves and deceiving the public and the rest of the world. I see the Constitution as a nullified instrument because EPRDF did not come to power by being elected in a democratic election, which the Constitution stipulates is a requirement for forming a government. Furthermore, most of the subsidiary laws enacted during Meles' administration, including the Press Law of 2001 and the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2009, did

not serve the Constitution's principles but rather supported the dictatorship's interests and desires”.

The constitution, according to Elias Gebru, was just utilized by the regime “...to trick the world into believing it was fostering democracy in Ethiopia while practicing it. Even though the constitution guaranteed freedom of speech and ideas, the regime had taken away that right”. He recalls what a politician said here once: "All the rights and freedoms guaranteed in the constitution cannot make us either clap with pleasure or cry with sorrow." They were all well-designed to assist the EPRDF government in achieving its goals, rather than to develop democracy in the country.

Habtamu Minale accused EPRDF and “its cronies” of using the Constitution as a ruse to deceive the world into believing that Ethiopia is democratic and respects citizens' rights. Habtamu agreed that the Constitution gives all kinds of liberties on paper, “... but that examining how they are used in practice reveals that they are all lies”. “Only a few parts of the constitution, such as Article 39, caused popular outrage during Meles' reign,” according to Habtamu, demonstrating that the problem was not the constitution itself, but those who had power and used it as a cover-up.

Eyuel Fisseha agrees with others that having a democratic constitution does not automatically imply having a democratic government. For him, the EPRDF government knew exactly how to play the game when it granted constitutional freedoms. “Even though Article 29 of the constitution prohibits censorship, the dictatorship enacted a subsidiary law requiring journalists to censor themselves before publishing any story. Several articles in the Anti-Terrorism Law are also in violation of the Constitution.”

Mahlet Fantahun described her own experience with exercising her constitutional rights as “...an opportunity to learn how people like Meles and his cohorts behave like wolves while wearing sheepskin” she said. “Their daily claims of granting a democratic constitution,” according to Mahlet, “were a ruse to persuade Western donor countries to continue their financial support”. Mahlet argues that from the moment she was apprehended until the day she was freed, she was denied all of her constitutional rights and benefits.

Secret service operatives, according to Befekadu Hailu, “just used cops as puppets. “I saw it time and time again when these agents gave us orders without question and then torture, harass, intimidate, and imprison civilians for no reason”. Befekadu was certain that the police officers who detained or interrogated civilians did not know what the country's constitution or other laws indicated regarding residents' rights and advantages.

The Revised 1955 Constitution granted legal sanction to freedom of expression for the first time in contemporary Ethiopia (Gideon, 2010, p.204). Freedom of expression has been recognized in Ethiopia for more than half a century, at least on paper. Even though press freedom was guaranteed by the Constitution, it did not become effective until the EPRDF came to power, since freedom of expression was elaborately spelled out in the 1995 FDRE Constitution (Ibid. p.205).

According to Gideon (2010), Article 29 of the FDRE constitution guarantees freedom of expression by listing what is protected, such as political speech, operating a press, and expressing one's views and opinions through state media, among other things, but it also has grounds and conditions for limiting freedom of expression in its last two sub-articles, sub-articles 6 and 7, in which: "...sub-Articles 6 and 7 deal with the limitation of the rights enumerated in the preceding sub article. While Article 6 establishes the grounds and conditions for restricting freedom of expression, Article 7 states that "any citizen who violates any legislative restrictions on the exercise of these rights may be held accountable under the law" (Ibid. p.205).

Based on the foregoing facts, not only the subsidiary laws but also the constitution itself has laid the groundwork for curtailing freedom of expression, as well as allowing the enactment of other subsidiary laws that could potentially curtail the already granted freedom in the above sub-articles and punish journalists who don't consider or recognize that the right to freedom of expression enshrined in Article 29 of the FDRE Constitution is not even an absolute right.

#### **4.4.2.3. Unlawful behavior**

While in prison, the participants detailed how the police and Secret Service operatives sabotaged the court system and pursued their own political goals. "... freedom of the press has been battled for, brutally, frequently at tremendous human expense, and this continues to be the case in dozens of nations around the world, with record numbers of journalists being slain and imprisoned every year," writes Balding (2007, p.10).

The participants have described how the police and secret service agents undermined the justice system and pursued their political motives by revealing unlawful behavior, with one participant claiming that all of the illegal acts and manners they revealed towards them was "a clear manifestation of how they languished under a tyrannical regime that pretended to be democratic using the constitution as a pretext."

#### ***"They undermined justice"***

According to Iskinder Nega, most instances began with no direct interaction with the secret operatives. Rather, they dispatched federal cops to apprehend him wherever he might be and then handed him over to them. The torture was then carried out by the secret service agents. He can recognize the folks who have been tormenting and harassing him for over ten years in person. They imprisoned him without a court order for weeks and months, and he was abused and abandoned in a dark room, surviving on a cup of water and a small meal once a day. They will finally let him go after all of the torture and misery he has endured. They were not only evading the law, but they had also become the law in their own right, according to Iskinder. No one is allowed to ask them "Why?"

Temesgen recalls how secret service operatives sabotaged the court system when it came to the rationale given by security officials for the closure of the weekly "Feteh," which was shocking to many at the time. "Feteh" included a piece titled "Meles dies!" on the main page, and his editing staff sent it to the print house for publishing. As the printing of the 30 thousand copies continued, secret agents and federal police officers appeared at his office and demanded that the news be removed from the publication. Temesgen refused their instruction, and they walked out of his office, threatening him, to see what would happen next.

The then-Justice Minister phoned Temesgen and summoned him to his office, warning him that if the news was not removed from the paper, he would face serious consequences. Temesgen, on the other hand, departed the minister's office after giving him the same answer he had given the secret service operatives earlier. The owner of the printing shop called him later that night to tell him that security agents and federal police had surrounded his business and demanded he burn all 30 thousand copies in front of them. When he inquired how he complied with their request, the owner explained that he didn't have any other option except to do as he was told. The next day he phoned and told him that he tossed them all in the fire and hung up the phone. Security agents and police surrounded his office the next day to inform him that "Feteh" would no longer be in circulation.

Wubeshet Taye is a living witness to how the police and secret service operatives tortured him and others, and even murdered many. Even though the law plainly stated that journalists cannot be jailed after stating the police, they continually imprisoned him after taking his remarks. Wubeshet was transported to an interrogation room every night after midnight during his first ninety days at the Central Investigation Agency, where he was subjected to various forms of torture, both physical and mental.

According to Reiyot Alemu, secret service operatives and police officers acted as slaves, devotedly serving the government with all their power and passion. If Meles or his associates accused someone of political dissent, the accused was deemed an enemy of the state by the police or secret service officers. They will go to any length to harass or frighten him.

She recalls how, when Meles made every derogatory remark about her in parliament, the police and secret service officers were ecstatic and seized the opportunity to throw her in jail. Then they unreservedly committed every harsh and demeaning deed against her. For Riyot, the cops were simply acting like zombies incapable of distinguishing between good and wrong. They simply accept and carry out whatever orders they are given, and they never regret it.

Sileshi Hagos described the cops as "dummies," because they had no idea what the law said about citizens' rights and obligations, or how to treat them when they were caught or summoned to court. They showed there at any time, morning or night, as it didn't matter to them, with no court warrant in hand and only a Kalashnikov to detain the journalists. For them, the law was whatever Meles said about any subject or case. If Meles spoke a venomous remark, it would be easy to predict what security measures would be taken the next day. They were willing to express their allegiance to the dictatorship, regardless of the country's laws.

Secret service operatives and police officers, according to Wosenseged Gebrekidan, were loyal to the regime rather than the people. He stated that they didn't do anything to him when he was in prison, not because they liked him, but because he was physically lanky and thin, and they were afraid to hurt him. He could have died if he had been beaten or tormented like he had seen them do to others.

Wosenseged regularly reflects on what he saw happen to his companions while they were physically tormented and subjected to other sorts of agony. He was arrested nine times, and in eight of them, police emerged out of nowhere and took him from his office or home without a court warrant, save for the last one. Wosenseged was charged with a political crime with CDE party officials at his ninth detention, and they showed him a court warrant at the time.

During the Meles era, the primary concern of the police and other security personnel, according to Befekadu Moreda, was to protect the ruling party elites' safety and interests. He doesn't recall ever seeing one among them who was loyal to the Constitution or his conscience, but to the EPRDF, because the majority of them were TPLF fighters and cadres who fought the Derg regime for seventeen years. Because of their outspoken criticism and exposé of Meles' rule and his administration, private press journalists were branded as their opponents. Befekadu was arrested nine times, but only once did the cops show up with a court warrant.

Security agents, according to Elias Gebru, had complete latitude and privileges to do anything they wanted with those considered opponents of the regime. They

demonstrated their allegiance to the EPRDF by behaving aggressively and cruelly toward opposition politicians and private press journalists. They believe they are responsible to the regime, not the constitution or any other law of the country. Elias recalls being hauled into prison three times without being shown a court warrant and being neglected for nearly a year. When someone is detained, according to Elias, it simply indicates that he is either a terrorist or a state enemy.

Security personnel and police officers were essentially political operatives of the ruling EPRDF party, according to Habtamu Minale. With their hands, he was harassed and suffered greatly, as were his mother and sisters subsequently. According to him, the Secret Service operatives, in particular, had no understanding of human rights, human dignity, or the rule of law. They were simply carrying out orders and doing what was asked of them. They saw their leaders as defenders of democracy, and as a result, those who opposed the dictatorship were tortured and persecuted. People became so desperate that they couldn't trust even one other because anyone who didn't agree with the regime's policies was branded a state enemy.

Security agents during the EPRDF era, according to Eyuel, had no idea how important it was to respect citizens' rights, or even have a basic comprehension of the constitution. Except for the government leaders, they had no respect for anyone. In prison, Eyuel watched prisoners being molested, abused, or tormented in horrific ways. He once refused to speak to them and went on a hunger strike with other prisoners until they were all brought before the court. A few hours later, the Commander ordered their transfer to a new jail, where the majority of the inmates were mad. Following that, no one yelled for their rights to be honored, while their anguish escalated to a new degree of severity.

The secret service men, according to Mahlet, had no regard or humanistic care for revealing information about a woman. They were harsh, she remembers and saw private press journalists as their opponents. "They did everything they could to humiliate me, including spitting on my face and uttering derogatory and dirty words in front of other inmates." "They didn't care about the law," Mahlet remembers with bitterness. When she refused to answer their question during interrogation, one of them hit her in the nose,

causing her to bleed for almost an hour. For her "obnoxious" behavior, she was even denied medical assistance.

Befekadu Haulu describes how the cops and Secret Service officers who threw him in jail were overjoyed because they saw it as an opportunity to carry out the brutal and degrading treatment they wished to inflict on others like him. They were just acting like dummies to him, accepting and carrying out whatever orders were given to them without hesitation. They publicly abuse and suffer everyone who falls into their clutches, he claims, because they have no understanding of state law.

Dictators' mistrust of free media is well-founded, as many countries have seen when they play a critical part in deposing nondemocratic regimes (McFaul, 2005). The interviewees revealed how Meles' dictatorship used its secret service agents and police force to exert total control over the private press. The dictatorship wished to dominate all media narratives, particularly those produced by the commercial sector and encouraged strong responses to challenges to its power. The Secret Service and the police saw their masters as guardians of democracy, and as a result, citizens who opposed the system were tortured and persecuted. The study's participants cited this as a motivation for going through various types of agonizing situations.

#### **4.4.3. Interpretation of Findings of the Third Research Question**

**RQ3: What were the challenges that private press journalists faced with the judiciary when trying to obtain a fair trial?**

Regarding the lack of judicial freedom in Ethiopia during the Meles era, Mgbako C. et al. (2008) state:

The breakdown of separation of powers in Ethiopia is a result of a system in which a political organ with strong ties to the executive is the final arbiter of the constitutionality of the executive's political acts. One of the outcomes of this system is that judges are fearful of ruling on politically sensitive cases (p.290).

The participants discussed the difficulties and problems they had encountered during their court case. They claim that the legal system is completely dominated by political power and that it is just behaving like a puppet and doing what it is told.

The three topics that participants describe in their responses to this study question are a) *The judiciary's independence*, b) *The proceedings*, and c) *The verdicts*. As a result, the researcher divided the question into three subordinate themes for interpretation, which are: (a) *"Political operatives dress up as judges"*, b) *"I knew you were innocent,"* and c) *"I was punished without being charged"*, under the major themes.

#### **4.4.3.1. The judiciary's independence**

The breakdown of separation of powers in Ethiopia is a result of a system in which a political organ with strong ties to the executive is the last judge of the constitutionality of the executive's political acts, according to Mgbako C. et al. (2008). One of the consequences of this approach is that judges are hesitant to rule on politically sensitive matters (p.290).

The participants described the difficulties and problems they encountered due to the lack of freedom and independence of the judiciary, and based on their responses, this researcher interprets that the judicial system was completely under the control of political power and that it was simply acting like a puppet and doing what it was told.

#### ***"Political operatives dress up as judges"***

Iskinder recalls that he was arrested more than ten times, and, according to him, "...in each of those instances, he did not see a judge who was free of political bias or association". It seemed to him as though they had been appointed by the party or by Meles himself to indict and prosecute him and his colleagues with a crime. Judges never challenge or reject prosecutors' requests or appeals, whereas their plea was readily rejected and their ability to plead on a matter was lost. For him, it was a good example of the regime's dictatorial reign, which had lasted more than a quarter-century.

According to Temesgen's personal experience, there was no judicial freedom during the EPRDF era, and it was even amusing to witness how judges exercised their judicial

power. All judges were appointed based on their political and ethnic affiliation with the regime. Of the two or three benches that were assigned regularly to look into the cases of politicians and journalists accused of various crimes artificially designed by the regime, all judges were appointed based on their political and ethnic affiliation with the regime. Judges have pretended to be neutral in some cases, but as soon as they exhibit such behavior, they are sent to different benches.

According to Wubeshet, judges were assigned to preside over cases involving detained private press journalists and opposition politicians permanently. He claims that expecting judicial independence from political operatives posing as judges is impossible. Some of the regime's high-ranking officials had regularly encouraged him to work for them, but he had previously declined their offer. Though the prosecutor did not cite the regime's retaliatory action in his accusations, the judges' reflections revealed that they were aware of it. They had been mentioning such things in the middle of the procedure on occasion, and they had unwittingly betrayed their disdain for him.

Naturally, after his case had been adjudicated for more than a year, new judges were assigned to rule over his case. He recalls the new judges expressing a preference for his innocence or a reluctance to accept the prosecutor's claims. Then, to seek his case, other new judges who had proven their loyalty to the leadership swiftly replaced them.

Reiyot recalls that the regime's high-ranking officials or the Party leaders personally appointed the judges. Some of the judges were members of the EPRDF or had some sort of affiliation with the party. So, Reiyot wonders, how can one expect to see judicial freedom when all of the actors were chosen and allocated in such a way that they were expected to serve their political party rather than the public's interest? She had been treated by a slew of judges who treated her as if she were a criminal, displaying their open hatred for her.

She recalls judges being assigned to review the files of suspected politicians and journalists regularly. In brief, the judicial system was set up in such a way that those linked with the EPRDF held decision-making power, and then judges were assigned who could be trusted to deliver rulings that the regime's leaders were happy with.

Sileshi recalls the judges who presided over his case, and he is certain they were all members of the ruling party. According to Sileshi, anyone accused of political crimes was deemed an enemy of the state, and it was often impossible for him to even submit his case as a citizen with every legal right to defend himself, let alone secure a fair trial.

During Meles Zenawi's reign in Ethiopia, Wosenseged never experienced judicial freedom all at once. He claimed that judges were chosen mostly based on their political stance toward the ruling party, as well as their ethnic background. When the prosecutor delivered the charges, he recalls the judges refusing to let him register a complaint. They read their verdicts, and he was led to prison by the cops. He agreed with the other participants that there were judges who were specifically chosen and assigned to look into political issues and that when private press journalists were arrested, their cases were also brought before these courts. They were appointed to promote the regime's interests and had no regard for the constitution or citizens' rights, Wosenseged continues, his voice trembling.

Befekadu Moreda sadly recalls the judiciary's lack of total freedom during Ethiopia's Meles era, when all press cases were referred to the high court's 10th criminal bench, which was presided over by Assefa Abreha, a top TPLF central committee member at the time. Meles appointed Assefa, the older brother of the then-defense minister Seiy Abreha, while his sister Timnit Abreha was also a government minister."

When Assefa was appointed as a presiding judge to the only bench authorized to review cases of private press journalists accused of different press-related offenses, Befekadu and his pals realized what the dictatorship was up to. Assefa and the other justices showed no interest in hearing their appeal at least once.

Elias Gebru agrees with the other participants that the judiciary was not free at all because the bulk of the judges selected to hear their cases were either EPRDF party cadres or supporters. Meles had been arguing constantly, mentioning the Derg era, in which individuals were just pulled off the street and slaughtered, whereas during his rule, people were taken to appear in court for a fair and free trial. The paradox, according to Elias, was that prosecutors and judges were not politically neutral, as Meles had claimed

for years, and they were passing their judgments on defendants after lengthy consultations with prosecutors or even security officials who seized them.

Habtamu only had one chance to appear in front of the court, and it was in the judge's private office. He was thrown in jail without being charged with a crime, and the young judge, who was in her late twenties at the time, granted the police an additional 14 days for further investigation without allowing him to speak. He felt that his personal experience would aid him in comprehending the facts surrounding judicial freedom during the Meles era.

After being charged with instigating public unrest as well as being involved in a terrorist attack, Eyuel appeared in court twice. However, because the prosecutors were unable to substantiate any of the charges filed against him in court, the judge allowed his release with a bail of 2000 birr. However, they disobeyed the court order and threw him in jail, where he was ignored. Even though the court ordered his release, he spent nine months in the regime's brutal prison cells.

Mahlet chooses one example to demonstrate how the judicial system was built to support the EPRDF government. It was about how she was interrogated about a relationship she had with someone who wrote a political piece on their blog page opposing the regime. As evidence, a Central Investigation Agency agent produced voice-recorded material claiming to prove her relationship to the author of the piece. The prosecution presented the evidence against her in court and requested that the charge be accepted as adequate evidence implicating her for her role in a terrorist act. The judge dismissed Mahlet's request for the court to hear the recorded voice material brought against her as evidence. She cries out, "How can one expect to defend oneself in a court where the judge has refused his right to see the evidence produced against him?"

Befekadu Hailu testified that in none of his four repeated wrongful arrests, he did not have the option to appear before an unbiased court with judicial independence. Befekadu notices the judges' prejudice toward the government from the first day in court, and he subsequently witnesses how they ignore the defendant's appeal and make decisions based on the prosecutors' demands and requests.

Judicial independence, according to Robert et al. (1999), is a promise of democracy that acts as a cornerstone of a free society and the rule of law. It simply means that talking about democracy or the rule of law in a society where the population denies judicial freedom is meaningless.

The participants discussed their shared views on judicial independence, noting that the judges assigned to hear their cases were either EPRDF political cadres or regime loyalists. They state unequivocally that all judges were appointed based on their political and ethnic ties to the dictatorship, and that they did not anticipate judicial independence from "political cadres posing as judges."

#### **4.4.3.2. The proceedings**

Courts, according to Ginsberg and Moustafa (2012), are frequently utilized to further the goals of authoritarian governments, but they are also sometimes transformed into key centers of political resistance (pp.6-7). Unfortunately, it appears the Ethiopian courts have chosen to take the former position.

The participants revealed the ordeals they went through during their case's judicial processes. The judges appear uninterested in even listening to their argument, regardless of how important the truth and reliability are. This researcher evaluates their depiction of lived experience, which may be utilized to show how courts exercised law throughout the EPRDF time.

#### ***"I knew you were innocent!"***

Iskinder Nega discusses the court procedures that he went through after spending several months in jail for an inquiry. Following the secret operatives' acts of cruelty and brutality against him, he was met with judges who shared his viewpoint.

He first appeared in front of the court when he was the publisher of the weekly newspaper Ethiopis. Teferra Asmare, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper, was also charged with encouraging violence between nations and nationalities, as well as publishing false information to the public. Their bail plea was denied, and they were obliged to defend themselves from prison.

Iskinder tried everything he could to defend himself, but the judges were uninterested in hearing his reasons. Instead, they granted police requests for more investigative time and repeatedly incarcerated him. The judge refused his bail rights, putting him in a dark room prison for a year until the prosecution persuaded the judge that if he was set free, he would have no complaints, and the judge gave him freedom. The prosecutor requested that the editor-in-chief be sentenced to two years in prison, which the judge granted. Teferra was sentenced to two more years in prison without being permitted to defend himself in a court proceeding in a free manner.

Judges, according to Iskinder, are essentially puppets of the administration who are appointed based on their political affiliation or ethnic background. He has never been allowed to defend himself in a court of law, despite the constitution's guarantee of citizens' rights and benefits. "It was difficult to expect a proper legal procedure presided over by such politically biased justices," Iskinder recalls.

Temesgen was first arrested in 2010 and was charged with 35 criminal offenses. After four months, he was hit with an additional 69 charges, bringing his total to 104 files. He believed that the allegations were brought against him to force him to flee the country or to frustrate and destroy his career as a journalist. However, he remained adamant, and they realized this and chose three accusations from the large list of crimes he was accused of. They charged him with "misleading the public's image of the government," "trying to disrupt the constitutional system through mutiny," and "defaming the government's good name."

Temesgen recalls his lawyer asking the court how the government's name, if it has one, could be slandered, given journalists are supposed to be part of the government. According to Temesgen, it was unusual and unprecedented for a government to accuse a journalist of defaming its name.

Dr. Yared, a Harvard law professor, also appeared in court and gave a one-hour-long statement in which he rebutted all of the claims leveled against Temesgen. A total of 2000 documents were provided to the court, which could have adequately contested all of the charges while also validating his innocence. However, the court ignored all of his

reasons and sentenced Temesgen to one year in prison for each crime, for a total of three years in prison.

The indictment against Wubeshet, he recalls, was that he published several articles in publications and on the internet associating with terrorist organizations such as the OLF, ONLF, Ginbot 7, and others. However, he stated that he had never had any personal contact with these organizations or any type of communication with them throughout his life. Surprisingly, there was no proof to support the claims leveled against him. The prosecutor once called four witnesses against him, but all of them testified in his favor.

The prosecutor read the charge against Wubeshet as though he had been caught red-handed committing a crime on June 24. However, he refuted the accusation, claiming that he was arrested on June 22 and that it was impossible to commit a crime on June 24, as the accuser claimed. The judges, on the other hand, were unconcerned about it, instead informing the prosecutor to change the date of the crime for which he was charged.

Reiyot recalls that the prosecutor was unable to provide evidence to prove her guilt, despite being charged with numerous crimes including acts of aggression against and attempts to destroy infrastructures; assisting terrorist groups through her journalistic career; receiving money from organizations designated as terrorists by the regime; and numerous others. On the other hand, the judges refused to hear her witnesses while allowing those who came to testify against her to do so.

She has asked the court twice to have two renowned politicians, Professor Merera Gudina and Doctor Yakob Hailemariam, attend as her witnesses and provide their professional testimony, but the judges have turned down her request both times. A judge even informed her at one of the court sessions that the court is not a parliament or a place for political debate. She expresses her displeasure with the way she has been treated in court over the years. The courts were hearing all the fake accusations and charges that the prosecutor had filed against her, Reiyot recalls with agony.

Silishi describes how the cops filed a criminal complaint against him and took him to court, where the matter was heard by a judge who was a young woman in her early

twenties. The judge didn't seem disturbed while yelling and screaming about how he had been subjected to a lengthy inquiry and torture, as well as protesting why the police had denied him his constitutional right to appear in court within 48 hours. While Sileshi was screaming and cursing, the officer requested an additional fourteen days of investigation, alleging that the police probe had not yet been completed.

The young judge motioned for the officers to approach the bench and whisper to each other for a few minutes before deciding that the police would be given an additional 28 days to perform their investigation. Sileshi recalls her being the only judge presiding over cases involving political prisoners, and he regarded the court procedures in his case as a demonstration of the "so-called judiciary's freedom" during Meles' reign.

Wosenseged had been charged with several criminal offenses, and the judges were more concerned with the charges leveled against him by the police and Secret Service agents than with the evidence that may have disputed their assertions. On one charge, he was sentenced to one year in prison, and then the same court summoned him again to hear another case. Wosenseged portrays the judicial procedures at the time as a manufactured drama intended to appease Meles' government on the one hand, while punishing those who resisted or attacked him on the other.

Even when the prosecution dismissed two counts, Befekadu Moreda was charged with seven criminal offenses. As a result, he was required to appear in court once or twice a month. He was taken from his home and prison by the authorities on several occasions. The charges alleged defamation of the government's and officials' good names. Though it is still unclear to him how a government can have a name that may be defamed, he was charged with and expected to defend himself on various allegations, including reporting fake news and inciting public insurrection against the government. However, they were unable to produce any solid evidence to the court that would show his guilt.

Among the various claims leveled against him, Elias recalls fostering hate between nations and nationalities, aiming to destroy the people's chosen government, as well as reporting or manufacturing lies to aid terrorist organizations. He was also charged with "using his journalistic career to incite public violence." He was first charged in a news

report published by "Awramba Times," and the other two allegations were related to his membership in the Ginbot 7 party, which the regime designated as a terrorist group. But, after suffering and pain in their prison houses owing to the slow-moving legal proceedings, he was eventually released free of all the counts he was accused of.

Even though Habtamu Minale was suspected of being part of a terrorist act with the Al-Shabab group, he was never allowed to defend himself in court throughout his two months in prison. The security guards, who had been drinking the night before when they arrived at his residence, took him to a detention center and interrogated him, hoping to find evidence of his involvement with the terrorist Al-Shabab group.

The court process had only taken place once, in the judge's private chamber, and she had done it on purpose to avoid journalists who had come to the courtroom to report on his case. After speaking with the security officers, the judge ordered his arrest and gave them an extra fourteen days to probe further. Habtamu couldn't speak even if he wanted to, but he was perplexed and even more startled to learn why they were wasting their time in such a foolish charade.

Eyuel viewed the judges who were reviewing his case as political appointees, and he did not expect a fair trial from such a court. Those security agents who placed him in jail returned to the courtroom to watch his trial. The court didn't bother to inquire about their legal standing to file a charge at a prosecutor's office. She merely gave herself an extra fourteen days to research, followed by another three months. When the police told her a bogus story that incriminated him, the judge nodded her head in agreement throughout the court proceedings, Eyuel laments.

Mahlet appeared in two courts; on her initial appearance in the first instance court, the police asked and were allowed further time to conduct their investigation. She reappeared after a month, and the prosecutor had already presented all of the fabricated documents, which contained numerous charges against her, including recruiting young people to join the Ginbot 7 Party, writing articles supporting a terrorist organization, and assisting members of the party by providing information, among others. Even though the cops and secret service agents couldn't discover a single piece of evidence to back up their

assertions, the judge chose to convict her just by looking at the paperwork piled on his desk. She has also rejected a bail request since the charge leveled against her was "involvement in a terrorist act."

During one of the court proceedings, the police said that while conducting an investigation, they discovered an Oromo Democratic Front (ODF) manifesto inside her computer files. After more than two months of creating evidence, the judge decided to transfer her case to the high court terrorism criminal bench, where she began to suffer for more than two years while defending herself.

The judges, Mahlet says, had strong ties to the ruling party, the EPRDF, and couldn't seem to keep their disdain and anger towards her hidden. They were only interested in hearing the prosecutor's claims, and she was never permitted to invite her family, friends, or coworkers to any of the court proceedings. On one of her court dates, she invited a friend, who was a journalist at the time, and the secret service agents spotted him secretly filming the court procession late that day. The next night, she was violently removed from her cell and hauled to their investigation room. They forced her to remove her clothes and stand naked in front of them, where they began tormenting her in a terrible and abusive manner. One of the cops punched her in the face with his powerful biceps, while the other flogged her with an electric wire. She was beaten to death and returned to her cell in the morning, tormented by all of their heinous acts, just because she invited a journalist friend to go and watch the court proceedings that day.

Befekadu Hailu, who was charged with terrorism for the first time, claims that the charge included no truth and that all of the stories were made up, claims that the charge included no truth and that all of the stories were made up. According to him, no witnesses or evidence were presented to demonstrate that he was guilty, and the judges were also aware from the beginning that he was innocent of all charges, but they just permitted the police to imprison him and continue their investigation. Befekadu wept because the judges had denied him all of his rights to bond since he was accused of terrorism. For refusing to cooperate with Secret Service officers and police, the court sentenced him to almost two years in one of the country's worst prisons.

"Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to accept them, or shall we attempt to alter them, and obey them until we succeed, or shall we transgress them at once?" asks Henry David Thoreau (1849).

During Meles Zenawi's leadership, the participants in this study highlighted how court proceedings led to their misery and despair. The majority regarded the then-time court as a stage on which regime officials might demonstrate their guilt, while the rest depicted the judges as puppets who were sent there to accomplish the dictatorship's nefarious desires. They also said that the administration had been utilizing the courts as a vehicle to carry out all of its evil plans against anyone who stood firm in their opposition.

#### **4.4.3.3. The judgments**

Gedeon (2010) claims that the Ethiopian courts lacked expertise in interpreting the constitution because they were simply convicting journalists based on provisions invoked by the public prosecutor in his study paper, which focuses on how a lack of constitutional jurisprudence in Ethiopian courts can undermine freedom of expression. "...in most cases, the courts carried on and applied the statutory provisions claimed by the public prosecutor without any attempt to attenuate the concerns that might arise in connection with the unfavorable ramifications of these provisions for freedom of expression and the press," according to Gedeon (2010, p.226).

The descriptions of how the participants were convicted and how they received their verdict led the researcher to question the judicial organ's independence from government intervention during the Meles Zenawi era, as well as the courts' expertise in interpreting the law in accordance with the stated articles in the constitution, particularly the freedom of expression.

#### ***"I was punished without being charged"***

Iskinder Nega was charged with instigating violence and encouraging the public to destabilize the country's peace eight times. He was once accused of using guns to topple the regime while admitting to never having had such an objective or experience in his entire life. He had never been released from prison, or at the very least, the judge had always sentenced him to pay a fine to the government, despite the fact that they couldn't

find him guilty of any crime in practically all of the charges. They tortured him in their prisons for some time before releasing him with a monetary fee or spending one or two years in prison.

During the EPRDF dictatorship, he was sentenced to 18 years in prison for allegedly participating with the Ginbot 7 organization, which the regime categorized as a terrorist organization. Even though no evidence of his involvement in the group had been given to the court, he was sentenced to 18 years in jail. It has been difficult to defend oneself once charged with such a crime because the charge will be based on the country's Anti-Terrorism Law, which was purposefully written by the regime's officials to eradicate opposition groups. After that, he was held in Kaliti prison for six and a half years until a new administration led by Dr. Abiy Ahmed took control and freed him. Being a journalist, as well as having the courage to speak inner thoughts without fear, were seemingly considered crimes for Iskinder to spend more than a decade in prison during the EPRDF era.

Temesgen was taken aback when he realized that his case had been heard for more than two years, during which time the judges had been replaced five times. When the previous judge was transferred to another bench, the newly appointed judge began investigating his case from the beginning. But the judge who was finally appointed to preside over his case didn't bother to pore through the file like the others did, and he declared Temesgen "guilty" of all the allegations against him. In less than a week, this judge sentenced him to one year of harsh jail on each charge, for a total of three years in prison without any evidence of wrongdoing. Because of a political decision rather than a judicial conscience, the judge allowed him to endure for three years in those dreadful dungeons.

Wubeshet had been held captive in several prisons across the country for the past eight years, accused of terrorism. The kangaroo court of Meles Zenawi condemned him after reviewing his case under the country's Anti-Terrorism Law, but in actuality, his crime was simply stating the truth. Wubeshet appears to be the only individual in Ethiopian legal history who has been found guilty and sentenced to 14 years in jail

without any charges or evidence being presented to the court. He does not deny that there were a few judges with noble intentions and a strong commitment to the law. Unfortunately, when such judges were discovered, they were reassigned to different benches, while others trusted to carry out the regime's wishes were given an automatic appointment to hear his case. The judge who finally ruled over Wubeshet's case did not allow him to defend himself, and, "... one day he rushed up to the courtroom and summoned me to his bench and gave out a 14-year sentence without even glancing at my face," Wubeshet said. Wubeshet asserts that "... the judge did not render his own decision on that particular day, and it was quite likely that he followed an order from higher-ranking EPRDF officials".

Reiyot Alemu feels that the Meles dictatorship reacted against many of them in terms of judicial power, using such subsidiary laws as pretexts. She described the regulations as tools used by the regime to prevent private press journalists from carrying out their tasks in a free and independent manner, causing them to live in terror and despair. She was dissatisfied with the courts because they had never attempted to examine her case with a clear conscience and a guilt-free mentality. They were well aware that they were not practicing law with seriousness, and that they were not honoring their pledge in all of the court processions summoned to hear her case. They simply accepted the prosecutor's claim and sentenced her to 14 years in prison and a fine of 33,000 birr. The judges were well aware that the judgment made against her was a political one.

Sileshi Hagos' case did not receive a judicial decision. He had been imprisoned for months in a dark chamber, and secret service agents had been interrogating him day and night, in a hard and violent manner. In each of those instances, Sileshi appeared in court four times, with the judge granting the police a further twenty-eight days to complete their investigation into him at each appearance. The judge, who was in her twenties, was only there to allow the police to do what they wanted. He eventually recognized that the cops had taken him to court to escape media criticism for depriving him of a fair trial.

Sileshi received his judgment one day after being held in a dark room for months and being interrogated at all hours of the day and night. He was brought from his dungeon to

the office of the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Agency by a police officer. "You may now return to your house," the Head remarked, satisfied and smiling. Sileshi was forced out of the room before he could say anything. Sileshi received his verdict and was set free in this manner.

For writings and stories published in Ethop weekly, Wosenseged Gebrekidan was charged with nine criminal counts. He referenced, for example, the news he broke about the Tigray Hotel bombing, for which he was condemned to one year and four months in prison by a first-instance court for publishing. He was then called by the court from prison to defend himself on other allegations. By appealing to the Supreme Court, he was able to defend himself and win prosecutor charges in a few cases. The case in which he was accused of a press crime and sentenced to one year of hard jail by the first instance court exemplifies this. He eventually appealed to the Supreme Court, and the judge who investigated the case agreed with him.

Wosenseged was also charged with participating in an act of hostility with CDU leaders, for which he was sentenced to eight years in solitary confinement by the court. Despite his declaration that he had no relationship with the CDU at the time, the dictatorship utilized the claim, that he served as member of the coalition, to punish him for his activities as a free press journalist. There was also a charge of being part of a terrorist attack, for which he could face life in prison or 25 years in prison, but he vanished for a while and the administration changed before they realized their vengeance on him.

Befekadu Moreda was charged with seven criminal counts before the Federal High Court, two of which were dismissed by the prosecutor while the remaining five were investigated. In the meantime, he was granted bail and began to await his verdict, after which he fled to Kenya to seek refuge. Many of the private press journalists who traveled to Kenya at the time realized that getting a free and fair trial in Ethiopia was difficult due to the kangaroo court system established during Meles' rule.

Friends of Befekadu later informed him that the day after he traveled to Kenya, one of the criminal benches sentenced him to one year and six months in prison. It was one of

the five cases in which he was charged. Then he interpreted the judgement issued in his absence as a clear message from the administration to abandon his ambition to return to Ethiopia if he did not want to face prison. There was no need for the judges to investigate the other charges against him since they knew he wouldn't want to return to the country where he had already endured enough misery and torment.

Elias Gebru was imprisoned for seven months without ever having the opportunity to appear in court. They took him to court after he had been in prison for seven months. Without hearing his plea, the judge sentenced him to Kaliti prison, vowing to pursue his case from there. He suffered for a few months in Kaliti prison until the court summoned him again, and the new young female judge in charge of his case declared him guilty on his first appearance before the bench. She ordered his release and a fifty thousand birr bond to allow him to defend himself outside of jail. She further directed that if he wanted to travel overseas, a letter be drafted to the Immigration Agency telling them not to issue him an exit visa. It took more than four years for Elias' case to be closed once a new judge took her place. The new judge absolved him of all allegations brought against him in court, which he had been wrongly accused of.

In a court of law, Habtamu Minale received no verdict. He was seized from his home by security personnel late at night, imprisoned, and tortured for a year in several jails. He recalls a security official who had ordered his detention coming to the prison where he had been imprisoned for a year and shouting his name. When he walked out of his cell, the officer advised him to go home because he had been cleared of all charges. After a year in one of the harshest prisons in the capital, Habtamu received his verdict in this manner.

In a similar vein, Eyuel Fisseha was released due to a police officer's judgment rather than a judicial order. Eyuel was not told to go home immediately, but rather through his brother, who had come to see him that day. Euel couldn't trust his brother when he told him the "wonderful news" at first because he had been suffering there for nearly a year. He was entitled to appear in front of a court of law at any point throughout that period. He didn't ask the police officer "why" that day, nor did he go to the police station to

protest about the unjust suffering simply was subjected to in prison, but he fled. The officer later told his brother that he was freed because of a court order of 2000 birr bail, but Eyuel recalled that the court had issued such an order nine months before, and he couldn't think of any reason why the police needed nearly a year to carry it out. He was released after a year in prison for a cause that even his arresters were unaware of.

Mahlet Fantahun was imprisoned for three years at the Central Investigation Bureau detention center and Kaliti jail, after which the prosecutor dropped the terrorist allegation against her and replaced it with "incitement of violence among different ethnic groups" in Ethiopia. The judge then granted her bail and allowed her to defend herself. A year later, the judge exonerated Mahlet of all allegations against her. She recalls the judge's decision, which stated that all of the evidence given in court was "insufficient" to prove the charges she was accused of. When Hailemariam Desalegn came to power after being tortured, abused, and tormented for nearly three years by Meles Zenawi's thugs, Mahlet was liberated.

Befekadu Hailu was charged with terrorism to imprisoned him for years, if not his entire life, by the regime. The judges, he claims, showed no regret toward him, at least not out of professional or ethical values; rather, they were there to carry out the government's wishes. They couldn't find a single piece of evidence to indicate Befekadu was guilty of the charges against him after more than two years in prison, so they ultimately let him go.

He claims that his release was not because the judges followed the law, but rather due to foreign and internal pressure on the government to recognize and order the courts to decide what it detested. So, after allowing the police to torture him for over two years, the court cleared Befekadu of all charges, but he was not allowed to leave the country until Prime Minister Abiy assumed office, at which point the new court decided to dismiss his case and grant him true freedom.

According to Maru (2009), the rule of law refers to a government based on laws rather than personalities. Individuals working for the government are expected to carry

out their official tasks and responsibilities in a legal manner. To put it another way, the rule of law denotes the dominance of the law (p.364).

The descriptions of the research participants show that the courts investigated their cases and rendered judgments without regard or consideration for the rule of law. According to Maru (2009), who quotes Dicey (1995, p.17), the rule of law entails three elements in practice: No one is punishable except for a distinct breach of law established in the ordinary legal manner before the ordinary courts of the land; No one is above the law; and Courts play an important role in protecting individual rights. However, these three crucial aspects were missing from the legal system and court practices when it came to investigating and providing a fair trial to the charges leveled against private press journalists.

In contrast to Article 29 of the constitution and its subordinate articles, there were practices of invoking the provisions by the public prosecutor, and judges were appointed to function and implement the regime's will and wish, regardless of where the truth resides.

#### **4.4.4. Interpretation of Findings of the Fourth Research Question**

**RQ4: How do private press journalists' portray their sufferings they undergo in prison houses?**

The word "affliction" is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as "the state of being afflicted by something that causes suffering." The participants' lived experiences while imprisoned at different jail institutions in the country were the focus of this study topic. A variety of reflections from the study participants reflected the anguish and torment they experienced while in various prisons during the period. Under the major themes: a) "*Life in Prison*" and b) "*Tortures and afflictions*", the researcher discovered two

subordinate themes under them: a) *Getting into hell* and b) *“A place to lose humanistic demeanor”*.

#### **4.4.4.1. Life in prison**

According to Foucault (1995), one can identify what form of government one has by listening to him talk about the type of prison he has in his nation.

The participants have shared their disturbing memories of the general scenario of the jail houses where they spent years of their lives. According to one participant's account, the prisons were structured in such a way that convicts were tormented by their traumas even after they were released and left the facility.

#### ***“Getting into Hell”***

The participants first gave the researcher broad details of the prison houses where they had been imprisoned and had witnessed various sorts of misery and afflictions. The researcher analyzes one of the study's participants, Iskinder Nega, description of his first prison interaction, which he claims occurred at the Central Investigation Bureau, where he was thrown into a dark, tiny room where he couldn't stand or sleep properly.

Iskinder recalls that the darkness of the room rendered him unable to see his own hands and that he was only allowed to see the sun for 30 minutes every three days. He'll only be out of the room for interrogation, which generally takes place after midnight. He was relocated to another prison where multiple people were smothered in one chamber after suffering in this manner for three months in solitude. Iskinder thought the new prison was too small, and that many politicians were imprisoned there. He had seen many opposition politicians go through various types of torture and suffering, and he was amazed at how they managed to keep going until he went through what he had seen others go through in prison.

Many detainees were crammed into one small room, making it simpler for the cops to torture Iskinder and his cellmates at any hour of the night. He recalls that detainees, including himself, were frequently brought by the police late at night to the security agents' room, where they were tortured until morning and then returned bleeding all over

their bodies. Those who were severely injured and required immediate medical attention were not permitted to be treated outside of prison. Only chance saved Iskinder from the torments and pain he endured at the Central Investigation Bureau's prison.

Iskinder also had another prison experience at Kaliti, where he was held in a cramped chamber with about 200 other inmates at the same time. It was often difficult for them to touch the floor with their feet, according to Iskinder, who explains how the small room was filled with convicts who couldn't fit, and they were forced to go to the toilet tiptoeing over other prisoners' legs and chests. The room was crammed with people accused of murder, rape, and theft, and regime officials ordered it that way on purpose to demoralize and frustrate opposition politicians like Iskinder.

The prison homes' walls and roofing were made of corrugated iron sheets, which got so hot during the day that they felt melting down into vapor. Bedbugs and lice flooded the space every few seconds due to the heated temperature inside. Then they sustained themselves by drinking prisoners' blood.

A toilet room was built adjacent to a cell where Iskinder was imprisoned, and the foul odor that emanated from it was too much to stomach in the afternoon. As a result, the majority of inmates developed nasal and throat infections, while some developed asthma.

Temesgen Desalegn resembles hell on earth in comparison to the prison he was in. Being taken to prison, especially as a journalist, had offered him the opportunity to participate in the most gruesome adventure imaginable. He was imprisoned with people who murdered people, raped innocent toddlers and girls, and committed cold-blooded crimes. Surprisingly, he observed in prison that those criminals had far more privileges in terms of all services rendered in prison than his peers. This may be why politicians and journalists refer to themselves as "prisoners of conscience."

He was imprisoned for two years and four months in a dark chamber separated from other inmates, and he was denied access to services such as the library, cafeteria, sporting activities, and religious prayers or rituals that other inmates enjoy. He was imprisoned in a dark chamber with other political prisoners to suffer.

Even though the prison had its compound, there was a smaller compound within it. Politicians and journalists were imprisoned there. It was a restricted area, and only jail guards were permitted to enter it. Security agents patrolled the small compound where the private press journalists and political prisoners were imprisoned at all hours of the day and night. Temsgen was allowed to get out of that small compound only when visitors came once or twice a month. For more than two years, he had been languishing in a dark chamber inside a small complex, while murderers and rapists enjoyed all of the privileges that the government gave in the large prison facility.

Wubeshet Taye spent time in four separate prisons across the country. He was originally apprehended at the Central Investigation Agency in a room known as "The 8th House". The room was completely black, and the brick walls kept any outside noise out, making it even more terrifyingly quiet every day and night. He was imprisoned for 90 days in that room, which was one of only four of its kind in the Agency compound. These rooms are specifically for political detainees. Wubeshet recalls a senior official of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) being imprisoned for a long time in one of the rooms next to his for being suspected by the authorities of being a member of the Oromo National Liberation Front.

Wubeshet was accompanied by a member of the opposition political party in his little and horrifyingly built cell. They couldn't even converse to one other because of the room's coldness and quietness. They attempted to get warm because being flung and bearing such a horrific circumstance was difficult. As a human being, being imprisoned in that chamber for even one day, let alone ninety days, is intolerable.

After ninety days in prison, Wubeshet was transferred to Kaliti prison. But he was also imprisoned there for months until the court issued its final verdict. He got locked up alone again in Kaliti prison, this time in a little room named "The 6th House" (፩ኛ ቁጥር), which was part of the Zone 3 compound, which also housed other private press journalists like Iskinder Nega and others. Because Meles' regime deemed private press journalists to be political prisoners who had committed major crimes against the government, they were not allowed to mix with other detainees.

Wubshet regarded Kaliti prison to be significantly superior to the one run by the Central Investigation Agency in many ways. At the very least, he was allowed to eat and converse with the other inmates in the compound. Because they were few, they were able to keep their room clean daily with ease.

Finally, Wubeshet was sent to Kilinto Prison, which, in comparison to the previous two prisons, was a lot better place to be arrested. It was well-built, and it matched the norm for what a modern prison should look like both inside and out. However, his sentence in Kinlinto prison was only for a month before he was transported to another prison, Zeway.

Wubeshet was imprisoned at Zeway prison in a gloomy room known as "The Number 8", where he spent the next seven years in torment. In the meantime, a few convicts were relocated to other rooms after a few days or months in that chamber, while he was neglected. Temesgen Desalgn used to work with him for a few months before being transferred to the other room. "On various occasions, leaders of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and other opposition political party executives were imprisoned in that small dreadful chamber. Those who were imprisoned in that room were seen as a danger to the organization's power. A modest complex encircled the room, which could house a few people Wubeshet said".

After being imprisoned in a gloomy solitary confinement chamber alone for more than a year, Reiyot Alemu was taken to the Central Inquiry Bureau, where she began her torturous investigation. "I was only allowed to use the restroom once a day and see the light of day for 30 minutes every three days. Even though I was allowed to speak in court, the judges refused to hear my defense case and sentenced me to 14 years in jail" said Riyot remorsefully. She was then transported to Kilinto Prison, where she endured a variety of terrible hardships and painful situations for seven years. Reiyot said: "I was imprisoned for eight years for a crime I didn't commit or even knew about until Dr. Abiy came to power and liberated me".

They put Sileshi Hagos in a dark room where he couldn't see a flash of light to enter on the day he was captured. He was only permitted to see the sun for fifteen minutes

every other day for the next three days. He couldn't see the sunlight easily because he was trapped in a dark chamber for three days, so he had to shield his eyes with a scarf or a jacket.

He told the judge about the terrible condition he was in and how the police tormented him every night during one of his court hearings. The judge didn't say anything in response to his appeal, instead jotting something on a piece of paper. She then gave the police an additional fourteen days to continue their investigation into him. He then recognized that he had made a terrible mistake by trying to disclose what the cops had done to him, and as a result, he was punished by being thrown inside a one-meter-by-one-meter dark room. They imprisoned him for fifteen days, allowing him to see the light of day for only fifteen minutes every three days.

Sileshi was transferred back to his original dark room after fifteen days of misery, which was considerably superior to the one he was thrown into for punishment. However, he discovered that his room had become overcrowded with new political detainees and that his normal corner spot had been taken by one of them. Sileshi had no choice but to sleep by the gate, folding his legs, until he was granted his freedom after ninety days of suffering in this manner.

Wosenseged Gebrekidan's most harrowing experience was in prison. He was imprisoned eight times and couldn't even acclimatize to the dreadful situation he was in at the time. They humiliated and degraded him for months by locking him up among dangerous criminals charged with murder and rape after the prosecutor accused him of "publishing evil propaganda" that harmed the public's tranquillity. Because of his protests against being iron shackled whenever he was transported to court, he was frequently confined to gloomy chambers for weeks as a punishment. The cops interrogated him at night on purpose to abuse him psychologically and mentally.

When Wosenseged was imprisoned alongside CDU officials at Kaliti jail, he remembers being in a better environment. Despite being accused of terrorism, he had the good fortune of being treated kindly by CDU officials. Otherwise, he agonized, being a

prisoner as a private press journalist in Ethiopia during the Meles era was like being thrown into the most dreadful place on earth.

The many detention camps in Ethiopia where Befekadu Moreda was detained each had their distinct characteristics. For Befekadu, like for the other convicts, being imprisoned at the Central Investigation Agency's prison was the most terrifying experience of his life, as he was locked in a dark room that resembled an animal cage for months. He had been dumped there for months, and every minute of it felt like an eternity to him. He was being treated unfairly in comparison to other inmates who had committed significant crimes such as murdering family members or raping children.

Befekadu's most harrowing encounter, which was far worse even than this one, occurred at a jail center in Assossa, around 800 kilometers from the capital, Addis Ababa. He described the detention center as an earthly hell for him because of the hot sun in Assossa town, as well as the dreadfully crammed jail chambers with detainees. He despised the day he was born multiple times, not because of the awful situation he found himself in, but because of the way his constitutional rights and freedom as a citizen were denied by a system whose officials claimed that Ethiopia had democracy and equality.

Security agents took Elias Gebru to the Gerji Police Station initially. They tossed him in a jail where other violent criminals were also incarcerated. In such a prison cell, the sole light source was candlelight, and incoming prisoners were obliged to pay one hundred birr for a place to sleep. He paid the fee to the "Cabo" (prisoner's chief) and was given permission to sleep on a cement floor in one of the room's corners, where only the most fortunate could do so.

One can have a hard time adjusting to the stench coming from the toilet area just next to their cell. Furthermore, the tin can that prisoners used to relieve themselves at night, which was placed in the opposite corner, as well as the foul odor that emanated from the convicts' bodies, making the chamber the worst spot on the planet to be found.

Within minutes, fleas and lice had infested his entire body and were mercilessly stinging him. It was impossible to sleep in the rear of the room due to the overcrowding.

One can either sleep "Deboqa" (on one side of the body only) or try to fall asleep by sitting on the floor and burying one's head between two legs.

Except for the Kaliti Prison, all three prisons to which Elias was sent had identical characteristics. The sanitation at Kaliti Jail is significantly superior to the prison houses he had been in, and he was allowed to stroll about the prison's mini-compound at least once a day. Prisoners were also allowed to use the restroom whenever they needed to, which helped the chambers smell nicer, at least during the day.

Habtamu Minale was originally thrown into a prison cell filled with convicts accused of theft, rape, and murder. The prison room was dark and smelled like a toilet room that hadn't been cleaned in a long time. He couldn't find enough room in the room to sleep over on the first day, so he sat in a corner next to a tin can full of urine. He tried tucking his head between his legs to sleep, but it was futile. The next day, several inmates were moved to different quarters, and he was given a place to sleep called "Deboqa." Deboqa was a term used in prisons to describe sleeping on one side of the body.

Habtamu was relocated to another prison after months of suffering there, and he was never allowed to appear in front of a court of law. The new prison he entered was overcrowded, with a large number of Somali tribal members suspected of involvement in terrorism. He then understood that the security officers who stormed into his house and arrested him that night had already planned to falsely accuse him of a terrorist offense about which he was unaware.

"Become a prisoner in one of your country's jail houses if you want to gain a true view of your country," when Eyuel Fisseha recalls the situation of the prison houses where he was imprisoned, that says it all. Eyuel was initially detained at a police station near Piazza, and the prison cell into which he was thrown could hold no more than six to eight individuals, but he discovered approximately fifty inmates in his cell. He was imprisoned and forced to live in a cramped room with dangerous and notorious criminals for a month.

Eyuel was transported to another dreadful prison, where he went through hell on Earth. The room was comparable to the preceding one in size and was connected to a bathroom. He couldn't tell the difference between being imprisoned in a bathroom room and being imprisoned in that prison cell. After the court allowed him to be bailed out with two thousand birr, he was put in a deplorable prison cell. By that time, he had deduced that the secret agents had prepared him for a lengthy voyage to suffer and languish in one of their covert jail centers, which he did for a year.

Initially, Mahlet Fantahun was transported to the Central Investigation Bureau, where she was placed in a cramped cell with two other female inmates. She became scared when she saw the prison's exterior building, which resembled a large furnace designed for wicked intentions. It features a short corridor through which two people cannot travel at the same time, and all of the apartments were built with large stones, much like a military barricade. The two detainees were suspected of terrorism, and one of them was held for eight months without ever being allowed to appear in court.

Because the chamber lacks a light bulb, Mahlet and her fellow inmates can only see light throughout the day when they go out to the small courtyard in front for thirty minutes or to use the restroom. They were kept in their small chamber for the rest of the day, only allowing light in via the small gaps in the window and door. Mahlet was forcefully interrogated every other day, and it was generally after midnight, so she had to sleep largely throughout the day to treat and restore energy from all the violence and cruel acts that were being perpetrated against her.

After suffering for almost three months at the Central Investigation Bureau, she was given the opportunity to appear in court. The court began to consider all of the charges and decided to allow her to defend herself while she was incarcerated. The judge denied her bail, citing the fact that she was suspected of terrorism. She was then transported to Kaliti Prison, where she was subjected to yet further ordeals over the years.

In comparison to the previous prison, Kaliti Prison was a much better location for Mahlet. They put her in a very small room by herself because she was accused with terrorism. She was never allowed to speak with other inmates when they went out

throughout the day to warm up or to use the restroom. She was transferred to another small room with eight other prisoners after months of suffering in such a circumstance. They were able to make sufficient use of the limited space in the room to accommodate all of them. Even though they were crammed into that small area, it was a huge comfort for her to be able to converse with someone.

Befekadu Hailu was initially taken to the Central Investigation Agency, where he was subjected to horrors he never imagined would happen in his lifetime. The cops transported him to a location where he was given over to the secret agents who had ordered his arrest in the first place. They then threw him into a pitch-black room with only the door holes for illumination. He could view the day of the light for thirty minutes every day. He was imprisoned in such a torturous room for a month, where he was interrogated by the agents at night.

Then he was taken to the Awash Seven prison camp, where he endured unimaginable physical and emotional abuse. When he arrived at the Awash jail, he noticed that conditions were getting worse due to the oppressive heat in the area, which made life a living hell. He found the weather to be the hardest to stomach, even for residents who had lived there for decades, let alone strangers like him. In the end, despite his previous skepticism about the possibility of hell, both jails persuaded him to believe in it.

#### **4.4.4.2. Tortures and Afflictions**

"...under a government that imprisons any unfairly, the proper place for a just man is likewise a jail... the only dwelling in a slave state in which a free man can abide with honor," Thoreau writes in his essay "Civil Disobedience" (1849).

During Meles Zenaw's reign, the participants were subjected to a variety of hardships and tortures in the prisons where they were held. Several international organizations, including Human Rights Watch (2001, 2004), Journalists Without Borders (2004), and Amnesty International (1998), have reported that Ethiopia was at the top of the list of countries imprisoning journalists during Meles Zenawi's presidency. Various types of affliction tortured these journalists at various prison homes during those trying times, particularly at Maekelawi, Kaliti, and Zeway prisons.

The participants' lived experiences in such jail institutions were the focus of this study topic. A variety of reflections from the study participants reflected the anguish and torment they experienced while in various prisons during the period.

*“A place to lose humanistic demeanor”*

In prison, Iskinder Nega has endured a variety of hardships and afflictions. “I was beaten and held in a dark chamber for days or weeks without a court order, surviving on a cup of water and a little meal once a day. I was forced to use the bathroom while tiptoeing over other inmates' knees and chests in a tight room with roughly 200 other detainees, where feet couldn't readily touch the ground and prisoners were forced to use the bathroom while tiptoeing over other inmates' knees and chests,” Iskinder recalls.

“I was regularly thrown into a solitary confinement chamber that was barely 2 by 1 square meters in size, and I couldn't even stand up straight in that claustrophobic environment, where I was held for three months, sometimes less” Iskinder said. Iskinder was allowed to leave the room for half an hour every three days in that dismal room created with care to keep light out. Iskinder recalls in excruciating detail, "apart from its tiny size, the large fat rats run over my body at all hours of the day and night, making my presence extremely agonising."

In addition, the mosquito bites and lace stings made his entire situation unpleasant. In some of the prisons where he was held, a variety of bugs covered his body from head to toe. He was denied a blanket from the prison or even his family, so he slept with his clothes on a cement floor.

He had endless restless nights as a result of all of these situations, in addition to the physical suffering secret service personnel inflicted on him after midnight. Government secret operatives arrived at night in many of the prisons where he was held and began torturing him with heinous cruelty that no one could comprehend. They hung him upside down and used an electric wire to remove his underpants for hours, till blood flowed all over the floor. Outside the torture room, more officers assisted him in returning to my cell each time. They made him suffer by attempting to break every single bone in his body.

Temesgen's most terrifying experience at Zeway prison was being bitten and stung all over his body at all hours of the day and night. When he started removing those creepy-crawly insects from his body with two full hands at a time, he cursed his life. The bugs were plentiful on the walls and ceiling, and when they bit him, he felt like the bane of his existence.

Temesgen became numb to their venomous bites over time, and he fell asleep dead while they crouched all over him. When Red Cross International authorities paid a visit to the prison where Temesgen had been thrown in and saw the conditions, he had been through this ordeal for a year. Then, to their relief, they arrived a week late with a range of pest-killer sprays and insecticides. The bugs, on the other hand, and the agony they caused him were a mind-numbing experience that lasted in his consciousness long after he was released.

Over a hundred inmates were crowded into the prison room he entered, and they could only sleep horizontally. He tried on multiple occasions to sleep on his back or lay down on his chest, but he couldn't because the room was set up to torture them horribly.

Finding only one toilet room for more than one or two hundred inmates was a nightmare for Temesgen. All of the detainees may have died in a matter of days from cholera or any similar outbreak if it hadn't been for God's miracle. In the morning and at night, they were only allowed to use "the only toilet room" for ten minutes. For those who were raised in an Ethiopian society, it's easy to envision how hard it would be for the prisoners to relax while their cellmates waited for their turn at the door. Constipation was a problem for his convicts, and it was tough for them to bear the pain when they needed to use the restroom.

Temesgen had also seen other hostages whose bodies, particularly their legs, had withered as a result of the physical pain they had endured, and listening to their agony every night was excruciating to him. Temesgen was familiar with the prison and did not feel himself fortunate to have survived such a torturous ordeal. It was because his detention was being closely monitored by several foreign organizations, human rights delegations, and local non-governmental organizations. At least once a month, they paid

him visits and checked on his condition. As a result, they were unable to find a suitable environment at the prison in which to physically harm him.

For many, including Temesgen, the food they served to the convicts was a cause of discomfort. During Meles' reign, the daily allotment for a prisoner meal was 4 birr, which is barely enough to buy breakfast, lunch, or dinner in Ethiopia. Even you would not set aside such a modest amount for animal feeding. As a result, they were fed food that even animals would have refused to eat.

Only when the prisoners' families came to visit them regularly or fortnightly did they get a nice supper. The guards would sometimes deny their family access or allow them to pass the food on, forcing them to bring the food 300 kilometers back to Addis Ababa. Prisoners developed several parasitic problems connected to sanitation and contamination as a result of being compelled to eat their garbage. It was infuriating to Wubeshet to recall the misery and torture he faced during his eight years in the Kaliti and Zeway prisons, places where "guys being put into even animals don't deserve to get there," according to him.

For him, going to prison was like going to hell because it was a place where he had the "chance" to go through all types of difficulties and obstacles in life. When he was imprisoned in the Central Investigation Agency, he was secluded and kept in a dark room where he was only allowed to see light for fifteen minutes each morning and night when he went to the lavatory. The guards offered him something that appeared to be food, but which no animal would eat. That is why, if a person could only survive in the chamber for two days, he would lose his humanistic manner and mutate into a wild beast, similar to being transformed into a cat. Wubeshet was imprisoned in that chamber for ninety days. During those days, he went over every horrible scenario a person could envision, while secret service operatives took me to an interrogation chamber and tortured me at night.

“Inspector Alemayehu, the group's cruelest member, was their boss, and by that time he had been promoted to Commander of Addis Ababa's Anti-Terrorist Task Force. When Prime Minister Abiy first came to power, he was one of the first culprits accused of

abusing his position of authority to do several horrific deeds against innocent people” Wubeshet recalls.

When Wubeshet was transferred to Kaliti prison, things got a lot worse. The guards treated him like a political prisoner, not a journalist who was accused of criticizing the government while exercising his constitutional rights, and they watched him every second of the day. Kaliti had one edge over detainees at the Central Investigation Agency prison: he was housed with them. At the very least, he was relieved not to be imprisoned in an isolation room. When his relatives visited him at Kaliti prison, he was also given food and water, which remedied the food problem.

Though there is no pleasant story to be told about prison life, Wubeshet fared better in Kaliti until he was returned to Kilinto Prison. Kilinto Prison was a newly built prison at the time, with all of the minimum modern amenities that a prison should have. Unfortunately, he was only able to spend a few weeks in such "luxury." They transported him to Zeway prison, a facility where humans undergo the most terrible experiences in the world.

There is no access to drinkable water at the Zeway prison. A prisoner may be given water to drink once a week, or even once every fifteen days. He had been taught in elementary and secondary science classes that a human could not spend more than three days without water, but what he witnessed at Zeway prison disproved his previous knowledge when he observed others, including himself, go more than a week without water.

The meals supplied to them at Zeway prison tasted like animal feed. When such food was offered to them, they would frequently fail to eat it right away and leave it on the plate for only two minutes. Then it started emitting a horrible odor that made them want to puke and flee the table, much less eat it. They were constantly surprised to learn about the ingredients in their meals. They were used to seeing grass and wood within injera (local bread) and bread, and he suspected Zeway Prison was the first to make injera with teff and wood waste (Segatura).

He had learned a lot about how to survive without food for days at Zeway Prison. Prisoners have been eating barely a quarter portion of injera per day to stay alive. Wubshet was underweight when he was arrested, but he was nearly skeletal when he was released from Zeway after eight years. Is there any type of torture that a person may endure that is more torturous than this?

The filthy, biting bugs that were discovered all over the place at Zeway prison added to the captives' misery. Wubshet had the sensation that he was in a Hollywood horror film at moments. The mattress was full of bugs, and his first few days there had been so memorable because they had left him with the most awful experience of his life. Fortunately, man is an adaptable animal, as he demonstrated when he began to live in peace with those callous bugs. He felt no pain when they drew his blood, and when they started stinging or biting his flesh, he stopped scratching it.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Zeway jail was that it formed inmates in a unique way when it came to contacting God in prayer or worship. People like Wubshet started by focusing on God for long periods during the day then moved to meditate on God for four or five days without drinking or eating. Such days and nights of concentration on God had brought them not only physical but also spiritual enlightenment. Some of the inmates in Zeway jail had learned a lot about how meditating on God while denying flesh access to worldly comfort gave them the ability to struggle through all of the traumas and tribulations they faced there, as well as in their current lives.

Reiyot knew she had been stripped of all her rights and privileges throughout her eight years in solitary confinement, which she deserved at the very least. At any institution, she was not allowed to interact with other inmates in any way. Several detainees expressed an interest in speaking with her but were afraid of the repercussions. She was tortured by isolating her from other people and abandoning her to her fate. She was taken to the Central Investigation Bureau's interrogation chamber every night after midnight and abused and tortured until the early hours.

“The interrogation was usually conducted by three to four Secret Service officers, who asked me to strip down to my underwear and stand naked in front of them. They used to complete their interrogation sessions by banging my head against the wall, passing out, and lying down on the cold cement floor, Reiyot recalls remorsefully. When they beat her with an electric wire or punched her in the nose and eyes with their massive fists, she usually passed out. She was denied access to adequate medical care for a long period, which culminated in a health problem in her later years.

The court sentenced Reiyot to 14 years in prison, and she was transferred to Kilinto Prison, where she endured a variety of torments and misery. They put her in solitary confinement, as they had done before, and subjected her to the most terrible punishment imaginable. She has got a respiratory problem because the sanitation room was close to the toilet room. The prison cell's walls were composed of corrugated iron sheets, so it's easy to imagine someone getting burnt during the day and freezing at night.

She remained alone in that small room for six years, with no one to talk to or share her feelings with. She was alone and segregated within the next compound, staring through a wired bibber at the criminals who were playing and conversing with each other. She was only permitted to read a limited amount of works, none of which were political or critical of the government at the time. She couldn't read magazines or newspapers in her room, and they weren't allowed at the library either. She was only allowed to see her parents once a week, and no other visitors were allowed. In later years, those and other harsh treatment of her began to change, and she was permitted to see her friends and other visitors once a week.

Sileshi Hagos was held in a cramped, dimly lighted room when he was arrested. He was allowed to view the light of day for fifteen minutes every three days. He had to drape a scarf over his face when the soldiers led him out of the chamber because he couldn't open his eyes to see out into the daylight. Sileshi told the judge about how he was mistreated and tortured in prison at one of his court appearances. Instead of commenting on his appeal, the court spoke briefly with the cops in charge of his case and granted them

an additional 28 days to complete their investigation. Sileshi realized right then and there that his appeal had been a major miscalculation.

When they got back to prison, one of the cops told him to be prepared for the impending punishment. As they approached the jail compound, they carried him to the opposite side of his last cell, where they waited at a little iron gate. One of the guards pushed him inside into a cage-like chamber after unlocking the fence. He couldn't even stand up because the room was only one meter by one meter and the ceiling height was only one and a half meters.

In that confining space, a small mattress, perhaps for a boy, was set on the floor, and he spotted a small pail next to it for peeing and other similar uses. They kept him in the cage for a month, allowing him three days to see the outside world. He used to ooze into the bucket and hide it behind his back with his jacket. On the third day, he put on the jacket or used it to shade his eyes from the light as he left the room.

In addition to imprisoning him in such a chamber, secret service operatives blindfolded him and transported him to an interrogation room in the middle of the night, where he was grilled for more than three hours every day. It was one of their tactics for mentally tormenting inmates. Sileshi eventually decided that pressing his case to court over how he was treated in prison would only make matters worse. As a result, when he next appeared in court, he was deafeningly quiet and made no protests against his confinement. The guards were ordered to return him to the dark chamber where he had been previously imprisoned when they returned from court that day. He was permitted to return to his chamber, which at least enabled him to stand upright, after a month of being confined in a room that resembled a kennel.

Sileshi believed that his only transgression was reporting the truth on the ground as a journalist, despite their best efforts to induce him to confess to a crime. Every day, he was interrogated for up to six hours after midnight. He was a prisoner who was imprisoned in a dark chamber for three days and only allowed to see the sun for fifteen minutes. He was a prisoner for several weeks, confined to a one-meter-by-one-meter room in which he couldn't even stand up. He was a prisoner who had to sleep next to a

bucket full of pee and feces since he was confined to a kettle-like room. He was a prisoner who had been threatened with death on numerous occasions because of his lousy behavior. He was a prisoner who had been tortured psychologically and physically by Meles's secret service guys. Most people, he said, would go insane if they were forced to go through what he went through in the Central Investigation Agency prison for six months.

Wosenseged Gebrekidan was incarcerated in a cell with roughly 300 other inmates at the time. The cell was filled with detainees like a grain silo, and it was difficult to envision a prison like this in stateless Somalia at the time. Every prisoner began to break out in a cold sweat on their forehead around sunrise as if they were having a bath. They also felt obliged to breathe quickly, as if the room's oxygen supply had been restricted. The sweat on the prisoner's brow had evaporated, generating dew on the ceiling, which subsequently fell as raindrops on the inmates. He had been tormented in that horrific prison cell for more than a year.

Sleeping on one's back, tummy, or chest was not an option in the cell, which held over 300 inmates. A prisoner could only sleep on either his left or right side! Inmates refer to sleeping on either side of the body as Deboka. When convicts are unable to sleep Deboka style, they are forced to stand or sit in the corner of the room until they are awakened and replaced. He had been tortured for years by sleeping Deboka for long periods, not only in one prison but also in others.

Wosenseged was also tormented by being forced to stand or sit in a corner of a prison cell for an entire night in the hopes of finding a vacant area to sleep, only to have a morning light enter the room instead. His family was not allowed to see him when they came to visit, but other offenders were able to see and contact their families for many hours on weekends. It was one of the most harrowing events he experienced while incarcerated.

The interrogation, like that of the other detainees, took place mostly at night, especially when people were sleeping. They interrogated him for up to six hours at a time, forcing him to speak about subjects he had no knowledge of or would never be

involved in. During interrogation, the commander would frequently set his weapon on the desk in front of him and tell the interrogator not to pressure him into doing anything he didn't want to do. As a journalist imprisoned for years under Meles Zenwi's government in Ethiopia, he had another agonizing lived experience.

Befekadu Moreda had to suffer a succession of horrible experiences in prison after being imprisoned nearly nine times. He was held captive in a dark room and interrogated at night by senior operatives of the Central Investigation Agency, including Director Tadesse Miheret, after his first arrest at the Central Investigation Agency detention camp. When the Bureau's Head, Tadessee Miheret, accidentally shot him with his gun, Befekadu was severely injured, and blood spilled for more than half an hour. He wouldn't even let him see a doctor, allowing only a small cotton pad soaked in alcohol to be applied to the wound on his skull. That experience became the most excruciating moment of his life to recollect until today, not because Befekadu watched his blood split on the floor, but because of the bitter taste of tears in his mouth dripping down on his cheeks.

The most harrowing experience Befekadu had, which was considerably worse than his time at the Central Investigation Bureau, was at a jail camp in Assossa town, Benishangul Regional State, around 800 kilometers from the capital, Addis Ababa. The sweltering sun in Assossa town, combined with the dreadfully cramped chambers with an uncountable number of inmates, rendered the detention center where Befekadu was held an earthly hell. It was impossible for a newbie to Assossa town to even breathe properly while sitting beneath the shade of a tree, let alone be cramped into a small space with over a hundred criminals.

Malaria, yellow fever, typhus, typhoid, and other deadly diseases are common in the area. When he was ill with two of the diseases listed above, he was lucky enough to avoid death in prison twice by seeking medical care. Many prisoners died as a result of a lack of medication and care at the detention facility after consuming poisoned food and polluted water.

Many of the inmates had also been bitten by poisonous bugs and had been threatened by dangerous animals such as snakes, which would occasionally enter the chamber and

harm them. Befekdu's experience at Assossa prison was the most horrific and inextricably tied to being recognized for a long time as a city-bred journalist. The prison seemed to him to be a place that had been abandoned not only by man but also by God.

Detention institutions around the country during the EPRDF era were described by Elias Gebru as "torture homes" rather than "correctional facilities" since they appeared to be put up for such purposes. Security officials working for the regime utilized these facilities to torture opposition politicians and private press journalists. He wasn't the only one who had gone through such difficulties; his family, friends, and coworkers had all stood by his side throughout that terrible time.

In prisons, there are many restrictions, especially if you were imprisoned for expressing dissenting ideas as a politician or journalist. Elias, for example, was not allowed to seek medical treatment in a government hospital when he became unwell. He was suffering from Asthma, and the warden refused to let him go to a hospital for treatment. He and other criminals of his type had been allowed to visit a tiny health station staffed by a health officer or a nurse. In such situations, anti-pain drugs, primarily paracetamol 500mg, were the conventional treatment. When he gained his independence, he completely lost his ability to smell.

The mattresses that the inmates slept on were filthy and frayed. They couldn't even bring our sleeping beds in, so they had to sleep on the ground rather than on the cold cement. He was forced to sleep on a filthy mattress that no one had the patience to clean, let alone sleep on because security agents refused to allow them to obtain adequate services at the correctional facility. They also sent him to sleep in the room's corner, near a tin can where the detainees discharged themselves at night.

The bugs had covered his entire body within minutes of his incarceration and were stinging and biting him severely. He's still shocked at how he was able to endure such excruciating pain for months. He thought what had happened to him was similar to having a nightmare or seeing a horrific incident.

Meles and his friends had spent years researching how Algerians were treated by their conquerors to make them subservient to all of their demands and wants, as Elias learned in prison. He recently wrote a book about the battle of the Algerian people against their colonizer. The book tells the story of an Algerian who lived during that period, and what fascinated him was the fact that he had long considered himself a second-class citizen in comparison to his conquerors. Elias believes that this was quite similar to the intent and objective of Meles' regime's activities against individuals who were incarcerated.

They tortured and harmed them in any manner they could to make them feel inferior to their position and authority. Security agents, for example, arrived at the prison unexpectedly and instructed the prison officers to bind their hands and legs to remind them that they were still detainees. They frequently verbally abused them to hurt their feelings and diminish their humanity. They were subjected to a variety of psychological tortures, all of which were intended to dash their dreams for a better future or persuade them that their sacrifice was in vain.

Habtamu Minale's initial prison room was three meters by three meters, with forty-six inmates crowded into that short space. It was a miracle that anyone could breathe in the room, which could only hold eight to 10 people. It was impossible to stretch my legs while sleeping. When sleeping, it was customary to bury one's head between one's legs, as if one were a chicken. Even a few days of such imprisonment would be enough to make anyone miserable. For the first two weeks, Habtamu suffered from back agony, but he couldn't stop. He asked the prison authorities for medical treatment, but it was rejected.

The room was filled with insects, and the stings and bites came thick and fast. He remembers the bugs enveloping his body the day he was locked up, and he couldn't stand up to their sting. He cried and screamed at first because of the pain all over his body, but the other convicts helped him wipe some of it away from his back, and he felt a little better. Being a human has the advantage of being able to quickly adapt to the environment in which they find themselves.

Prisoners were only allowed to use the toilet in the morning and evening, and the rest of the time they were compelled to use the tin can in one corner of the room. Their cage began to stink like hell as the day continued and the temperature rose. As a result, several of the convicts, including himself, got a lifelong sinus condition.

After they had been suffering in this manner for nearly two months, the authorities brought in twenty-four new prisoners to be added to their cell. Every prisoner began shouting and insulting the government and police in protest at that time, and they sealed the door from the inside to prevent further criminals from entering. A jail administrator arrived at the situation after a few hours and directed the policemen to take them to a new prison cell within the facility. Then they moved in, handing over their prison cell to the newcomers.

Habtamu and his fellow inmates discovered a new jail cell that was large enough for them, but they later discovered that they had been placed there to further punish them. It all started the night they were sent to their new prison cell. The chamber was inundated by a spring that broke forth from the ground, trapping us inside. They spent the majority of their time sleeping on the soaked floor. The water drenched their mattresses and clothes every night, so they had to change their clothes every morning. After eight months in such a prison, the police let him go home without taking him to court as if they had done nothing wrong.

A life in prison cannot be regarded as such for Eyuel Fisseha. You'll get a taste of what it's like to live in hell on Earth once you arrive. He has seen how convicts fight and languish in prison till they loathe their Ethiopian heritage. At first, the bugs' stings and bites made him weep for several days until he learned accustomed to them. Because everyone was scratching their body, the inmates dubbed it "playing guitar."

In there, humans were regarded with far less respect than animals. Men were exposed to horrific treatment, including physical and psychological abuse. Inmates are tortured at night by police and secret service personnel if they utter a single word in protest of what is happening to them or other prisoners. They would confine inmates in a dark room for days at a period, allowing them only thirty minutes in the morning to see the light of day.

The filthy circumstances in the prison were too much for them to tolerate. The toilet rooms, one of which was connected to their prison cell, had very little water. In the jail section, which held hundreds of inmates, only two toilets were located. As a result of the terrible odor that had pervaded their chamber, many of them were suffering from throat and nose problems.

They were only allowed to use the toilet in the morning and evening; otherwise, they had to pee in a tin can in the corner of the room. They were driven wild by the toilet's terrible odor coupled with the pungent odor of the tin can. Eyuel and his fellow inmates were tortured and imprisoned in this manner. One day, the cops were painting the wall with iron paint, and the strong odor forced them to sit for two nights in a row because they couldn't breathe properly.

A lack of access to appropriate medical treatment was another challenge Eyuel and his fellow convicts encountered in prison. Inmates were expected to fall ill in prison, but the police escorted them to a nearby health center, where they were examined by nurses or health officers. They normally gave them 500mg of paracetamol or another pain medication and released them. They weren't even allowed to utilize their money to pay for treatment at their preferred clinic or hospital. When they grew critically ill and were referred to the hospital, security personnel refused, allowing them to die on the prison floor.

Mahlet Fantahun was first detained in a dark solitary confinement cell at the Central Investigation Bureau detention center, where she was only allowed to see light for an hour a day. In the middle of the night, several secret service agents tortured her naked. They came in the middle of the night to take her from her cell to their interrogation room regularly.

Electric wires and devices, iron chains, and various types of bumping sticks were among the torture instruments she saw there. Before they started punching and smacking Mahlet, they told her to take off all of her clothes but her panty. They began questioning her with words once she stood naked in front of them, then slapping, striking, and slicing her with an object.

Standing barefoot on the cement floor at that hour of the night nearly killed her, in addition to the psychological trauma caused by being naked in front of a gathering of men. They flogged her with an electric wire after severely chaining her hands. They told her she had to confess to a crime she hadn't done when she asked them to stop. She didn't tell them anything, though, because she hadn't done anything wrong that she was aware of. As a result, they kept torturing her, and she ultimately grew accustomed to it.

Solitary confinement was the most severe kind of torture utilized on her, as it was on the other individuals in this study. It was tough for her to stay in such a room for extended periods. She was not allowed to speak with other detainees and was forced to eat, sit in the sun, or use the lavatory after everyone else. She was entirely shunned and confined to a small, dark room to suffer alone. After the court ordered that she defend herself against the charges against her, she was transported to Kaliti prison.

Because she could communicate with other convicts, Kaliti Prison was a better fit for her. But she had other problems to contend with, one of which was a food problem. It was revolting enough to look at the food supplied to convicts at Kaliti Prison, let alone eat it. She was given the option of sharing a room with two other inmates and cooking their meals once a day. Meanwhile, she begged God to free her from the clutches of the regime's goons, who were waiting for her death outside the compound.

The secret service operatives tortured Befekadu Hailu in a variety of methods, the most heinous of which was the midnight flogging of his under-feet with an electric wire. Strenuous physical tasks that caused him to fall to the ground like a leaf off a tree were among the other types of misery he endured there. Interrogators frequently employ the punch with their massive fists or legs over his body in addition to all of these agonizing ways, in which any interrogation method might easily end in a broken nose or a bulging eye.

When Befekadu was transferred to the Awash Seven prison camp, he discovered that he was subjected to much more ordeals than he had been subjected to at the Central Investigation Agency prison. The filthy food supplied to convicts, as well as the intense

weather, which reached temperatures of over 40 degrees Celsius at times, made him feel as if he had been consigned to hell, were the worst types of misery he endured at Awash.

According to Berger (2007), media freedom is a right that extends beyond an individual's freedom of expression, "despite being constructed on that right" (p.14). "...it is privately held newspapers that continue this quest or help preserve triumphs against powerful forces reluctant to allow certain information to become public," Berger claims in many countries (Ibid. p.14).

The participants have described a variety of ailments that they were compelled to undergo during their time in prison, and their reflections highlighted two key points in much of the evidence: (i) Private press journalists during Meles Zenawi's era went through countless forms of torture and affliction while they were jailed at various prison houses, and (ii) the regime's was pursuing totally a dictatorial nature of administration, as it didn't show any sign of respect to the constitution which itself ratified.

#### **4.4.5. Interpretation of Findings of the Fifth Research Question**

**RQ5: How do they describe their lives after they were released from jail, i.e., the damage resulted on their health, and the psychological trauma they suffer on their lives afterward?**

The researcher looks into the participants' lives after they leave prison, as well as how they impacted their families' lives while they were inside. Therefore one major theme, "The Impact of Prison" was discovered based on the comments of the participants as well as the researcher's desire to learn more about the topic, and three subordinate themes were discovered under it: a) Family's psychological torture, b) Suffering from health problems and c) The shattered vision, dream, and ambition.

Each participant in this study had identified similar types of family issues and had had financial difficulties in both their personal and professional lives. Although each person's situation appeared to be unique, there were numerous similarities in their replies.

#### **4.4.5.1. The Impact of Prison**

The researcher investigates how the participants' families and occupations were affected while they were incarcerated. Participants claimed repeatedly during the interviews that life after jail would not be the same as it was before. The participants' health was severely harmed as a result of the inhumane treatment they received in prison. Furthermore, they were subjected to severe psychological trauma for a longer amount of time as a result of the deplorable conditions of the prisons in which they were housed.

In terms of their personal and professional lives, each participant in this survey recognized comparable forms of family troubles, job loss, and money insecurity. Although each person's situation appeared to be unique, there were numerous similarities in their replies.

##### ***Family's psychological torture***

According to Iskinder, his family life came to a halt not only when he was imprisoned, but also when his wife Serkalem Addis, a former editor-in-chief of the weekly "Menilik," was charged with publishing an article about an opposition political group that the EPRDF regime had designated as a terrorist organization. Serkalem had spent a long period in prison and had been through a lot. While incarcerated, she gave birth to a son and subsequently delivered him to Iskinder's parents. They had no choice but to let him grow up with them because they were both in prison at the time. Serkalem had been released before him, and she had a better chance of at least being with Iskinder.

When Iskinder was eventually liberated and his son first met him, he didn't know him. His wife opted to leave her hometown and live abroad as a result of the sorrow and anguish she faced throughout the EPRDF era. Their son now lives in the United States with his mother, and Iskinder spoke with him on the phone on occasion. He currently lives alone because, he claims, he learned from his mistakes that raising a family while pursuing his professional and political aspirations was too perilous.

Temesgen feels himself extraordinarily fortunate not to have started a family while Meles was in power in Ethiopia. He would have had to deal with the added burden of

worrying about his life partner and children if he had started a family by then. Because security agents were tracking him at all hours of the day and night, he expected the worst to happen to him one day. Due to this unbroken trail by security agents, he moved out of his parent's house and began living alone in a rental apartment many years ago.

After he was condemned to prison, however, his elderly mother, whom he was supporting, became increasingly frightened that she would no longer be able to see him. His mother drove the 300 kilometers to Zeway prison every Sunday to see him, despite her elderly age. He pretended to be in good form and appear healthy in front of her even though he had already been through enough in prison. She realized he was concealing something to comfort her and began to cry, despite his best efforts to conceal his inner grief. His brothers were also concerned about his situation and paid him regular visits, which immensely aided him in getting through his time in prison.

Wubeshet learned of his father's death while incarcerated, but he was denied permission to bury him. That was the most excruciating experience he'd ever experienced while in prison. His mother had been sick for a long time, and when he was arrested, her condition worsened. She'd been denied a visit to Zeway prison before, and she'd become agitated due to his prison conditions. She mistook him for dead and remained silent to avoid alerting the media. When he was released from prison, he discovered her to be sick and frail. He was able to bury her after she died after only a few months.

Wubeshet's son was just two years old when he was detained. For him, not being able to play with and feed his son for the entire eight years was a torturous experience. His son was already ten years old when he was released, and he had never spoken to him while incarcerated. He'll never forget his son's look the day he was released from prison, when he stared at him with hard eyes, as if his father was a helpless victim who couldn't even save himself. Wubeshet realized at the time that his detention had caused a considerable distance between them.

Because she was living with her parents, Reiyot didn't have her own family. She, like the other participants, feels fortunate not to have started a family because children would have had a harder time witnessing their mother in a situation like hers. Her parents and

siblings, of course, have been through a lot with her, and she owes them a debt of gratitude. Reyiot's father and mother made regular visits to see her, putting their work and family commitments on hold. She was the one who felt responsible for their support, but they were always there for her.

Sileshi couldn't even consider starting a family because he was constantly watched by security officers. He recalls that most private press writers knew deep down that they would end up in prison one day, so they didn't consider getting married or starting a family. Most of them were bachelors, which helped them deal with all of the challenges we'd face later on. However, they had suffered immensely as a result of their captivity, as they were unable to support their aging mom and fathers. Sileshi was thinking a lot about his mother in prison, and how she was making ends meet on his father's small pension. He was in agony because he was worried about his mother on top of the suffering he was going through in prison.

Wosenseged stayed with his mother even after he turned forty because Meles' secret service agents had been chasing him for a long time, just like the other private press journalists. He was convinced that he would be imprisoned at any moment. He considers himself fortunate, though, because he was not married at the time of his incarceration. His mother was from a large family, so his brothers were there to help her when he was jailed. Wosenseged and his mother, on the other hand, were so close that when he was imprisoned, she got feeble and unwell from his absence. She'd gone through a lot, and it affected him more than the pain he'd felt in prison.

As a result of Befekadu Moreda's nearly nine-year incarceration, his family suffered long-term psychological anguish. They became increasingly anxious for his return home and began weeping day and night until they were informed of his whereabouts. When he was harassed by secret service operatives at all hours of the day and night, his family suffered alongside him. He was jailed nine times, and he was subjected to physical and emotional abuse in the regime's many prisons. He never contemplated or felt safe returning home when he left his residence to go to work every morning. He was scared every day that they would kidnap him and take him away for good. As a result, he and his

family lived in constant anxiety until he was able to travel to Kenya and escape the looming danger that was approaching their home.

Elias Gebru was lucky enough not to have started a family when he was imprisoned, so his wife and children did not have to go through the same suffering he had. Unfortunately, his mother, father, and other family members are responsible for paying him weekly visits and aiding him with numerous jail challenges. He used to be able to earn his own money and live a regular life, but once he was imprisoned, everything went apart and he was forced to rely on his family once more. Furthermore, the most terrifying emotion his parents were feeling was their fear for his safety while incarcerated.

Habtamu's family, notably his mother, had suffered a tremendous deal as a result of his detention. He was the one who helped the family, despite his sisters' meager salaries. As a result of his father's suffering, his mother went to prison and finally became unwell. She was in tears every time she came to see him, and it was devastating for him to see his mother in such a state and helpless to help.

Eyuel's family had been through a similar trauma, but they had not been imprisoned in a cage like he had. He considers himself fortunate not to have started a family because if he had, he would have suffered considerably more. His family was fortunate in that they were self-sufficient, so he didn't have to worry about their living situation. However, they couldn't see him daily because they were preoccupied with their own lives.

Mahlet's life has been touched by prison in a variety of ways, one of which is her adherence to moral principles. She was living with her parents when she was detained, and they were exposed to the same psychological and physical anguish that she was. They were only different in that they were not confined to such a little, claustrophobic environment as she was. Her sister and she were very close, and her arrest-related anxiety caused her sister's college degree to be disrupted. Secret service agents once apprehended Mahlet's brother at his place of business and imprisoned him for several days while interrogating him about his sister's case. Instead of helping her parents in their old age, she became a burden to them because they had been supporting her with their meager income while she was incarcerated.

Befekadu Hailu's family had to suffer alongside him after he was kidnapped by secret service officers. He was detained four times, and each time he was harassed and tortured in the regime's jails, both physically and mentally. When he left the house to go to work, he noticed a terrified expression of irritation on his family members' features, as if secret agents were about to kidnap him and take him away for good. As a result, Befekadu and his family were subjected to a great deal of anxiety and stress.

### *Suffering from health problems*

Iskinder Nega excruciatingly remembers that in many of the prisons where he was imprisoned, "...the regime's secret agents tortured him day and night with unimaginable savagery". As a result, when they punched him with their heavy boots, his left hand was broken and his ribs were fractured at separate times. In addition, as a result of being tortured in prison, his ankle was severely wounded and developed an abscess that lasted for a long time. "Among the many injuries to my health," Iskinder said, "I was most affected by the trauma I experienced while languishing in the regime various jails and detention camps throughout the country. While incarcerated, I was denied sufficient medical attention, which put my life at risk".

Temesgen now suffers from a severe spinal cord illness that was brought on by his lengthy incarceration. The conditions in which inmates were forced to sleep, particularly the cement floor, were extremely cold, exposing convicts to a variety of health concerns even if they covered it with a mattress. He addressed his spinal cord disease for a long time after he was released from prison, both in Ethiopia and overseas.

Before he went to prison, Temesgen had a problem with his right ear. Since his arrest, he has been prohibited from seeking any form of medical assistance. In prison, his right ear issue worsened, and he eventually went deaf. When he was given his freedom, he went to see a well-known doctor at a local hospital, who told him that it was too late for him to see him and that if he had gotten medical assistance sooner, he would not be deaf now.

Wubeshet Taye has been denied his right to receive medical treatment in prison since his arrest. He had a significant ear problem, and the jail management had never permitted

him to receive any therapy there, so it worsened over time and became impossible to treat. As a result of being infected with germs and bacteria, he experienced frequent diarrhea and vomiting difficulties related to the food they were provided at the prison. Because of how it smells, it's easy to tell if the food has been tainted.

After suffering from diarrhea and stomach aches for a week after eating jail cuisine, he was unexpectedly saved. At that point, his other convicts were convinced he wouldn't make it much longer and pleaded with the warden to let him see a doctor. However, the judge rejected their request and permitted him to use the restroom without disturbing other inmates when he vomited or leaked. He was able to resurrect that agonizing incident and recover without the assistance of medical professionals. When Wubshet was imprisoned, he also had an eye condition. However, after he was locked in a dark room for more than a year, the condition worsened. In prison, he was completely unable to obtain any form of medical assistance.

Reyiot Alemu was suffering from a basic health ailment upon her release from prison. She was frequently perplexed by a variety of life difficulties, even crossing a road on her own alone. She was badly assaulted, tortured, and tormented in prison for a long time, which resulted in a series of health difficulties that required treatment both at home and abroad. She suffered a health issue as a result of the terrible damage she sustained in prison because she was denied sufficient medical attention.

Sileshi was unable to sleep for more than an hour per day for more than a year as a result of the trauma. In his dream, the entire scenario of his time in prison materialized as a nightmarish nightmare. The dark room where he was locked for nearly six months, the one-meter-wide, one-meter-high confinement room where he was punished for one month, the smell of the food that even animals wouldn't dare to taste, and the crying of his inmates at night when they were physically tortured in the interrogation room were some of the scenarios that traumatized him so much that he never fully recovered his freedom. Later, he received medical assistance from a psychiatrist friend and was effectively treated.

Wosenseged had suffered greatly as a result of the traumatic experience he had experienced in prison. For many years, he could only move a few meters per day because his prison cell was encircled by a small complex that resembled a cage, making it difficult for him to take a long walk on the streets of Addis. Furthermore, prison life forces him to live alone, making it extremely difficult for him to reintegrate with his former companions later on. His desire for seclusion contrasted sharply with his pleasant and laid-back demeanor in the journalism field.

When he was in prison, every prisoner entered his allotted room at 6 p.m. (midnight local time) and was locked up within. When Wosenseged was freed from prison, his thinking had been formed in such a way that he was afraid to leave his house after 6 p.m. (12 local time) since it was dark.

Befekadu Moreda has been through a lot of hardships in Ethiopian prisons, particularly at the Central Investigation Bureau and Assossa Prison. He recalls that a senior official of the Agency abused and tortured him personally. He received a scar on his head as a result of the injury he received when the official smacked his head with his rifle, as well as a significant headache problem that he suffered from regularly. Another issue he had been dealing with for years was the psychological damage he had received from Assossa prison. He was afflicted with typhus and typhoid, which were common occurrences in prisons, and which every inmate had to deal with and be diagnosed with.

When Elias was freed from prison, his health had badly worsened. He'd been forced to sleep near a toilet door and a tin can that detainees used to relieve themselves. He had a moderate Asthmatic condition, but incarceration exacerbated it to the point that he lost his ability to smell altogether. The interrogation process he underwent, combined with his health issue, had a significant influence on his left ear, causing him to lose his hearing capacity to a greater extent, and he is still suffering from the problem. Typhus and typhoid infections, which he contracted in prison, plagued him for years, even after he was released.

Habtamu's health had been severely harmed by the freezing water he had been sleeping in every night. The cold water had a significant impact on his left side of the

body, which hasn't fully recovered since then. Because he was imprisoned in a dark chamber for months, his vision deteriorated significantly. He also suffered a nasty illness in his throat as a result of the prison's poor hygienic conditions.

When Eyuel was freed from prison, he had a difficult time adjusting to his new surroundings. The psychological morass that the prison had left in his life caused him to live a terrible existence filled with doubt and distrust of others. He grew preoccupied with looking behind him twice before taking a step forward. He also had trouble sleeping at night since the horrible memory he had in prison would not leave his thoughts for long. As a result of typhoid and typhus ailments he contracted while in the worst hygienic conditions of the prison, he was placed in, Eyuel became a frequent visitor to several hospitals throughout the city. When he was discharged, he had lost eighteen kilograms, which illustrates how badly his health had been harmed.

Even when she was set free, Mahlet couldn't sleep like a normal person for years because of the psychological trauma she had. The various tortures she endured in prison, particularly the bare body torture and other brutal treatment she received, made her life unhappy and despondent for a long time. She was suffering from various health issues as a result of her inability to receive proper medical care while in prison. When she was released from prison, she went bankrupt because she spent all of the money she had saved for medical treatment. Aside from the long-term mental trauma she endured, her vision was significantly harmed as a result of the dark room in which she was imprisoned for a long time, and she is still suffering from various difficulties as a result of the cruel torture she endured in prison.

The trauma of Befekadu Hailu's traumatic period in prison had caused him a tremendous deal of suffering. As a result of the trauma, he was suffering from a basic health problem. He was afraid even after he was set free whenever he spotted police officers on the road. He was also bewildered by a range of life issues, making communication with others, especially his pals, difficult. He was severely abused and tortured in prison for a long time, and as a result, he developed health issues that required treatment at numerous hospitals around the country.

### *The shattered vision, dream, and ambition*

After gaining their freedom, the participants suffered greatly as a result of losing their jobs, and this wrecked their plans and dreams for a better life.

Iskinder's life was impacted by prison since it slowed, and in some cases prevented, him from accomplishing his long-held aspirations and plans. The authorities shut down his office, seized his possessions, refused to renew his publication license, and threatened to kill him if he created a newspaper or magazine. But Iskinder overcame all of these challenges and used a variety of strategies to begin publishing several newspapers under various banners. He bought licenses from various people or rented space to publish newspapers for a set period. Consider himself fortunate not to have had major financial difficulties, since his parental family's background had aided him greatly in resolving his financial issues.

Temesgen would have been a pioneer in publishing a magazine on the internet by now if he hadn't been imprisoned. When he was condemned to three years in prison by a kangaroo court in Meles, he had completed the implementation of the magazine material to be posted on the internet. As a result, when he was freed from prison, he couldn't continue what he had started because the material would be outdated.

"My magazine was the most widely read and well-liked publication in the nation. However, the magazine stopped publishing and went out of business when I was incarcerated". Temesgen added anguishedly, "The journal would have reached a circulation of over a hundred thousand or more copies across the country by now if I hadn't been imprisoned." When he was released from prison, he had to start all over again, selling only a few thousand copies every week. Because most regular writers have fled the country, and some have left journalism to pursue other careers, it would be impossible for him to repeat his prior triumphs at this time.

For a long while, Wubeshet's vision, passion, and hope had been shattered by the EPRDF administration, whose authorities had imprisoned him without even granting him access to a legal court system. I had finished two books when they took my computers

and destroyed them. He sulked, "I even bought those two laptops after a long time of hard work and consider them to be my assets."

He was barred from attending prison school, even though other inmates were allowed to continue their education. Most prisoners improved their educational status as they neared the end of their sentence, but after eight years in the same position, he left prison in the same condition he entered. As a result, when he gained his freedom, it was extremely difficult for him to restore his life to its previous state.

“After I was given freedom, almost all private press outlets were closed, with the exception of a small number that I believed to be supportive of Meles' regime. As so, my chances of pursuing my boyhood dream of becoming a journalist were slim to none.” Wubeshete fought to make ends meet by undertaking translation work and composing his life reminiscences, which he eventually published as books.

When Reiyot regained her freedom, she returned to her employment as a freelance writer and joined the fight to depose the oppressive EPRDF regime from power, which it had controlled for a quarter-century. Unfortunately, the struggle did not go as planned, and vestiges of the EPRDF dictatorship continued to wield power under the guise of political reform. As a result, she might conclude that their efforts to establish true democracy were in vain. She moved to the United States years ago, where freedom of speech and expression are valued, and she has now launched her social media site to openly communicate her ideas and political wishes, which she believes will be beneficial to her country in the future.

Sileshi earned two degrees before being imprisoned. As a result, he assumed that once he was released from prison, it would be relatively easy for him to start his newspaper or find work in the media. However, he understood within a few weeks or months of gaining his freedom that Meles' authorities had organized things differently than he had hoped. After seeing an advertisement in the newspaper, he went to apply to a media company and a private college at different times. Both universities accepted his applications and invited him to sit for written exams and interviews, which he passed with flying colors in both companies.

Sileshi only worked for two days in a media organization after gaining release. When he arrived at his office on the third day, his employer summoned him to his office and frantically informed him that he was no longer permitted to work as a journalist there. When he inquired about the basis for his dismissal, he was informed that government secret operatives had arrived at his office that day and ordered him to be fired.

He also secured a teaching job at a private college after clearing their standards with flying colors. He was able to work for a few days there as well, but when he went to do his job, the college guards barred him from even entering the compound. At first, things were unclear to him, and he grew enraged by the circumstance, forcing him to face the guards. The Dean of the College, who had been watching everything from his office window, rushed out and urgently approached him, telling him that two secret service agents had come to his office the day before and warned him to terminate him immediately. They even told him he couldn't let Sileshi within the college's compound. That day he realized one thing: as long as Meles' administration remained in power, he would have no hope of finding work and living a good life in his own country.

“If I had the chance to meet Meles Zenawi or his officials, I would have pleaded with them to return me to prison rather than punishing me so harshly. The regime did indeed punish me by making me jobless for years, but I was able to endure their retaliation because I had a clear conscience, which helped me to get through all the ups and downs and supported me for a long time with its silent voice by saying: "You know the truth, and the knowledge of the truth will set you free," Sileshi agonizes. He believed that he was free, but he was wrong.

When Wosenseged was released from prison, the authorities shut down practically all private news publications. Those that had been circulated by then were either state-controlled journals such as Addis Zemen and The Ethiopian Herald, or a small number of privately owned newspapers and periodicals suspected of having ties to Meles' administration. Because the newspaper he was working on had been shut down by a Meles Zenawi official's order, it had become extremely difficult for him to restart his life.

Wosenseged's only ambition in life was to work as a professional journalist and serve his country. So, once he was released, he proceeded to the Ethiopian Broadcast Authority, which is authorized to issue press licenses, with his pals to obtain one and resume printing a newspaper. The Authority's officials, on the other hand, were ping-ponging them from one office to the next. They'd now realized that they still held grudges against them, and they didn't want to issue them a fresh press license and force them back into the industry.

Others, like them, who were seeking to earn their licenses felt desperate and fled the country, becoming refugees in the United States and Europe. Wosenseged and his associates, on the other hand, were adamant about getting the license and starting a newspaper again, even though they had no reason to refuse them. It took them more than six months to secure the license and launch a newspaper with the name "Harambe" as its masthead. However, after only six months of trying to stay afloat, the newspaper became bankrupt, and was shut down.

Wosenseged had then devoted his time to writing books and doing other related activities, as he had no other ambitions in life except to be a journalist and writer. He was able to write two novels, one of which was based on his life experiences while imprisoned at Kaliti jail and was a commercial triumph for him. In addition, he intended to write further novels on other prisons where he endured hardships, but for personal reasons he was unable to publish them. He also works as an editor and proofreader, and he manages to make enough money to get by.

Befekadu Moreda was devoted to his journalism vocation, despite having to pay the ultimate price of his life to accomplish it. He had little choice but to depart Ethiopia and save himself first, for the sake of his wife and small children, who had been terrified and impatiently awaiting his safe return home every other day. They paid the price as well when he fled the nation and sought asylum elsewhere since being separated from the person they loved more than everything for even a day, many alone years, is excruciating.

He was a refugee in Kenya for more than a year before seeking asylum in the United States. He knew he wouldn't be able to pursue journalism in Ethiopia because the

dictatorship had closed down his office before he left the country. Apart from the constant harassment and persecution by the police and secret service agents, this was one of the reasons that compelled him to flee his homeland and start a new life in another nation. He lost his publishing company as well as his newspaper "Moged," which was a popular publication at the time. He developed both with a dogged effort that spanned more than a decade of working day and night. In Ethiopia, Befekadu lost his dream and passion, and he has always felt an emptiness in his life, which he has sought to fill with tears.

When Elias was released from prison, he began his journalistic career from the ground up. After more than a year in prison, he learned that the newspaper he had been working for had been shut down by the regime and that some of his coworkers had been detained, while the remainder had managed to flee abroad. He also discovered that some of them changed careers to work as bankers and insurance agents. Then, rather than focusing on what he lost in prison, he tried to console himself with what he acquired as a journalist imprisoned and suffering only for performing his trade.

Habtamu was set free after nearly a year of agony, and everything he possessed crumbled into oblivion. He lost his job when the publication was shut down by government authorities. He lost his job after the police or secret service officers shut down the newspaper he was working for. His long-held ambition of becoming a well-known journalist was dashed, not because he was implicated in terrorism, but because he used his pen to expose the regime's corruption and maladministration. It had been difficult for him to find new employment for a long time, even though he had a university degree in the subject of study. Even after receiving the highest score in both the written and oral examinations, every institution to which he applied for a job disqualified him. He later discovered that the organizations to which he had sought a job had refused him because government security officials were pursuing him wherever he looked for work. They were threatened with being labeled a terrorist if they permitted a man accused of terrorism to work for them.

Eyuel had struggled to find work for a few years after gaining his release. Security agents shut down the publication he was working for, and other print media businesses were also threatened with shutdown by the dictatorship. Furthermore, because the Secret Service guys were pursuing him at all hours of the day and night, he had no choice but to apply for and be hired in different types of jobs to make a livelihood. Those who were eager to help him find work were also threatened. He earned a BA in business administration, but government officials were continually scrutinizing where he applied for jobs, and institutions were directed to reject his application.

He dealt with the situation first with the help of the Committee to Protect Journalists' financial assistance (CPJ). The charity sent money to support journalists in many nations who had been imprisoned and were subjected to authoritarian regimes. Eyuel benefited greatly from the financial aid provided by CPJ after he was granted his freedom.

Mahlet was unable to return to work, even though the court later gave her a statement stating that she was innocent of all the charges against her. As a result, she became a burden to her family again as they grew older until she found another job and was able to support herself once more. When she got out of prison, her major concern was that no one wanted to hire her, even though she was qualified for the work she wanted. The secret agents told leaders of every institution where she asked for a job not to hire her, and some did so out of fear, while others did so to show their support for the EPRDF.

According to Befekadu Hailu, despite his academic and professional abilities, nobody wanted to hire him. "I applied for jobs at a variety of institutions after gaining my freedom, and despite passing all of the written and oral exams, they refused to hire me. I then realized that undercover agents were still after me at all hours of the day and night to make my life as unpleasant as possible," Befekadu recalls with pain. He eventually learned to fend for himself by doing things like translating, editing, and writing research papers.

#### **4.4.5.2. Summary**

The findings of the researcher's conversations (in themes) related to each of the research topics are reported in this chapter. Overall, participants described the lived experiences they underwent during Meles Zenawi's era in Ethiopia. Their responses are much related to the sufferings and tribulations they went through as a result of practicing journalism, while they do concede that the private press has had certain shortcomings in terms of being ethical and professional while executing its duties.

Throughout the interviews, participants stated that their life after prison couldn't become as it was before. Participants' health was affected badly due to the ill-treatment they faced in prisons. In addition, they suffered heavily from psychological trauma for a longer period as a result of the tormenting experience they lived through at various prison houses. Most of the journalists lost their jobs and their careers were tarnished as well, due to the measures taken by the regime of Meles as it shut down them systematically.

Participants claimed repeatedly during the interviews that life after jail would not be the same as it was before. The participants' health was severely harmed as a result of the inhumane treatment they received in prison. Furthermore, as a result of the agonizing experience they had at numerous prison places, they suffered from psychological trauma for a longer period. The majority of journalists lost their jobs and had their careers ruined as a result of the regime's systematic shutdown of media outlets.

#### **4.4.6. Interpretation of Findings of the Sixth Research Question**

**RQ6: What do you envisage ahead about the prospects of journalism as a profession in Ethiopia?**

In spite of the fact that this research question is categorised as NA (Not Added) in the main lists of research questions, the researcher nevertheless chose to include one major theme, "Future Prospects of Journalism in Ethiopia," and one subordinate theme, "What the future holds to the press," because I felt that doing so would aid in understanding and drawing comparisons between the past and the future.

When Dr. Abiy Ahmed initially rose to prominence, many people—especially those in the private press—saw it as the beginning of a better future. According to the International Press Institute (2020), PM Abiy first removed restrictions on more than 250 outlets' ability to publish and revoked several highly criticised legislations pertaining to the media. Then there are arrests once more, especially during the conflict in Tigray, and rights groups describe this as a "dangerous throwback" to repression (Flick, 2021). However, Dr. Abiy's government claims that the climate is "favourable" for journalists. The government reported that 44 new broadcasters had received licences and a new media legislation had been passed in a few years, indicating significant improvements in the working environment for journalists (<https://www.reuters.com>).

Nonetheless, Flick (2021) says that the Abiy administration has jailed "at least 21 journalists and media workers since early 2020," citing complaints from international media watchdogs. Sadly, Ethiopia has returned to the list of countries in sub-Saharan Africa that imprison journalists the worst, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists' (2021) report. In this context, the issuance of "Hate Speech and Disinformation Proclamation No. 1185/2020," which the government is attempting to defend for the benefit of people's security and peace, is one citing example that media have complained about during the Dr. Abiy administration.

With respect to this, Geremew (2021) contends that: The assertion that hate speech and misinformation should be prevented and suppressed is closely connected to the foundations of the current international human rights discourse. It is acknowledged under Article 19(2) of the ICCPR that every individual is entitled to the freedom of speech. "However, since hate speech and misinformation can inflict harm to other human rights, freedom of expression may be curtailed on the basis of these issues" (Ibid. p.iv).

Naturally, as stated by Flick (2021) citing the Danish media Groups that researched the new media law, the previous laws were not replaced with a precise regulatory framework pertaining to media practice during the Abiy era, creating a legal void around matters like the permissions granted to new media businesses to operate. The organisations contributed to the drafting of Ethiopia's new media law, which they said

was a hopeful step because it was mostly modelled after the "most solid" laws on the continent, including those in South Africa and Kenya. The United Nations special rapporteur on freedom of expression, however, cautioned that the hate speech law could exacerbate ethnic tensions and could spark additional violence before separate legislation prohibiting hate speech and disinformation was implemented in early 2020 (Flick, 2021).

Human Rights Watch (2021) reports that between 2010 and 2018, at least 60 journalists left the country because of fear of retaliation from the authorities. "It is not unusual for media to have an ideological bias, but in our challenging context we need more responsible media for accurate facts, fair analysis, and to promote social justice and peaceful coexistence," states Daniel Bekele, Director of the Human Rights Commission (<https://www.reutors.org>).

#### **4.4.6.1. Future prospects of journalism in Ethiopia**

This researcher, at the end of the interview, attempts to gain some responses from the participants and shed some light on the prospects of press journalism in Ethiopia in general, as well as how past experiences may affect the future growth of the industry and what can be gained in the foreseeable future.

##### ***What the future holds to the press***

For Iskinder Nega, the present transformation in Ethiopia is merely "the transfer of power from the TPLF-led regime to the OPDO-led regime". He criticizes the fact that the EPRDF still exists under a different name and that it would be difficult to expect a better future for the print media when there is no significant change in the country's political arena. However, he considers the OPDO-led government's position to be superior to the TPLF's in terms of viewing Ethiopia as a single nation. He believes that the TPLF regime had done a lot to dismantle the unity of the country by using the equality of nations and nationalities as a pretext. He portrays EPRDF administration as "one that had long regarded the private press as an enemy of the state". But what he is currently asking for is at least "the same level of freedom that they enjoyed during his time, if not more, from Abiy's administration".

Temesgen Desalegn, on the other hand, sees a bright future for Ethiopia's media industry. People tried to convince him that the government should be more patient with the press, but he flatly refused, stating that the government's job is to preserve the law. He questioned whether or not we have a government that follows the law. For him, every journalist must be judged according to the law of the land, and not according to the good will of the government!

Temesgen recalls that during the EPRDF era, the constitution guaranteed press freedom, but that social divisions between Ethiopia's ethnic groups were also deeply ingrained, but that this division has now surfaced in a more apparent form. According to Temesgen, an Oromos reporter covering the death of Amhara people in Wollega may be characterized as an Amhara nationalist or Neftegna by Oromos. He may have reported the fact, but his journalistic decorum was overlooked. If another reporter reports a similar case of Oromo nationals being killed in the Amhara region, he will be classified as an OLF member. Temsgegn argues that “today's journalists are facing the most terrible scenario in the profession's history, with the truth being sacrificed in favor of ethnic nationalism”. Of course, he admits that the EPRDF regime is to blame since it laid the groundwork for such attitudes to flourish among Ethiopians, to the point that they have become a way of life.

Wubeshet Taye believes that the profession of journalism in Ethiopia will improve in the future. Those who came before them, he believed, had set the road by executing heroic actions with their pen rather than with swords. He considers himself fortunate to have had the opportunity to be a part of their history. In terms of freedom of speech and the press, however, today's journalists appear to be significantly superior to those of EPRDF era. He provides one example in which the print media was utilized as the main or only platform to fight for democracy and equality in Ethiopia during the Meles era, but new media technology now plays a vital part in achieving similar goals.

However, he acknowledges that there are still manifestations of issues similar to and related to unprofessional and unethical reporting that were seen in the private press in the past, such as press outlets fabricating news during Meles' era, and many more today who

are posting lies on the internet to promote their political ambitions. He warns that if the press does not do all possible to present the public with the truth by evaluating and interpreting facts, there is a good probability that people will turn back to them.

He also suggests that the government take at least some important steps to help the press industry recover, such as revising articles in the Press and Anti-Terrorism laws that specifically target journalists, respecting the constitution's guarantee of freedom of speech and thought, and allowing journalists equal access to information and other privileges.

Due to the expansion of internet technology and social media, Reiyot Alemu does not see any favorable prospects for the media in Ethiopia. She also points to the government's lack of commitment as a factor in Ethiopia's print media's slow growth. According to Reiyot, the current tendency is a reflection of how people choose to look at and obtain information from social media rather than newspapers and periodicals. She claims that, even though newspapers and magazines are mandated to provide in-depth analyses of subjects, they rarely do so due to a lack of professional caliber and the pressure of daily living difficulties. She also highlights the government's high tax load on imported papers, as well as the additional tax cuts for printing businesses, which would put the print media's survival in jeopardy.

Sileshi Hagos recalls how the private press was subjected to severe repression during the Meles administration, to the point of being labeled an enemy of the state. However, with all of the ups and downs, the role of the private press in bringing democracy and good governance to Ethiopia appears to be a thing of the past for him. As the public has switched to using social media as a source of information, the role of the press has become unrecognizable.

Sileshi, on the other hand, claims that there were evident issues with private press journalists doing their trade responsibly and ethically. He stated that during the Meles era, several private press "journalists" exploited the freedom afforded by just reporting to further their political ambitions or ethnic dilemmas. Even though the problem has taken on a new shape and direction, he acknowledges that it still exists today.

Furthermore, according to Sileshi, the current challenge in Ethiopian journalism is tied to the usage of new media technology, particularly social media platforms. On them, everyone becomes a journalist, and people have already begun to place trust in information posted on the internet. As unprofessional persons have abused constitutionally provided freedom, the same type of people are now misinforming the general public through the usage of media technology platforms.

Furthermore, the government appears uninterested in seeing the press flourish again, as it ignores important issues such as lowering paper taxes, easing or avoiding the bureaucratic bottleneck that delays obtaining a press license, revising laws that prevent journalists and publishers from performing their professional duties, opening its door wider to provide equal access to information and advertisements, and assisting in the growth of professionalism.

Wosenseged Gebrekidan is convinced that the profession of journalism in Ethiopia would not improve. According to him, the public, particularly the elite, has already lost faith in the majority of private media as a result of unethical and inadequate newspaper creation. Another reason for his pessimism about the growth of print media is the widespread adoption of new media technology, such as the Internet, by the general public. Because people are so engrossed in social media that it has become their primary source of information, buying or reading newspapers is now seen as a frivolous pastime or a waste of time.

He also worries that if the print media shows any signs of miraculous development, our politicians will not just allow it to happen. According to Wosenseged, current politicians are well-designed by previous ones, so expecting compassion from them for the private press, which Meles' politicians never showed, is like misleading ourselves.

Befekadu Moreda has no idea how many years he has left to live, but he does not believe Ethiopian journalists have a better future. According to him, society must first be altered for the press to have a chance to play within it. People will be able to awaken the public from its slumber, and will be able to demonstrate that a society can only grow and

change for the better, both politically and economically, if its people become seekers of knowledge via committed reading, he claims.

The EPRDF dictatorship had left a scar on the print medium for Elias Gebru, forcing everyone to remember the painful suffering they endured and suffered. As a result, the unpleasant memories connected with the widespread imprisonment, torture, and harassment of journalists and publishers during the Meles era enraged not only those who worked in the industry but also those who wanted to join and even the general public. According to Elias, one sort of media that Meles and his cohorts restricted at its ripening stage was print media.

Furthermore, Elias says that the current government has done little to help the country's print media expand. Journalists expected the Abiy administration to reduce taxes on imported papers, create a more favorable environment for individuals working in the printing sector and the print media, and encourage government agencies and investors to promote their products and services through private press outlets. However, he disparagedly stated that the current situation does not appear to bode a brighter future for Ethiopia's print media.

Similarly, Habtamu Minale does not see any future growth prospects for Ethiopia's print media, as the government has failed to recognize the industry and help it grow through a variety of measures, including cutting taxes on paper, encouraging manufacturing industries to promote their products and services, and lowering the ever-increasing cost of printing, to name a few. However, given today's bleak prospects in the print media, it appears that he finds it impossible to imagine a bright future for it.

Eyuel Fisseha likewise does not see any favorable prospects for the print media in Ethiopia in the future, as the vicious loop continues to wreak havoc on the industry. He claims that many people who had no political or journalistic training or involvement during the EPRDF era have suddenly become online activists and bloggers and that others who do not know politics have become social media analysts and attempted to benefit from it. According to him, such methods are destroying the journalism profession, particularly in the print media.

On the other hand, Eyuel criticizes the government for not assisting Ethiopia's print media in regaining its footing, and he feels the government still views the press as a threat to its survival. Among the many examples given by Eyuel to support his argument are: the price of paper is currently skyrocketing, and the price of printing is aggravating daily, reaching ten times what it cost the business during the EPRDF era. With all of the bleak scenarios being reported in the print media, he finds it difficult to see a bright future.

Mahlet Fantahun is an optimist who believes that a better future awaits us if the government is willing to take certain steps to help the press industry grow and develop, such as lowering the cost of printing, which is increasing every day, and assisting in the solution by lowering the tax levied on imported papers and other raw materials. She also emphasizes the significance of updating or changing laws that obstruct press freedom, as well as providing journalists with the knowledge and skills needed in the profession. Mahlet also emphasizes the importance of journalists practicing their profession ethically and refraining from being partisans on either side of the debate.

People currently are fascinated with using social media, according to Befekadu Hailu, because it has become their primary source of information. He emphasized that buying or reading newspapers is no longer necessary because the internet provides real-time information from all over the world in a matter of seconds or minutes. He said that, in addition to the issue of social media for print media, the ever-increasing expense of printing is aggravating publishers in terms of financial capability.

Befekadu also advised that the government tax on imported papers and other raw materials used in printing works be reduced, as this would help to tackle the problem by cutting taxes on imported papers and other raw materials. Befekadu also emphasized the significance of modernizing or amending regulations that restrict journalistic independence. However, Befekadu does not believe Ethiopia's print media has a bright future as long as these and other impediments exist.

#### **4.4.6.2. Summary**

This researcher assesses the participants' lived experiences during Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi era based on their responses, which are largely related to the sufferings they experienced as a result of practicing journalism. Though some of them admit to making mistakes in terms of being ethical and professional while executing their duties, the majority blame Meles' administration for everything that has gone wrong in their professional life as journalists.

The majority of the participants do not see any good prospects for the print media to flourish in Ethiopia in the future for the various reasons they mentioned above, including the currently sky-rocketing tax on paper, the exacerbating daily price of printing, which has now risen tenfold from where it was costing the industry during the EPRDF era, and the bad memory associated with the arrest, torture, and harassment of journalists and publishers that had been done during the EPRDF era. Not only did the tactics irritate journalists, but they also frustrated the public's adoption of new media technology, particularly social media platforms.

Though the participants recognized that some of the laws had been revised since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office, particularly the Anti-Terrorism Law, they remain convinced that the laws need to be thoroughly revised again because they believe there are still many articles that promote evil intentions.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **5. ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

In this final phase of the study, the researcher discusses the significance of the findings on how future political leaders should approach journalists, why favoring free speech and press in Ethiopia, and how and why it is curtailed, as well as the extent to which press freedom may legitimately be curtailed.

The researcher also outlines some of the challenges and interferences that journalists can bear a significant amount of responsibility for maintaining their independence ethically and professionally, which are essential components of freedom of expression. The researcher also explains how journalists should practice their vocation professionally and ethically under the issues and implications part of this chapter.

#### **5.2. The issue of generalizability**

Though the issue of generalizability is always questionable in a qualitative research study, this researcher attempts to provide an in-depth exploration of the people who have the lived experience of the issue under study. However, this research study did not stop at studying the topic; it dug further and endeavored to illuminate those truths that were to be recorded as "historical facts" in Ethiopia at the time in its findings section.

The generalizability of qualitative research is a frequently asked question. This researcher understands that in a qualitative study, it is impossible to generalize from a small group of people (Creswell, 2013; Meloy, 2002). The goal of qualitative research, according to Creswell (2013, p.34) and Meloy (2002, p.76), is to provide an in-depth exploration of a few people or elites who have lived experience of the issue under study.

The points mentioned by the researcher in this study's section may help to propose how journalists should be handled and how, on their part, should adhere to the profession's ethical standards.

### **5.3. Issues and implications**

The issues and inferences drawn by the researcher in this study's section may help to propose how journalists should be handled and how they should adhere to the profession's ethical standards. In this context, the researcher first addresses here the significance of press and speech freedoms as well as the problems associated with restricting these fundamental human rights, which aided in the development of a democratic society.

#### **5.3.1. The issue of free speech and press**

The following are important characteristics that make free speech and press beneficial to every community, according to Jeffrey (1986):- First, any society's accepted wisdom is never complete - and may easily be erroneous; and truth is only determined via the unfettered clash of ideas. Second, the growth of man as a rational being capable of self-government and social interaction requires freedom of expression. Fourth, freedom of speech serves as a safety valve for the discharge of damaging emotion, and ultimately, free speech is a "self-regarding" action, and its restriction falls outside the appropriate jurisdiction of the government (pp.204-206).

However, Jeffrey (1986) points out some of the drawbacks and perils of free speech, including:

1. Popular wisdom may be correct, but it's also possible that expecting truth to emerge from a collision of competing views is misguided.
2. Individual freedom of speech lays an undue burden on the individual.
3. Exposing abuses of power may be detrimental to the state's wider objectives.
4. Freedom of speech has the potential to stir unrest.
5. In other cases, speech is the polar opposite of "self-regarding" behavior and must be controlled (pp. 206-210).

If the freedom of speech and press has its advantages and disadvantages, then is there any possibility that it could be curtailed legitimately?

The independence of journalists from any outside pressures is one of the guiding principles of journalism in terms of ethical standards. These factors could arise from government or political party officials, the country's legal policy, media owners or editorial policy, a lack of professionalism, advertisers' influence, or economic difficulties. All of these obstacles may not be considered outside influences that compromise the journalist's independence, but each has its detrimental impact on the journalist's public credibility.

When this researcher attempted to explore and investigate the lived experiences of private press journalists during EPRDF era, I focused on comprehending their ordeals and tribulations by analyzing the situation from a phenomenological standpoint. Even though their narratives are comparable in terms of the problems and sufferings the participants face throughout the study period, the researcher discovers that their freedom is misused for quite different reasons.

Of course, some contend that Ethiopian journalism is still in its infancy in comparison to other countries and that it requires a strong regulatory mechanism to develop. However, far from assisting its development, these regulatory mechanisms have proven to be an "egg breaker" for future journalism, preventing it from being hatched and growing. The independence of journalists from any outside independence or prejudice is one of the most important criteria in maintaining their reputation. The fundamental question, though, remains with them.

Serrin (2000) adds in this regard, "In journalism, like in many other industries... journalists must decide at some point what type of professionals they will be. Will they do the work that they believe is most important, or will they undertake the work that will gain them the most attention from their bosses? Will they prioritize substance over flash and celebrity? Will they remain silent if a bad piece of work is approved, or will they strive for higher standards, even if their employers are offended by the challenge? Do they want to be remembered for their work or their celebrity? (p.xv)"

When journalists' independence is imposed by others' interests or exposed to their interests, the rationale for being a journalist – public trust – begins to erode. A media

institution that lacks public trust will be unable to contribute to a country's social, economic, or political progress. When it comes to journalistic freedom, the phrase "independence" might be a bit ambiguous. Many journalists believe that being free of all forms of interference entails being unaccountable for their actions. But, as there is no such thing as perfect freedom, it is important to remember that freedom has its limits.

In this regard, according to Jeffery (1986), citing a study conducted by the Indian Press Commission, "the term press freedom has been given for long a wide and confusing array of interpretations, among which: (1) some people understood press freedom to mean freedom from legal restraint - liberty, that is, to publish any matter without legal restraint or prohibition; (2) some understood it to mean freedom from prejudices and preconceived notions; (3) some understood it to mean freedom from prejudices and preconceived notions; and (4) Some believed it to be independence from the influence of advertising, proprietors, and pressure groups; and (5) some believed it to be freedom from want—freedom from financial dependency on others (pp. 198-199).

According to Jeffrey, a better definition of freedom of the press is "the right to receive and impart ideas and information without interference," which is derived in part from the European Convention on Human Rights of 1950 and now reaffirmed in the national constitutions of many states. Primarily connotes legislative limitation and executive control (although, ideally, it should incorporate all five of the criteria stated above), Jeffrey explains (Ibid. p.199).

Jeffrey (1986) lists the following tests under which freedom of speech and press can be legitimately curtailed, in addition to its constitutional protection against making any law that abridges it:

- The press must not be subject to "prior restraint," i.e. free speech must always be permitted in the first instance even if it may later be punished if it is found to undermine a recognized interest, such as the protection of individual reputation..

- Second, only in the face of "clear and present danger" may free speech be restricted.

- Thirdly, if free speech has a "bad tendency," it may be curtailed. In this context, press freedom may be limited where publishing has the potential to cause social harm, such as the corruption of public morals or the disruption of public order. However, a test like this has a large margin for suppression.

- Fourth, free speech is a "preferred freedom" that requires extra safeguards. According to this principle, freedom of expression and freedom of the press are particularly important rights, as they are an "indispensable condition of liberty."

- Finally, only if free speech represents "incitement to action" may it be restricted. This principle states that the use of force or civil disobedience to obtain redress of grievances is unconstrained unless "such advocacy is directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action and is likely to incite or produce such action" (pp. 218-222).

### **5.3.2. Implications - *Challenges and interferences***

Journalists bear a significant amount of responsibility for maintaining their independence ethically and professionally, both of which are essential components of freedom of expression. As a concluding remark, this researcher discusses the following issues of interference and control that private press journalists face from an ethical and professional standpoint, based on observations made from participant replies.

⇒ **Government interference:** Based on the participants' accounts of their daily activities, the researcher concluded that the government posed obstacles and threats. Meles' dictatorship had been squeezing the private press through several tactics. First and foremost, a journalist is expected to be "loyal" to the people, and if this allegiance is sacrificed in favor of being "loyal" to the government, the profession as a whole will be jeopardized.

The researcher would like to summarize what Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) say about the necessity of being public-spirited in journalism as follows:

...it is possible to be an honest journalist and loyal to a cause. It is not really possible to be an honest journalist and be loyal to a person, a political party or a faction... But to be loyal to a political party, a person or a faction means that you do not see

your primary goal as a commitment to speaking the truth to people who are your audience. There's a fundamental conflict of loyalty there (p.96).

When journalists resist government meddling, one of the most basic reasons for their lack of independence arises. In this regard, the researcher discovered various interference mechanisms from participant responses, including denying them government advertising; denying them access to government information; restricting them to government printing presses, which was, of course, widely observed after the 2005 national election; restricting new print; and so on. Restrictions on who can practice journalism, i.e. license; and restrictions on who can own print and broadcast media.

⇒ **Government legal policy:** Other forms of government involvement challenged the journalist's independence, but these are the key ones that the researcher should highlight here. For example, the researcher examined the government's legal policy during the Meles era and discovered that private press journalists, like all other professions, were obliged to be registered. The government was busily restricting the constitutionally protected right of free expression by meddling in such a situation.

In this respect, Kruger (2004) states the following crucial truth about the issue of journalism (journalists) licensing:

Other professions are regulated by law. Doctors and lawyers have to be registered and can have their right to practice revoked if they fall foul of the rules of the profession. Journalism is different. Anybody can pick up a pen or a microphone and call themselves a journalist – there are no externally determined standards that regulate the profession. The reason for this amazing privilege is that freedom of speech is such a precious thing, and any system to register journalists would compromise it. For that very reason, authoritarian governments are very fond of systems of licensing journalists (p.35).

By licensing journalists, the government was able to exert control over their constitutionally given freedom and render them unable to defend their hard-won independence from government pressure.

Furthermore, while the constitution guarantees an individual's freedom of expression, other government subsidiary laws violate the independence of private journalists. Those regulations not only violate the Constitution's guarantee of freedom but also demonstrate that the government has devolved into a tyrannical regime. The following legal policies can back up what this researcher is claiming:

The Ethiopian constitution Art 29 (2) says: *“Everyone has the right to freedom of expression without any interference...”*

According to the article, freedom of expression is guaranteed, which includes the freedom to seek, receive, and transmit information and ideas of any type. All political organizations tend to use private media to introduce their policies. Even though this was seen as a positive sign during the 2005 election, private press journalists were not permitted to report on what they saw in different polling locations. The administration accused many journalists of supporting opposing political parties in their reports. When reporting political stories, they were required, in a covert manner, to censor themselves.

The right to freedom of expression is also included in Art 29 (3) of the constitution, as is the right to be free from "censorship." Based on the comments of the participants, the researchers concluded that they were frustrated by the regime's daily threats, which caused them to be concerned not just about the substance or tone of their narrative, but also about the response of government officials once it was published. Regardless of what the constitution says about freedom of speech, journalists were expected to self-censor before publishing any story, even if it was of public interest.

Art 29 (4) also indicates that *“... press enjoys legal protection to ensure its operational independence and its capacity to entertain diverse opinions”*.

Even though this clause aims to ensure that everyone, including the private press, has the right to express themselves politically, other regulations will prevent journalists from exercising this right.

The constitution's article 29 (6) also limits freedom of expression "to defend human dignity." Article 27, 4 (a) of Proclamation 178/1999 appears to fall within this

article, which states: "Any transmitted program shall not violate the dignity and liberty of mankind." However, neither of these sections explains what the word "the dignity of man" meant. Journalists frequently filter and limit themselves while reporting issues that could have enormous societal worth because they are subjected to numerous interpretations.

⇒ **The editorial policies of media owners:** Just because the press is owned by private individuals does not mean it is free and impartial. It can be used by some private press owners and publishers to further their economic, political, and social goals. They develop their editorial policies as well because they wish to attain their own goals. Even though they are private press media, journalists are obliged to carry out their duties without being impeded in their independence. Two participants tell this researcher that during the 2005 election, the owners of the newspaper on which they were working urged them not to report any news that revealed electoral fraud. Many journalists quit according to one research participant, because their owners, who were also editors-in-chief, defended them by using their editorial rules as shields to interfere with their independence.

One of the participants later told this researcher that one of the provisions of one of the publications with which he had been working said that "the journalist's major aim in times of political crisis would be to promote peace". From the participants' first-hand accounts, this researcher has learned that some journalists lack sufficient prior knowledge of the editorial policies of the media organizations for which they work, which could contribute for media owners' frequent violations of their independence.

In this regard, this researcher believes that newspaper owners should be self-employed. Furthermore, journalists can have their independence if only the owners place a high value on journalistic values. The idea of public loyalty will bear fruit if they are bold enough to give adequate consideration to the values of core journalism standards.

⇒ **Lack of professionalism:** Due to their mistaken attitude to the events of the day, this researcher concluded through the process of investigating the lived experiences of private press journalists that they lose their independence and become entangled by

outside obstacles. In this sense, when they get alienated or linked with political engagement, one aspect that prepares the way for interference is when they become alienated or affiliated with political involvement. This was evident during the 2005 election when numerous journalists from the private press pushed the opposition parties' agenda. They perceived themselves as participants in the event since they lacked professional know-how, and they made several errors as a result.

"If impartiality is not a cornerstone of journalism, what then makes anything journalism, as opposed to, say, propaganda?" ask Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) (p.95).

⇒ **Advertisers' influence and economic issues:** Another element that this researcher deduced from the views provided by the participants was that advertisers' influence and economic troubles posed a significant threat to their independence. Because practically all journalists are not well-trained, well-educated, or well-paid, they can be readily swayed by advertisements, and lose their independence, sometimes for mere economic benefit, and turned out to be sensational in their reportings.

One of the participants told this researcher about a time when a colleague brought him credential information about a major corruption scheme. Then he contacted the company's manager and requested a response to the situation. He begged him to hold off on publishing the story for a week until he could respond quickly. He consented to his demand and agreed to wait for his response. But the next day, he went to the media owner's office and discussed the situation with him.

After he left his office, the newspaper's owner approached him and requested all documentation, adding, "I will handle this matter, and the owner of the company signed a one-year advertisement arrangement with us." However, he conveyed his displeasure with the situation and requested that he reconsider his position. Despite his decision not to publish the tale, the owner pressed on his demand, but he refused to provide him with the paperwork. The corporation invited the owner of the newspaper for a visit to the UK a week later, and he accepted. The document is still in the hands of the journalist, and the corporation continues to operate illegally.

This is a fantastic example of how sponsors can influence journalists' independence in their daily work. In response to the challenge that advertisers pose to journalists in their daily operations, Serrin (2006) says:

The reporter for the dissemination of whose honest work the press is supposed to be free is subordinated now to the nature of the corporation itself and the mass audience requirements, ideological restraints, profit-making imperatives, and preferences of a quiescent and obediently buying population of those same advertising and entertainment corporations. Freedom of the press now conceals and, by the workings of perverted constitutional law, protects corporate control of the press. Journalism has become the captive of advertising and entertainment corporations (p.35).

Journalists should realize that the public is their main priority. If they advocate for the interests of other parties, such as advertisers, the professional principles and ethics of journalism will be jeopardized.

According to the responses of the participants, some journalists have lost their independence from marketers as a result of the low pay they receive from the media firms. As a result of advertisers and businessmen's pressure, there was a risk of transmitting incorrect information to the public. As a result, while economic difficulties and how salary payments are handled may be presented as threats to their independence, no explanation can be acceptable for violating the public's right to know about and be informed about the events and matters that affect them.

Although various elements affect journalists' freedom in Ethiopia at the time, the researcher believes that the aforementioned explanations are sufficient to solve the study issue. The main point here is that private press journalists did not have full freedom to conduct their profession since the regime interfered in their day-to-day activities, limiting their ability to have a final say over their work.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

The most important legal provision regarding the right to freedom of expression in Ethiopia is Article 29 (2) of the Constitution, which states:

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 print, in the form of art, or through any media of his choice.

As the supreme rule of the state, the Constitution has already provided citizens the right to free expression without intervention from other forces. Individual journalists are undoubtedly included in the term "individual." This constitutional right will become null and void if it is abused and tampered with by the government, political parties, other subsidiary legislation, or people.

This researcher is certain that talking about journalists' freedom and independence in a country where the constitution is not given full regard for any reason is like having a wonderful dream in a strange scenario. This researcher tries to investigate how the EPRDF administration challenged and abused private press journalists through various forms of influence.

In this regard, this researcher assesses the participants' lived experiences during EPRDF era based on their responses, which are largely related to the sufferings they experienced as a result of practicing journalism. Though some of them admit to making mistakes in terms of being ethical and professional while executing their duties, the majority blame Meles' administration for everything that has gone wrong in their personal, as well as professional life as journalists.

This study also demonstrates that listening to someone about the kind of jail they were imprisoned in can reveal a lot about the character of the government. Based on the journalists' uneasy memories of the overall jailhouse environment in which they spent years of their lives, the study concluded that the pain the participants suffered as a result of practicing journalism was largely connected to EPRDF era. Although few admit to making mistakes in terms of ethical and professional transgressions while executing their duties, the majority blamed the EPRDF administration for everything that had gone wrong in their personal as well as professional life as journalists.

In this regard, the study emphasised two key points in a large body of evidence: (i) Private press journalists endured numerous forms of torture and affliction while incarcerated at various prison houses during the EPRDF era, and (ii) the regime later turned its course and started promoting authoritarian democracy, failing to actually honour the constitution that it had ratified. As a result, the study concluded that the regime later pursued an authoritarian form of democracy that fell short of meeting international standards and was anti-press and intolerant of free expression. Without a doubt, certain media outlets persevered and made it through those trying times throughout the EPRDF era, although most were thought to be moderate or entertainment media outlets rather than political publications like *Addis Admas* and *Reporter*, in that order.

This empirical study investigated how private press journalists in Ethiopia were harassed, imprisoned, and subjected to torture at various detention facilities during Meles Zenawi's era. These atrocities continue to haunt many journalists who experienced them during the stated period. As a result, the majority of the participants do not believe that Ethiopia's print media will flourish shortly for a variety of reasons they detailed in their accounts, one of which is the unpleasant memory of the arrest, torture, and harassment of journalists and publishers that occurred during the aforementioned era.

The participants acknowledged that some laws, notably the Anti-Terrorism Law, had been revised since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office, but they remained adamant that the laws needed to be thoroughly revised once more because they thought there were still numerous articles that promoted the bad intentions of an authoritarian democracy type of regime.

The researcher concluded from the participants' responses that the administration of Meles Zenawi had continued to build or use the ancient cave-like prisons, such as Maekelawi, Kaliti, Ziway, and other jails across the nation, to toss journalists in there and allow them to suffer after the oppressive Derg regime fell. It was observed that people continued to be imprisoned and through other sorts of persecution and torture during the reign of Meles, as stated by Dowdon (2008), the fact that Hitler committed genocide did not make Stalin a saint.

In addition, the researcher, based on the participants' comments, discovered and came to the conclusion that the Ethiopian judicial processes during the Meles era were to blame for their sorrow and despair, as the majority of the participants saw the court of the time as a platform for regime officials to admit their wrongdoing, while the remainder saw the judges as puppets who were brought there to serve the dictatorship's evil goals.

The researcher also understood that the participants believe the administration used the legal system, the police and the judges, as tools to carry out its nefarious schemes against anyone who firmly voiced their objections. In this regard, the participants' responses led the researcher to the additional conclusion that the judges assigned to hear their cases were either EPRDF political cadres or regime supporters because they categorically state that all judges were chosen based on their ties to the dictatorship on a political and ethnic level and that they did not expect judicial independence from "political cadres posing as judges."

This researcher, based on the participant's description of the difficulties and problems they encountered due to the lack of freedom and independence of the judiciary, finally interpreted that the judicial system was completely under the control of political power and that it was simply acting like a puppet and doing what it was told.

The study finally suggests that media organizations and associations need to create a policy for protecting journalists without regard to their qualifications, or political and ethnic background. Journalists must be able to work freely regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, or gender. They should be able to report on a wide range of viewpoints and attitudes, in addition to creating diversity among the media itself. If this diversity is reduced just to mean political, ethnic, gender, or other targets, then there are problems with its fundamental premise.

Journalists have also a duty to report with objectivity and impartiality, with the public interest always coming first. Even though political journalism is one of the more challenging aspects of the profession, partisanship reporting typically has an impact on how ethically a journalist considers issues. Future Ethiopian journalists should

understand that covering politics does not require them to support or be associated with any particular political party.

## **5.5. Recommendations**

"Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to accept them, or shall we attempt to alter them and obey them until we succeed, or shall we transgress them at once?" asks Henry David Thoreau (1849).

Many private media journalists in Ethiopia have entered this field for a variety of reasons. Some became journalists because they studied literature at the university level, while others became journalists because they had good writing skills, some to oppose the EPRDF government by spreading their political views, and some to fight Meles' regime by propagating their political beliefs. Because there was no formal instruction in journalism principles and ethics, the majority of them reported events and facts in a "conventional" manner.

The researcher noticed that this caused a lot of challenges in terms of maintaining their independence and providing neutral and professional services to the public. Serving self-political interests, siding on marketers, top business people, or politicians, or manipulating facts to promote political objectives were some of the manifestations of the lack of professionalism seen during Ethiopia's EPRDF era, which resulted in the sacrifice of journalists' independence, besides the government intervention in their daily activities.

The researcher offers the following recommendations in the study's final chapter for reducing interferences that threaten journalists' independence, as well as helping them practice journalism in an ethical and professional manner in future.

The researcher makes the stringent recommendation that future government in Ethiopia need to learn from the past and create a policy requiring its officials to provide information to journalists without regard to their political, social, or other relationships with the media.

Even though the participants acknowledge that some laws, particularly the Anti-Terrorism Law, were updated when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office,

the study suggests that the laws still need to be properly revised because the journalists believe there are still many articles that hamper freedom of the press.

Journalists must be free of any form of government interference, and have a self-contained mentality and way of thinking to perform their duty in an ethical manner. Journalists are not expected to support a particular political party or government. Their first and foremost loyalty should be to the public, and they should preserve independence from the issue they cover. In this regard, the study recommends that a legal framework is necessary to support journalists and preserve their independence.

Journalists must maintain their independence in practice and should not take sides in political debates, whether they are pro or con. Their report is required to be objective, without favoring one side over another, as well as free and fair. The study advises that a regulatory agency, such as the recently formed the Ethiopian Media Council, be established to supervise such work and check and correct them.

Journalists must be class and economic status-agnostic. To overcome insularity in the newsroom, journalists from a variety of classes, backgrounds, and interests must be recruited. Journalism produced by people with a variety of viewpoints is superior to journalism produced by any of them alone. The study suggests that media organizations create a policy for hiring journalists that would be focused on their qualifications rather than their political or ethnic background.

Finally, the study advises that journalists must be able to work regardless of their race, nationality, religion, or gender. They should be able to report on a wide range of viewpoints and attitudes. If this diversity is reduced just to mean ethnic, gender, or other targets, then there are problems with its fundamental premise.

## **5.6. Suggestions for further studies**

The following ideas were put up by this researcher for additional research in the field:

First, the researcher suggests the case for studying the threats to press freedom and why it is crucial for democracy to flourish in Ethiopia.

Secondly, the investigator suggests that further research be done to look at Ethiopia's current legal frameworks and how they relate to press freedom;

Thirdly, since media freedom is a contentious topic, wherein the right to information and freedom of speech are granted on the one hand and media regulations and press laws are prepared to restrict media freedom on the other, more research on this matter must be done in the Ethiopian context;

Fourthly, additional research can be done on the limitations that journalists face in their job, such as newsroom limits like deadlines, tight budgets, scarce resources, demanding supervisors, and distribution issues like internet outages and strict media regulations;

Fifth, it is necessary to look into the barriers and difficulties facing the media's independence and freedom, particularly the press;

Lastly, investigation should be done in future on how press freedom relates to many aspects of developments, poverty, good governance, and peace.

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*(The researcher uses APA in-text and reference citations style, based on the 7th ed., 2020 publication of the American Psychological Association.)*

*(Ethiopian names are presented following the naming tradition in Ethiopia, given name comes first then father's name follows.)*

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# Appendices'

## Appendix A: Articles Published in international journals from the dissertation

### ARTICLE 1

#### A/ Exploring how Absence of Judicial Freedom Undermines Press Freedom in Ethiopia



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## Exploring how absence of judicial freedom undermines press freedom in Ethiopia

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### Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study explores how private press journalists perceive, narrate and interpret their personal challenges and hardships they faced with the judicial system of Ethiopia. In addition, this study explored lived experiences of the journalists and their effort to fight to get a proper court trial in the country. To explore those challenges, and hardships the study considered a time framework embedded the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia Meles Zenawi's tenure. The study used a theory of Alfred Schutz's "Life World" as a lens to provide a "pure" description of the participants' lived experiences. The theory entails a thorough assessment of the participants'

encounters and a focus on their lived experiences concerning lack of freedom of judicial system. The data was obtained through a semi-structured interview, which is widely regarded as the most effective method for gathering information for an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study. Interviews with the journalists were conducted and transcribed with the goal of allowing participants to tell their own stories. The interview transcripts were studied one by one, and each transcript was read and reread to uncover themes that were then organized and further investigated. This study discovered that private press journalists undergo a variety of problems, hardships, and sufferings as a result of lack of free judicial system in Ethiopia during Meles Zenawi's nearly quarter-century rule. Thus, we propose that if we want to see true freedom in every dimension, including press freedom, the legal system must be totally free from the grip of political power and cease functioning like a puppet and doing what it is instructed.

#### **KEY WORDS**

lived experience, private press, judicial freedom, journalism Ethiopia, phenomenology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

## **1. Introduction**

Judicial independence, according to Robert and William (1999), is a promise of democracy that acts as a cornerstone of a free society and the rule of law. It simply means that talking about democracy or rule of law in a society where the population denies judicial freedom is meaningless. Therefore, this article addresses how private press journalists in Ethiopia describe the hurdles they encountered with the judiciary in getting free and fair court trial.

The participants discussed their shared views on judicial independence, noting that the judges assigned to hear their cases were either the ruling Ethiopian peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) political cadres or the regime loyalists. The participants, in this regard, state unequivocally that all judges were appointed based on their political and ethnic ties to the dictatorship, and that they did not anticipate judicial independence from "political cadres posing as judges."

The participants revealed the ordeals they went through during their case's judicial processes. The judges appear uninterested in even listening to their argument, regardless of how important the truth and reliability are. This researcher evaluates their

depiction of lived experience, which may be utilized to show how courts exercised law throughout the Meles' administration in Ethiopia.

According to Maru (2009), the rule of law refers to a government based on laws rather than personalities. Individuals working for the government are expected to carry out their official tasks and responsibilities in a legal manner. To put it another way, rule of law denotes the dominance of the law.

The descriptions of the research participants show that the courts investigated their cases and rendered judgments without regard, or consideration for the rule of law. According to Maru (2009), who quotes Dicey (1995), the rule of law entails three elements in practice: No one is punishable except for a distinct breach of law established in the ordinary legal manner before the ordinary courts of the land; No one is above the law; and Courts play an important role in protecting individual rights. However, these three crucial aspects were missing from the legal system and court practices when it came to investigating and providing a fair trial to the charges leveled against private press journalists. In contrast to Article 29 of the constitution and its subordinate articles, there were practices of invoking the provisions by the public prosecutor, and judges were appointed with the goal of functioning and implementing the regime's will and wish, regardless of where the truth resides.

## **2. Literature review**

### **Philosophical and theoretical framework**

The epistemological position of this research study is interpretive philosophy, while the two most notable alternatives of Interpretivism: Phenomenology and Hermeneutics are recommended as research theories to conduct the study's description and interpretation (Collins, 2010).

According to Denscombe (1983), understanding "what some people think and do, what kinds of problems they face, and how they deal with them within a given socio-historical context" (p. 87) is one of Interpretivism's characteristics, and it usually focuses on meaning and may employ multiple methods to reflect different aspects of the issue. This researcher employs the theoretical foundations of Phenomenology, specifically Alfred Schutz's "Life World Theory" in studying the lived experience of private press journalists that of the suffering they face due to the absence of free judicial system during Meles Zenawi's rule of Ethiopia.

Schutz (1967) took the idea of Intersubjectivity, a term originally coined by the philosopher Husserl (1931), to his theory and states that: "Intersubjectivity is the basis for living and sharing the understanding of the life-world with others" (p. 124). For Schutz (1967) intersubjectivity refers to ". . . person to person social interaction, in our day to day experience as human beings with others connected by actions, influences, ideas, etc., in the course of understanding

and being understood by others, in mutual attempts in making sense of the world and others” (p. 125).

According to Schutz (1967), the life-world is where our lived experience is created. It is where the past is deposited, the present emerges, and the future is shaped. As a result, without the life-world, we cannot understand social interaction. Schutz further elaborated his “intersubjectivity” idea in his theory in the following manner:

I assume that all that makes sense to me makes sense to all those with whom I share the life-world. My actions make sense, and I suppose that others are interpreting them meaningfully as well, and I make sense of what others do too. In these reciprocal acts of giving and positing meaning to yourself and others, inter-subjective social life is built. It is also the social life of others (p. 123).

Vargas (2020) also describes Schutz idea of inter-subjectivity by stating that it is the foundation for coexisting with others in particular dimensions of time and space and for imparting to them a grasp of the life-world. When the stock of knowledge is only partially derived from personal experience, intersubjectivity helps us refine it by validating or modifying it to later experiences.

The researcher uses Alfred Schutz’s theory, which emphasizes on “how people perceive social phenomena” rather than the European approach, which concentrates on “the core of human experience.” The researcher would be describing what is being experienced, rather than “attempting to unearth the essence of what is meant by the phrase,” according to Schutz’s definition of Life-World Phenomenology.

### **“Authoritarian rule” and the press**

The history of print media in the developed world is investigated because they have always been active agents in political change, economic development, and social formation rather than simply recorders of society (Craig, 2007). In contrast, in emerging countries such as Ethiopia, the media has not had a significant role in bringing about political change, economic progress, or social formation. If look, at least, the past 100 years of government type that Ethiopians have gone through various kinds of political leadership found with a totally different ideological orientation, but with a similar type of ruling system—an authoritarian one.

Emperor Haileselassie ruled Ethiopia under an authoritarian monarchical system of government for more than 44 years (from 1930 to 1974), in which a single man dictatorial power ruled the country with harsh censorship laws for all media outlets (Gasiorowski, 1990). The Emperor, like many authoritarian tyrants throughout history, did not allow free thought or speech.

Bahiru (2002) cites Article 4 of the Emperors’ 1955 constitution as evidence of absolute power:

“By virtue of His Imperial Blood, as well as the anointing which he has received, the Emperor’s person is sacrosanct, His dignity is inviolable, and His power irrefutable” (p. 13).

This just demonstrates how citizens were not permitted to oppose or denounce the Emperor verbally or in writing. In 1974, the Emperor was deposed from his throne and the monarchy was abolished by a military junta known as the “Derg,” which literally means “committee.” The “Derg” adopted communism as an ideology, declaring Ethiopia a Marxist-Leninist one-party state with itself as the vanguard party in a provisional government (Henze, 1985).

The Derg, led by another dictator, Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam, declared socialist philosophy to be the highest law of the country, and no commercial media was permitted to exist in Ethiopia (Keller, 1985). Some believe that the Derg adapted its philosophy from rival Marxist parties, all of which emerged from the student movement. The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP), for example, was so committed to civilian government that it waged urban guerrilla war against the military rulers, resulting in anarchy in the years that followed (Marcus and Crummey, 2006). Others, however, disputed this assessment, claiming that when Somalia was at war with Ethiopia, America was unhelpful and that the Derg simply fell into the hands of the Soviet Union (Gebru, 2000).

Whatever the case, the Derg proved to be an authoritarian during its 17 years in power by publicly banning citizens from using all democratic values and assets, including freedom of speech and opinion.

Following the demise of the Derg in May 1991, Meles Zenawi’s TPLF, which eventually became the EPRDF, assumed control of the government with a socialist bent. The Front’s name, Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT), was a clear indication of their leftist political beliefs from the start (Young, 1991; Aregawi, 2009). In May 1991, the TPLF, which eventually became the EPRDF, assumed control of the government under the socialist leadership of Meles Zenawi. The Front’s name, Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT), was a clear indication of their leftist political beliefs from the start (Young, 1991).

Bach (2011) conducted a thorough examination of the ruling EPRDF party’s political position, concluding that it is “authoritarian.” He says the following in this regard:

Since 1991 and the arrival of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) into power, the Ethiopian ideologists have maintained revolutionary democracy (abyotawi democracy in Amharic) as their core doctrine. The notion inherited from the struggle (1970s–1980s) aims at legitimizing a political and economic structure which de facto implies the resilience of authoritarianism (p. 643).

That means that, according to Bach’s assessment

of the EPRDF's philosophy, the term "authoritarianism" might be applied not just to those who have seized power through a military coup or without a democratic election, but also to those who have concealed their power under the appearance of democracy. One method to understand such governments is to look at how they "handle" their country's media and journalists.

Despite his success in delivering economic progress to Ethiopia, many people regard Meles Zenawi as an authoritarian leader who does not respect freedom of expression and thinking (Freedom House, 2012). De Waal (2012) writes the following about Meles and his political ideology in one of his review articles on Meles Zenawi's unfinished Master's thesis, "African Development: Dead Ends and New Beginnings."

World leaders have lauded Meles' economic achievements without acknowledging their theoretical basis. Human rights organizations have decried his political record as though he were a routine despot with no agenda other than hanging on to power (p. 148).

In a similar vein, Mark Tran wrote an article for *The Guardian* on August 12, 2012 titled "Ethiopia's renaissance under Meles Zenawi tainted by authoritarianism," in which he states that while Meles has received praise for his economic record, his regime's intolerance of dissent has drawn criticism from human rights groups and the UN, and raises awkward questions for aid donors. In the following way, Tran (2012) describes how Meles' dictatorship had a negative impact on the country's private press:

. . . In July, Eskinder Nega, a prominent journalist and blogger, was sentenced to 18 years in prison, and an opposition activist, Andualem Arage, was given a life sentence for breaking anti-terrorism laws. Other journalists have been charged under the same sweeping anti-terrorism law that was introduced in 2009, prompting Navi Pillay, the UN high commissioner of human rights, to say journalists, human rights defenders and critics were facing a "climate of intimidation" in Ethiopia (p. 12).

This study aims to discover from the perspectives of the participants whether Meles' dictatorship was granted constitutional status out of a sincere desire to advance democracy and press freedom in the country or if it was only a publicity act to win over Western countries.

## **Overview of absenting judicial independence**

The breakdown of separation of powers in Ethiopia is a result of a system in which a political organ with strong ties to the executive is the last judge of the constitutionality of the executive's political acts and one effect of this strategy is that judges are reluctant to make decisions on politically

sensitive issues.

Yemane (2011) states that, the rule of law is a must requirement for the protection of individual freedoms and rights, and advancement of limited governance. One of the various means of achieving these ends of the rule of law, according to Yemane, is the principle of separation of powers. "The original theory of separation of powers provides for the division of government powers between the two organs, the legislature and the executive, leaving the judiciary out" (Yemane, 2011, p. 31).

Yemane (2011) states what Montesque confesses with regard to separation of power and the rule of law as follows:

"Liberty is threatened when one branch of the government acquires more than one of the powers of government and all the more so when it acquires all three of the powers; so that in order to have liberty it is necessary that law be made by a legislative body, but administered by a separate executive, and applied by an independent judiciary" (p. 32).

What Montesquieu insisted upon saying is that in order to foster governmental accountability and safeguard citizens' fundamental liberties from the arbitrary whims of the state, it is critical to maintain a clear division of powers between the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch.

Darou-Salim (2017) states a couple of problems in the allocation of judicial power in Ethiopia, and one is that the Supreme Court in Ethiopia cannot interpret the constitution. Therefore, the judiciary has limited power in terms of their control over the administration due to a law passed by the Congress to reduce the review decisions of administrative agencies. Due to this constitution, the judiciary in Ethiopia does not have a lot of say in laws that control freedom of the press and free media.

Capitalizing on the weakness of the country's judicial institutions, Ross (2009) on his part states, the Ethiopian government used its advantage to pass a law that is repressive toward the press. According to Ross (2009), the Ethiopian government, for instance, established a mass media law in July 2008 that provided the government the authority to swiftly bring defamation lawsuits and levy severe financial penalties on publishing organizations and journalists who disobeyed government regulations. Additionally, by granting that authority to the minister of information, it allowed the government the ability to quickly deny the registration and licensing of journalists and media organizations (FDRE Constitution, 1995).

Article 43(7) of the same law stipulates that defamation or false accusation against any constitutionally elected official judiciary or executive can be prosecuted. This law, therefore, seals the mouth of journalists when it comes to criticizing government officials (Ross, 2009). The vagueness of the definition of defamation and false accusation gives a lot of freedom to the government to define it as it pleases.

The judiciary in the country does not allow for free review of laws voted by the Congress, giving almost total power to the Congress to act as they please. These practices impede human rights from being respected in the country.

Furthermore In 2009, the Ethiopian Senate passed the anti- terror law Proclamation No. 652/2009, that contains a vague definition of terrorism and allows the government to jail journalists and citizens easily (FDRE Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, 2009). According to Ross (2009) the law does not conform to any international definition of terrorism and violates human rights. A number of journalists were illegitimately jailed under that law. The law was not reviewed by the House of Federation despite the opposition of human rights activists, journalists, and opposition members.

First off, because of a law approved by the House to limit the review judgments of administrative agencies, the judiciary has limited authority in terms of its supervision over the administration (Yemane, 2011). Also, the constitution of Ethiopia does not precisely outline the procedures for reviewing administrative decisions. Yemane (2011) also claims that some provisions in Ethiopia's constitution permit the House of People's Representative to transfer authority from the judiciary to a special *ad hoc* court or an administrative agency. This constitution limits the judiciary's ability to influence legislation governing press freedom and free speech in Ethiopia.

### 3. Methodology

The current study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a methodology as it allows the researcher to "present and write the participants' lived experience as it is; i.e., quotations from participants—how they describe things and how they see the phenomenon they encounter." According to Creswell (2013), IPA will also assist the researcher in "...focusing on a small number of persons and going deep to develop the detail; and exploring the problem in an open-ended fashion" (p. 138–139).

The study looks at the judicial procedures and examines the problems, hurdles, and sufferings the journalists' faced. Because IPA employs both phenomenology and hermeneutic interpretation, the researcher formulates both positive and negative questions about their lived experience. To clear the ethical dilemma of the current study the researcher obtained oral consent of each participants and the name of the participants were used anonymously.

According to Alase (2017), "IPA is being used as a methodological approach in many qualitative research studies as it helps to investigate and interpret the 'lived experiences' of people who have experienced similar (common) phenomena," in addition to allowing researchers "to develop bonding relationships with their research participants" (p. 11–12).

The researcher discusses the findings of results by interpreting lived experiences of the participants by imploring Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the themes and subordinate themes prepared from the data-collection process in a series of breakdowns that enable the reader to identify the connections between participants' lived experiences, and the phenomena that was existed during Meles Zenawi's era of Ethiopia. The discussion of findings of results is reported "thematically across the individuals" (Friberg, 2001; Ferm, 2004; Carlsson, 2011), therefore presentation and interpretation of the findings are based on the themes designed at the data gathering process.

Though IPA has its own data analysis steps—aligned more with hermeneutics phenomenology and is being used for interpretative analysis of the study—this researcher adopts Braun and Clarke (2016) step-wise thematic categorization, which is also acceptable to use in an IPA framework to conduct a phenomenological study, and Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) four stages of inductive analysis for the interpretative part. Therefore, the researcher describes and interprets the interview data gathered from the participants using both the thematic Analysis and IPA with a qualitative phenomenological approach of study.

The researcher uses an inductive approach to give interpretative analysis of the findings based on theme identification from Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as it aims to compile and examine the interpretations people make on their experiences (Reid et al., 2005). Because the goal of IPA is to learn about the participants' perspectives, the process includes the researcher's interpretative activity, sometimes known as "double hermeneutic" (Tuffour, 2017). In other words, the researcher's interpretation of experiences is just as important as the subjects'.

According to Smith et al. (2009), due to its commitment to exploring, characterizing, interpreting, and contextualizing the participants' sense-making of their experiences, IPA has become a popular method for doing phenomenological research. This researcher mainly employs the inductive approach of IPA by using Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014)'s four key stages of phenomenological inductive analysis, which underpins the double hermeneutic, in which the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant's sense-making activity.

### Research questions

The research questions posed by the researcher and addressed in this article are:

RQ1: What obstacles and challenges did Ethiopian journalists face in their quest for a fair trial with the legal system?

RQ2: How did Ethiopian journalists tackle the challenges they ran against when they were being tried?

## Type of data and sampling method

The type of data employed by this researcher is primary data, which consists of texts transcribed from interviews conducted with private press journalists and will be used to investigate the phenomenon under investigation in this study.

With this type of data, the researcher has two alternatives. The “Face to Face” or “One-on-One” Interview is the first type of data. The researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with private press journalists who are affected by, or have knowledge of, the issue under study in order to acquire the essential data.

The researcher also conducts online interviews with the then private press journalists who are currently living overseas. The interviews were performed using Skype or other online tools that allowed the researcher to connect with the participants face to face. This study identified 12 private press journalists available to participate in one semi-structured in-depth interview between December 2020 and January 2022. The researcher uses the purposive sampling method to identify a more narrowly defined group for whom the research issue is relevant. Purposeful sampling, according to Creswell (2016), “is the act of selecting participants for a qualitative project by enlisting individuals who can help explain

the study’s key phenomenon” (p. 109).

When performing a phenomenological study, the researcher used sample data from “... only a few folks who have experienced the phenomenon” (Starks and Trinidad, 2007, p. 1374)—and who can provide a thorough account of their experience that might be enough to identify its core elements.

This researcher also applies Reushle (2005) principles of Connectivity, Humanness, and Empathy (CHE principles) for the ethical and methodological advantages of semi-structured interview research practices used to gather data.

TABLE 1 Participants’ demographic.

No.	Name	Educational status	Title/position	Remarks
1	Participant 1	MA	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
2	Participant 2	BA	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
3	Participant 3	BA	Editor	Imprisoned
4	Participant 4	BA	Editor	Imprisoned
5	Participant 5	Diploma	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
6	Participant 6	BA	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
7	Participant 7	Diploma	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
8	Participant 8	BA	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
9	Participant9	BA	D/Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
10	Participant 10	BA	D/Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
11	Participant 11	MA	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned

12	Participant 12	BA	Editor	Imprisoned
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It shows that all of the participants had first degrees and were editors or higher in the journalistic field. Additionally, everyone was incarcerated and receiving prison sentences of at least 1 year and up from the court.

*Familiarity, topic grouping, emerging theme analysis, and write up* are the four steps of analysis established by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) and used by the researcher in the results and discussion section.

## Participants’ demographics

This study identified 12 private press journalists available to participate in one semi-structured in-depth interview between December 2020 and October 2021. The researcher drew on the participants’ real experiences in addition to the demographic data provided in Table 1 at the end of this article.

## 4. Results and discussion

Courts, according to Ginsburg and Moustafa (2012), are frequently utilized to further the goals of authoritarian governments, but they are also sometimes transformed into key centers of political resistance (p. 6–7). Unfortunately, it appears the Ethiopian courts have chosen to take the former position.

According to Dicey, as cited by Mark (2012), just recognizing rights in a constitution does not safeguard or ensure an individual’s rights. When the rights guaranteed by a constitution and other laws are violated, they must be maintained or defended in court.

Regarding the lack of judicial freedom in Ethiopia during the Meles era, Mgbako et al. (2008), also state:

The breakdown of separation of powers in Ethiopia is a result of a system in which a political organ with strong ties to the executive is the final arbiter of the constitutionality of the executive’s political acts. One of the outcomes of this system is that judges are fearful of ruling on politically sensitive cases (p. 290).

The participants discussed the difficulties and problems they had encountered during their court case. They claim that the legal system is completely dominated by political power, and that it is just behaving like a puppet and doing what it is told. The three major themes that participants describe in their responses to this study question are: (a) Judicial freedom, (b) The proceedings, and (c) The verdicts. As a result, the researcher divided the question into three subordinate themes for interpretation, which are: (a) “Political operatives dress up as judges,” (b) “I knew you were innocent,” and (c) “I was punished without being charged,” under the major themes.

## Judicial freedom

The breakdown of separation of powers in Ethiopia is a result of a system in which a political organ with strong ties to the executive is the last judge of the constitutionality of the executive's political acts (Mgbako et al., 2008). One of the consequences of this approach is that "judges are hesitant to rule on matters that are politically sensitive" (p. 290).

The participants described the difficulties and problems they encountered due to lack of freedom and independence of the judiciary, and based on their responses, this researcher interprets that the judicial system was completely under the control of political power, and that it was simply acting like a puppet and doing what it was told.

*"Political operatives dress up as judges".*

Participant 1 was arrested more than ten times, and in each of those instances, he did not see a judge who was free of political bias or association. It seemed to him as though they had been appointed by the party or by Meles himself to indict and prosecute him and his colleagues with a crime. Judges never challenge or reject prosecutors' requests or appeals, whereas their plea was readily rejected and their ability to plead on a matter was lost. For him, it was a good example of the regime's dictatorial reign, which had lasted more than a quarter-century.

According to Participant 2 personal experience, there was no judicial freedom during Meles' era, and it was even amusing to witness how judges exercised their judicial power. All judges were appointed based on their political and ethnic affiliation with the regime. Of the two or three benches that were assigned on a regular basis to look into the cases of politicians and journalists accused of various crimes artificially designed by the regime, all judges were appointed based on their political and ethnic affiliation with the regime. Judges have pretended to be neutral in some cases, but as soon as they exhibit such behavior, they are sent to different benches.

Judges were assigned to preside over cases involving detained private press journalists and opposition politicians on a permanent basis, says the other participant. He claims that expecting judicial independence from political operatives posing as judges is impossible. Some of the regime's high-ranking officials had regularly encouraged him to work for them, but he had previously declined their offer. Though the prosecutor did not cite the regime's retaliatory action in his accusations, the judges' reflections revealed that they were aware of it. They had been mentioning such things in the middle of the procedure on occasion, and they had unwittingly betrayed their disdain for him.

Naturally, after his case had been adjudicated for more than a year, new judges were assigned to rule over his case. He recalls the new judges expressing a preference for his innocence or reluctance to accept

the prosecutor's claims. Then, to seek for his case, other new judges who had proven their loyalty to the leadership swiftly replaced them.

Participant 4 recalls that the regime's high-ranking officials or the Party leaders personally appointed the judges. Some of the judges were members of the EPRDF or had some sort of affiliation with the party. So, Participant 4 wonders, how can one expect to see judicial freedom when all of the actors were chosen and allocated in such a way that they were expected to serve their political party rather than the public's interest? She had been treated by a slew of judges who treated her as if she were a criminal, displaying their open hatred for her.

She recalls judges being assigned to review the files of suspected politicians and journalists on a regular basis. In brief, the judicial system was set up in such a way that those linked with the EPRDF held decision-making power, and then judges were assigned who could be trusted to deliver rulings that the regime's leaders were happy with.

The other Participant sadly recalls the judiciary's lack of total freedom during Ethiopia's Meles era, when all press cases were referred to the high court's 10th criminal bench, which was presided over by Assefa Abreha, a top TPLF central committee member at the time. Meles appointed Assefa, the older brother of the then- defense minister Seiy Abreha, while his sister Timnit Abreha was also a government minister."

When Assefa was appointed as a presiding judge to the only bench authorized to review cases of private press journalists accused with different press-related offenses, Participant 5 and his pals realized what the dictatorship was up to. Assefa and the other justices showed no interest in hearing their appeal at least once.

Participant 6 recalls the judges who presided over his case, and he is certain they were all members of the ruling party. According to him, anyone accused of political crimes was deemed an enemy of the state, and it was often impossible for him to even submit his case as a citizen with every legal right to defend himself, let alone secure a fair trial.

During Meles Zenawi's reign of Ethiopia, Participant 7 has never experienced judicial freedom all at once. He claimed that judges were chosen mostly on the basis of their political stance toward the ruling party, as well as their ethnic background. When the prosecutor delivered the charges, he recalls the judges refusing to let him register a complaint. They read their verdicts, and he was led to prison by the cops. He agreed with the other participants that there were judges who were specifically chosen and assigned to look into political issues, and that when private press journalists were arrested, their cases were also brought before these courts. They were appointed to promote the regime's interests and had no regard for the constitution or citizens' rights, he continues, his voice trembling.

Participant 8 agrees with the other participants that the judiciary was not free at all, because the bulk of the judges selected to hear their cases were either

EPRDF party cadres or supporters. Meles had been arguing constantly, mentioning the Derg era, in which individuals were just pulled off the street and slaughtered, whereas during his rule, people were taken to appear in court for a fair and free trial. The paradox, according to Elias, was that prosecutors and judges were not politically neutral, as Meles had claimed for years, and they were passing their judgments on defendants after lengthy consultations with prosecutors or even security officials who seized them.

Participant 9 only had one chance to appear in front of the court, and it was in the judge's private office. He was thrown in jail without being charged with a crime, and the young judge, who was in her late twenties at the time, granted the police an additional 14 days for further investigation without allowing him to speak. He felt that his personal experience would aid him in comprehending the facts surrounding judicial freedom during the Meles era.

After being charged of instigating public unrest as well as being involved in a terrorist attack, Participant 10 appeared in court twice. However, because the prosecutors were unable to substantiate any of the charges filed against him in court, the judge allowed his release with a bail of 2,000 birr. However, they disobeyed the court order and threw him in jail, where he was ignored. Despite the fact that the court ordered his release, he spent nine months in the regime's brutal prison cells.

Participant 12 chooses one example to demonstrate how the judicial system was built to support the EPRDF government. It was about how she was interrogated about a relationship she had with someone who wrote a political piece on their blog page opposing the regime. As evidence, a Central Investigation Agency agent produced voice recorded material claiming to prove her relationship to the author of the piece. The prosecution presented the evidence against her in court and requested that the charge be accepted as adequate evidence implicating her for her role in a terrorist act. The judge dismissed Participant 12 request for the court to hear the recorded voice material brought against her as evidence. She cries out, "How can one expect to defend oneself in a court where the judge has refused his right to see the evidences produced against him?"

Participant 11 testified that in none of his four repeated wrongful arrests, he did not have the option to appear before an unbiased court with judicial independence. Participant 11 notices the judges' prejudice toward the government from the 1st day in court, and he subsequently witnesses how they ignore the defendant's appeal and make decisions based on the prosecutors' demands and requests.

## **The proceedings**

According to Ginsburg and Moustafa (2012), courts are frequently utilized to further the goals of authoritarian governments, but they are also sometimes transformed into key centers of political resistance. Unfortunately, it appears the Ethiopian

courts have chosen to take the former position.

The participants revealed the ordeals they went through during their case's judicial processes. The judges appear uninterested in even listening to their argument, regardless of how important the truth and reliability are. This researcher evaluates their depiction of lived experience, which may be utilized to show how courts exercised law throughout the EPRDF time.

*"I knew you were innocent!"*

Participant 1 discusses the court procedures that he went through after spending several months in jail for an inquiry. Following the secret operatives' acts of cruelty and brutality against him, he was met with judges who shared his viewpoint.

He first appeared in front of the court when he was the publisher of the weekly newspaper *Ethiopia*. The then editor-in-chief of the newspaper was also charged with encouraging violence between nations and nationalities, as well as broadcasting false information to the public. Their bail plea was denied, and they were obliged to defend themselves from prison.

According to Participant 1, he tried everything he could to defend himself, but the judges were uninterested in hearing his reasons. Instead, they granted police requests for more investigative time and repeatedly incarcerated him. The judge refused his bail rights, putting him in a dark room prison for a year until the prosecution persuaded the judge that if he was set free, he would have no complaints, and the judge gave his freedom. The prosecutor requested that the editor-in-chief be sentenced to 2 years in prison, which the judge granted. The editor-in-chief was sentenced to two more years in prison without being permitted to defend himself in a court proceeding in a free manner.

Judges, according to him, are essentially puppets of the administration who are appointed based on their political affiliation or ethnic background. He has never been allowed to defend himself in a court of law, despite the constitution's guarantee of citizens' rights and benefits. "It was difficult to expect a proper legal procedure presided over by such politically biased justices," he recalls.

Participant 2 was first arrested in 2010 and was charged with 35 criminal offenses. After 4 months, he was hit with an additional 69 charges, bringing his total to 104 files. He believed that the allegations were brought against him in order to force him to flee the country or to frustrate and destroy his career as a journalist. However, he remained adamant, and they realized this and chose three accusations from the large list of crimes he was accused of. They charged him with "misleading the public's image of government," "try to disrupt the constitutional system through mutiny," and "defaming the government's good name."

He recalls his lawyer asking the court how the government's name, if it has one, could be slandered, given journalists are supposed to be part of the government. According to Temesgen, it was unusual

and unprecedented for a government to accuse a journalist of defaming its name.

Yared, a Harvard law professor, also appeared in court and gave a 1-hour long statement in which he rebutted all of the claims leveled against Participant 2. A total of 2,000 documents were provided to the court, which could have adequately contested all of the charges while also validating his innocence. However, the court ignored all of his reasons and sentenced him to 1 year in prison for each crime, for a total of 3 years in prison.

The indictment against Participant 3, he recalls, was that he published several articles in publications and on the internet associating with terrorist organizations such as the OLF, ONLF, Ginbot 7, and others. However, he stated that he had never had any personal contact with these organizations or any type of communication with them throughout his life. Surprisingly, there was no proof to support the claims leveled against him. The prosecutor once called four witnesses against him, but all of them testified in his favor.

The prosecutor read the charge against him as though he had been caught red-handed committing a crime on June 24. However, he refuted the accusation, claiming that he was arrested on June 22 and that it was impossible to commit a crime on June 24, as the accuser claimed. The judges, on the other hand, were unconcerned about it, instead informing the prosecutor to change the date of the crime for which he was charged.

Participant 4 recalls that the prosecutor was unable to provide evidence to prove her guilt, despite being charged with numerous crimes including: act of aggression against and attempt to destroy infrastructures; assisting terrorist groups through her journalistic career; receiving money from organizations designated as terrorists by the regime; and numerous others. On the other hand, the judges refused to hear her witnesses while allowing those who came to testify against her to do so.

She has asked the court twice to have two renowned politicians, Professor Merera Gudina and Doctor Yakob Hailemariam, attend as her witnesses and provide their professional testimony, but the judges have turned down her request both times. A judge even informed her at one of the court sessions that the court is not a parliament or a place for political debate. She expresses her displeasure with the way she has been treated in court over the years. The courts were hearing all the fake accusations and charges that the prosecutor had filed against her, she recalls with agony.

Even when the prosecution dismissed two counts, Participant 5 was charged with seven criminal offenses. As a result, he was required to appear in court once or twice a month. He was taken from his home and from prison by the authorities on several occasions. The charges alleged defamation of the government's and officials' good names. Though it is still unclear to him how a government can have a name that may be defamed, he was charged with and

expected to defend himself on various allegations, including reporting fake news and inciting public insurrection against the government. However, they were unable to produce any solid evidence to the court that would show his guilt.

Participant 6 describes how the cops filed a criminal complaint against him and took him to court, where the matter was heard by a judge who was a young woman in her early twenties. The judge didn't seem disturbed while yelling and screaming about how he had been subjected to a lengthy inquiry and torture, as well as protesting why the police had denied him his constitutional right to appear in court within 48 h. While he was screaming and cursing, the officer requested an additional 14 days of investigation, alleging that the police probe had not yet been completed.

The young judge motioned for the officer to approach the bench and whisper to each other for a few minutes before deciding that the police would be given an additional 28 days to perform their investigation. He recalls her being the only judge presiding over cases involving political prisoners, and he regarded the court procedures in his case as a demonstration of the "so-called judiciary's freedom" during Meles' reign.

Participant 7 had been charged with a number of criminal offenses, and the judges were more concerned with the charges leveled against him by the police and secret service agents than with the evidence that may have disputed their assertions. On one charge, he was sentenced to 1 year in prison, and then the same court summoned him again to hear another case. He portrays the judicial procedures at the time as a manufactured drama intended to appease Meles' government on the one hand, while punishing those who resisted or attacked him on the other.

Among the various claims leveled against him, Participant 8 recalls fostering hate between nations and nationalities, aiming to destroy the people's chosen government, as well as reporting or manufacturing lies to aid terrorist organizations. He was also charged with "using his journalistic career to incite public violence." He was first charged in a news report published by "Awramba Times," and the other two allegations were related to his membership in the Ginbot 7 party, which the regime designated as a terrorist group. But, after suffering and pain in their prison houses owing to the slow-moving legal proceedings, he was eventually released free of all the counts he was accused of.

Despite the fact that Participant 9 was suspected of being part in a terrorist act with the Al-Shabab group, he was never given the opportunity to defend himself in court throughout his 2 months in prison. The security guards, who had been drinking the night before when they arrived at his residence, took him to a detention center and interrogated him, hoping to find evidence of his involvement with the terrorist Al-Shabab group.

The court process had only taken place once, in the judge's private chamber, and she had done it on

purpose to avoid journalists who had come to the courtroom to report on his case. After speaking with the security officers, the judge ordered his arrest and gave them an extra fourteen days to probe further. He couldn't speak even if he wanted to, but he was perplexed and even more startled to learn why they were wasting their time in such a foolish charade.

Participant 10 views the judges who were reviewing his case as political appointees, and he did not expect a fair trial from such a court. Those security agents who placed him in jail returned to the courtroom to watch his trial. The court didn't bother to inquire about their legal standing to file a charge at a prosecutor's office. She merely gave herself an extra 14 days to research, followed by another 3 months. When the police told her a bogus story that had incriminated him, the judge nodded her head in agreement throughout the court proceedings, Participant 10 laments.

Participant 11, who was charged with terrorism for the first time, claiming that the charge included no truth and that all of the stories were made up, claims that the charge included no truth and that all of the stories were made up. According to him, no witnesses or evidence were presented to demonstrate that he was guilty, and the judges were also aware from the beginning that he was innocent of all charges, but they just permitted the police to imprison him and continue their investigation. Participant 11 wept because the judges had denied him all of his rights to bond since he was accused with terrorism. For refusing to cooperate with secret service officers and police, the court sentenced him to almost 2 years in one of the country's worst prisons.

Participant 12 appeared in two courts; on her initial appearance in the first instance court, the police asked and were allowed further time to conduct their investigation. She reappeared after a month, and the prosecutor had already presented all of the fabricated documents, which contained numerous charges against her, including recruiting young people to join the Ginbot 7 Party, writing articles supporting a terrorist organization, and assisting members of the party by providing information, among others. Despite the fact that the cops and secret service agents couldn't discover a single piece of evidence to back up their assertions, the judge chose to convict her just by looking at the paperwork piled on his desk. She was also rejected a bail request since the charge leveled against her was "involvement in a terrorist act."

During one of the court proceedings, the police said that while conducting an investigation, they discovered an Oromo Democratic Front (ODF) manifesto inside her computer files. After more than 2 months of creating evidence, the judge decided to transfer her case to the high court terrorism criminal bench, where she began to suffer for more than 2 years while defending herself.

The judges, Participant 12 says, had strong ties to the ruling party, the EPRDF, and couldn't seem to keep their disdain and anger toward her hidden. They

were only interested in hearing the prosecutor's claims, and she was never permitted to invite her family, friends, or coworkers to any of the court proceedings. On one of her court dates, she invited a friend, who was a journalist at the time, and the secret service agents spotted him secretly filming the court procession late that day. The next night, she was violently removed from her cell and hauled to their investigation room. They forced her to remove her clothes and stand naked in front of them, where they began tormenting her in a terrible and abusive manner. One of the cops punched her in the face with his powerful biceps, while the other flogged her with an electric wire. She was beaten to death and returned to her cell at morning, tormented by all of their heinous acts, just because she invited a journalist friend to go and watch the court proceedings that day.

## The judgments

Timothewos (2010) claims that the Ethiopian courts lacked expertise in interpreting the constitution because they were simply convicting journalists based on provisions invoked by the public prosecutor in his study paper, which focuses on how a lack of constitutional jurisprudence in Ethiopian courts can undermine freedom of expression. According to Timothewos (2010) in most cases, ". . . the courts carried on and applied the statutory provisions claimed by the public prosecutor without any attempt to attenuate the concerns that might arise in connection with the unfavorable ramifications of these provisions for freedom of expression and the press" (p. 226).

The descriptions of how the participants were convicted and how they received their verdict led the researcher to question the judicial organ's independence from government intervention during the Meles Zenawi era, as well as the courts' expertise in interpreting the law in accordance with the stated articles in the constitution, particularly the freedom of expression.

*"I was punished without being charged".*

Participant 1 was charged with instigating violence and encouraging the public to destabilize the country's peace eight times. He was once accused of using guns to topple the regime, while admitting to never having had such an objective or experience in his entire life. He had never been released from prison, or at the very least, the judge had always sentenced him to pay a fine to the government, despite the fact that they couldn't find him guilty of any crime in practically all of the charges. They tortured him in their prisons for a period of time before releasing him with a monetary fee or spent 1 or 2 years in prison.

During the EPRDF dictatorship, he was sentenced to 18 years in prison for allegedly participating with the Ginbot 7 organization, which the regime categorized as a terrorist organization. Despite the fact that no evidence of his involvement in the group had been given to the court, he was

sentenced to 18 years in jail. It has been difficult to defend oneself once charged with such a crime because the charge will be based on the country's Anti-Terrorism Law, which was purposefully written by the regime's officials to eradicate opposition groups. After that, he was held in Kaliti prison for six and a half years until a new administration led by Dr. Abiy Ahmed took control and freed him. Being a journalist, as well as having the courage to speak inner thoughts without fear, were seemingly to be considered crimes for Participant 1 to spend more than a decade in prison during the EPRDF era.

Participant 2 was taken aback when he realized that his case had been heard for more than 2 years, during which time the judges had been replaced five times. When the previous judge was transferred to another bench, the newly appointed judge began investigating his case from the beginning. But the judge who was finally appointed to preside over his case didn't bother to pore through the file like the others did, and he declared Participant 2 "guilty" of all the allegations against him. In less than a week, this judge sentenced him to 1 year of harsh jail on each charge, for a total of 3 years in prison without any evidence of wrongdoing. Because of a political decision rather than a judicial conscience, the judge allowed him to endure for 3 years in those dreadful dungeons.

Participant 3 had been held captive in several prisons across the country for the past 8 years, accused of terrorism. The kangaroo court of Meles Zenawi condemned him after reviewing his case under the country's Anti-Terrorism Law, but in actuality, his crime was simply stating the truth. He appears to be the only individual in Ethiopian legal history who has been found guilty and sentenced to 14 years in jail without any charges or evidences being presented to the court. He does not deny that there were a few judges with noble intentions and a strong commitment to the law. Unfortunately, when such judges were discovered, they were reassigned to different benches, while others trusted to carry out the regime's wishes were given an automatic appointment to hear his case. The judge who finally ruled over his case did not allow him to defend himself, but one day he rushed up to the courtroom and gave out a 14-year sentence without even glancing at Wubeshet (2016) face.

Participant 4 feels that the Meles dictatorship reacted against many of them in terms of judicial power, using such subsidiary laws as pretexts. She described the regulations as tools used by the regime to prevent private press journalists from carrying out their tasks in a free and independent manner, causing them to live in terror and despair. She was dissatisfied with the courts because they had never attempted to examine her case with a clear conscience and a guilt-free mentality. They were well aware that they were not practicing law with seriousness, and that they were not honoring their pledge in all of the court processions summoned to hear her case. They simply accepted the prosecutor's claim and sentenced her to 14 years in prison and a fine of 33,000 birr. The

judges were well aware that the judgment made against her was a political one.

Participant 5 was charged with seven criminal counts before the Federal High Court, two of which were dismissed by the prosecutor while the remaining five were investigated. In the meantime, he was granted bail and began to await his verdict, after which he fled to Kenya to seek refuge. Many of the private press journalists who traveled to Kenya at the time realized that getting a free and fair trial in Ethiopia was difficult due to the kangaroo court system established during Meles' rule.

Friends of Participant 5 later informed him that the day after he traveled to Kenya, one of the criminal benches sentenced him to 1 year and 6 months in prison. It was one of the five cases in which he was charged. Then he interpreted the judgment issued in his absence as a clear message from the administration to abandon his ambition to return to Ethiopia if he did not want to face prison. There was no need for the judges to investigate the other charges against him since they knew he wouldn't want to return to the country where he had already endured enough misery and torment. Participant 6 case did not receive a judicial decision. He had been imprisoned for months in a dark chamber, and secret service agents had been interrogating him day and night, in a hard and violent manner. In each of those instances, he appeared in court four times, with the judge granted the police a further 28 days to complete their investigation into him at each appearance. The judge, who was in her twenties, was only there to allow the police to do what they wanted. He eventually recognized that the cops had taken him to court to escape media criticism for depriving him of a fair trial.

Participant 6 received his judgment 1 day after being held in a dark room for months and being interrogated at all hours of the day and night. He was brought from his dungeon to the office of the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Agency by a police officer. "You may now return to your house," the Head remarked, satisfied and smiling. He was forced out of the room before he could say anything. Sileshi received his verdict and was set free in this manner. For writings and stories published in Ethop weekly, Participant

Participant 7 was charged with nine criminal counts. He referenced, for example, the news he broke about the Tigray Hotel bombing, for which he was condemned to 1 year and 4 months in prison by a first-instance court for publishing. He was then called by the court from prison to defend himself on other allegations. By appealing to the Supreme Court, he was able to defend himself and win prosecutor charges in a few cases. The case in which he was accused of press crime and sentenced to 1 year of hard jail by the first instance court exemplifies this. He eventually appealed to the Supreme Court, and the judge who investigated the case agreed with him.

Participant 7 was also charged with participating in an act of hostility with the Coalition for Unity and Democracy party (CDU)

leaders, for which he was sentenced to 8 years in solitary confinement by the court. Despite his declaration that he had no relationship with the CDU at the time, the dictatorship utilized the claim to punish him for his activities as a free press journalist. There was also a charge of being part in a terrorist attack, for which he could face life in prison or 25 years in prison, but he vanished for a while and the administration changed before they realized their vengeance on him.

Participant 8 was imprisoned for 7 months without ever having the opportunity to appear in court. They took him to court after he had been in prison for 7 months. Without hearing his plea, the judge sentenced him to Kaliti prison, vowing to pursue his case from there. He suffered for a few months in Kaliti prison until the court summoned him again, and the new young female judge in charge of his case declared him guilty on his first appearance before the bench. She ordered his release and a fifty-thousand-birr bond to allow him to defend himself outside of jail. She further directed that if he wanted to travel overseas, a letter be drafted to the Immigration Agency telling them not to issue him an exit visa. It took more than 4 years for Elias' case to be closed once a new judge took her place. The new judge absolved him of all allegations brought against him in court, which he had been wrongly accused of.

In a court of law, Participant 9 received no verdict. He was seized from his home by security personnel late at night, imprisoned, and tortured for a year in several jails. He recalls a security official who had ordered his detention coming to the prison where he had been imprisoned for a year and shouting his name. When he walked out of his cell, the officer advised him to go home because he had been cleared of all charges. After a year in one of the harshest prisons in the capital, Participant 9 received his verdict in this manner.

In a similar vein, Participant 10 was released due to a police officer's judgment rather than a judicial order. He was not told to go home immediately, but rather through his brother, who had come to see him that day. He couldn't trust his brother when he told him the "wonderful news" at first because he had been suffering there for nearly a year. He was entitled to appear in front of a court of law at any point throughout that period. He didn't ask the police officer "why" that day, nor did he go to the police station to protest about the unjust suffering simply was subjected to in prison, but he fled. The officer later told his brother that he was freed because of a court order of 2000 birr bail, but he recalled that the court had issued such an order 9 months before, and he couldn't think of any reason why the police needed nearly a year to carry it out. He was released after a year in prison for a cause that even his arresters were unaware of. Participant 12 was imprisoned for 3 years at the Central Investigation Bureau detention center and Kaliti jail, after which the prosecutor dropped the terrorist allegation against her and replaced it with "incitement of violence

among different ethnic groups" in Ethiopia. The judge then granted her bail and allowed her to defend herself. A year later, the judge exonerated Participant 12 of all allegations against her. She recalls the judge's decision, which stated that all of the evidence given in court was "insufficient" to prove the charges she was accused of. When Hailemariam Desalegn came to power after being tortured, abused, and tormented for nearly 3 years by Meles Zenawi's thugs, she was liberated.

Participant 11 was charged with terrorism with the purpose of imprisoning him for years, if not his entire life, by the regime. The judges, he claims, showed no regret toward him, at least not out of professional or ethical values; rather, they were there to carry out the government's wishes. They couldn't find a single piece of evidence to indicate he was guilty of the charges against him after more than 2 years in prison, so they ultimately let him go.

He claims that his release was not due to the fact that the judges followed the law, but rather due to foreign and internal pressure on the government to recognize and order the courts to decide what it detested. So, after allowing the police to torture him for over 2 years, the court cleared him of all charges, but he was not allowed to leave the country until Prime Minister Abiy assumed office, at which point the new court decided to dismiss his case and grant him true freedom.

## 5. Summary and conclusion

### Summary

In the 20 years of Prime Minister Meles' rule, hundreds of private press journalists were arrested, tortured, or forced to shut down their newspapers and magazines; and some managed to flee from the country in fear of persecution (Amnesty International, 1998, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2001, 2015; Amnesty International Report - Ethiopia, 2002; Freedom House, 2012).

Following Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's ascension to power by toppling the Derg regime, a number of international and human rights organizations expressed concern about "unlawful arrest and torture of Ethiopian independent press journalists" (Amnesty International, 1998, 2008; Article 19 Report, 2001; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2001, 2015; Reporters Without Borders, 2001; Amnesty International Report - Ethiopia, 2002; Freedom House, 2011). Reports which had been made by foreign organizations throughout the world were also routinely criticizing the dictatorship of Meles Zenawi as "one among the predators" of freedom of the press.

Many scholarly publications were also written, as well as analyses, on the dictatorship of Meles Zenawi's lack of press freedom (Alemayehu, 2003; Dagim, 2009; Skjerdal, 2009; Meseret, 2013). The government, on the other hand, accused the

journalists of being “criminals and saboteurs” (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2001; Freedom House, 2011); they were also branded as war and destabilization provocateurs, and some were even designated as terrorists (Fesmedia-international, 2011; VOA News, 2012; Fortin, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2015).

All those international human rights organizations accused Meles of “deceiving the world” as a democratic leader by simply putting the rights of freedom of the press and speech on paper, when in reality he was a true authoritarian whose government should be accused of committing numerous crimes and human rights violations in Ethiopia (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Daniel Bekele, the former Executive Director of Human Rights Watch’s Africa Division and currently Commissioner of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, was one of many who spoke out about the matter. “Its human rights record has dramatically deteriorated, non-violent protests have been shut down, opposition leaders, activists, and journalists have been arrested or forced to flee the country,” Daniel said, acknowledging that Ethiopia made economic advances under the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Accusations of “terrorism” have been used to stifle critics and intimidate activists (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2015).

The researcher, based on the participants’ reply, discovered and came to the conclusion that the Ethiopian judicial processes during the Meles’ era were to blame for their sorrow and despair, as majority of the participants saw the court of the time as a platform for regime officials to admit their wrongdoing, while the remainder saw the judges as puppets who were brought there to serve the dictatorship’s evil goals. The researcher also knows that the participants believe the administration used the legal system as a tool to carry out its nefarious schemes against anyone who firmly voiced their objections.

The participants’ responses led the researcher to the additional conclusion that the judges assigned to hear their cases were either EPRDF political cadres or regime supporters because they categorically state that all judges were chosen based on their ties to the dictatorship on a political and ethnic level and that they did not expect judicial independence from “political cadres posing as judges.”

These researcher, based on the participants description of the difficulties and problems they encountered due to lack of freedom and independence of the judiciary, finally interpreted that the judicial system was completely under the control of political power, and that it was simply acting like a puppet and doing what it was told.

## Conclusion

This researcher interprets the socio-political

phenomena that occurred during Meles Zenawi’s rule of Ethiopia based on participants’ feedback, as it often uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a methodology to develop new knowledge about a phenomenon not well-known or explored before, so that it has achieved its aim at filling the gap previous researchers didn’t bother to look on.

Moreover, by exploring the lived experiences of private press journalists during Meles’ regime the researcher shed new light on the then socio-political phenomenon by attempting to answer many unanswered questions, such as the crimes that the private press journalists were charged with, which resulted in their being imprisoned, tortured, and/or forced to flee the country, as well as the types of sufferings and ordeals that they endure to get a fair trial, and how they manage to survive them. The researcher also interprets the journalists’ perspectives on Meles and his regime, which have not yet been sufficiently studied and explored, as well as the struggles and hardships they go through to get a fair trial, the various ways the regime’s security agents interfere with them as they go about their jobs, and their views on the constitution and other local and international laws relating to press freedom.

Examining the bleak aspects of the past will aid in rekindling the hopes for the future. Hundreds of private press journalists were arrested, tortured, and some managed to flee the country under Meles Zenawi’s administration. However, the level of misery and anguish experienced by private press journalists in striving to practice their profession while exercising their constitutional rights remains unknown, both in academic and empirical investigations. This research study can be regarded as innovative because no other research studies attempted to undertake a phenomenological analysis of the lived experience of private press journalists by examining how they dealt with all of those trials and tribulations in getting a fair judgment during Meles Zenawi’s administration of Ethiopia.

The researcher is also convinced that studying the lived experiences of private journalists in Ethiopia during Meles Zenawi’s rule is crucial for understanding the socio-political phenomenon of the time and for imparting crucial lessons to other African leaders as well as to future Ethiopian journalists and political figures on how to prevent repeating such heinous events. As Santayana (1905) puts it, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Finally, the following issues have been listed by this study’s interpretation as causes limiting journalistic freedom in Ethiopia under Meles Zenawi, which also, in a manner, contributes to the absence of judicial freedom:

## Defamation provision

Article 43 (7) of the statute provides that defamation and false accusation against “constitutionally mandated legislators, executives

and judiciaries” will be prosecutable “even if the person against whom they were committed chooses not to press charge[s].” In essence, the Press Law allows for the criminal prosecution, punishment, or imprisonment of media professionals for defamation even in cases when there is no victim. This clause appears regressive and draconian in view of how criminal defamation laws are seen around the world, particularly for offenses committed against governments.

The media cannot carry out its duty to give the public with complete and accurate information if it is not allowed to comment on any and all news, whether it concerns the government or not. Also, there is a blatant violation of the public’s right to knowledge.

## **Registration system**

The authority of the then-Ministry of Information (MOI) was broadened in 2007 to include supervision of media source licensing and registration, partly as a result of the discussion surrounding the Draft Press Law. The Press Law recognizes this additional power and gives the MOI extensive latitude in deciding whether to issue licenses.

By establishing a licensing system, the Press Law not only establishes a connection between them but also a relationship in which the media is unable to function independently of the government. The press cannot afford to challenge the government’s assertions or actions under this type of environment. The scope of the government’s power is excessive: if the government views a media outlet’s reporting as criminal, it may be closed down, investigated, or even brought to justice.

## **Huge penalties**

Excessive fines levied against the press for insignificant infractions of the law are another way that the government may utilize the Press Law to repress the media. For instance, under the press law, the maximum fine for a defamation conviction is 100,000 Birr.

Should a media outlet be found guilty of what other jurisdictions would consider minor criminal violations, the severity of the fines levied by the Press Law might easily force it out of business. Furthermore, if the person or media source is unable to pay, the exorbitant fines could result in further punishment.

## **Putting journalists in prison**

Almost 200 editors and writers from the independent private press have been incarcerated since 1992, according to an Amnesty International (1998). All of these arrests were related to newspaper stories that

were critical of the government. The majority of them are regarded by the agency as political prisoners who were put in prison due to their journalistic work and peaceful expression of their ideas.

## **Using the press law as a weapon against press criticism**

A variety of criminal and imprisonable offenses were introduced in the Press Law’s “Responsibilities of the Press” chapter to replace earlier legislation that restricted the media. Any press coverage that violates the restrictions stated under Article 10 (2) is punishable by up to 3 years in prison and/or a fine of up to 50,000 birr (equal to \$7,700 USD).

In this regard, the researcher found that there were several instances of journalists being detained for denouncing government policies, intimidating the opposition, government personnel abusing their positions of authority or engaging in corruption, or for objecting to specific government actions. Some people were detained because of rumors that might not be genuine, were speculative, or were difficult to verify. Particular attention was paid to reporting on armed conflict, a topic with little government information.

## **Data availability statement**

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

## **Author contributions**

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

## **Conflict of interest**

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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## ARTICLE 2

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### **2. Making sense of Ethiopian journalists' prison experiences during Meles Zenawi's administration: a phenomenological inquiry**

Hailegiorgis Mamo Darge<sup>1</sup> ✉ & Amanuel Gebru Woldearegay<sup>1</sup>

This study investigated the agony, tribulations, and trials that private press journalists in Ethiopia experienced firsthand in several detention facilities in Ethiopia for engaging in journalistic activity. The study used the period of the late Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's administration, and it employed a qualitative phenomenological research approach to examine the lived experiences of 12 private press journalists. Alfred Schutz's "Life World" theory and the Italian fascist political theorist Giovanni Gentile's Authoritarian Democracy theory were used as lenses to provide a "pure" description of the subject under study. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The data were examined using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as the participants shared their narratives. The main finding indicates that journalists lacked professional and civic freedoms to carry out their duties since the government interjected into their daily lives, imprisoning them and limiting their capacity to have the ultimate say over their work and lives. We suggest that the government should revise impending laws and regulations that hamper freedom of expression in Ethiopia and create a policy requiring its officials to provide information to journalists without regard to their political, social, or other relationships with the media.

### **Introduction**

The role of the print media in developing democracy as well as combating corruption and malfeasance has been significantly hindered and constrained for a long time due to the undemocratic nature of many governments in Africa— Ethiopia was one example during Meles Zenawi's era—and the various tactics used to repress press freedom (Stapenhurst, 2000; Bach, 2011). Despite indicators of progress in certain developing nations in terms of press freedom (Singer, 2011; Mwesige, 2004), several countries, Ethiopia in particular, have been considered to be lagging in terms of allowing journalists to practice their profession freely.

During Meles Zenawi's administration, Ethiopia was consistently ranked first by international agencies for arresting, harassing, and torturing journalists, as well as restricting press freedom (Amnesty International, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2006). The regime of

Meles Zenawi has been described as "authoritarian," even though the government claimed to be democratic, but the regime's relationship with the press has remained a point of contention in academic and empirical studies.

According to Foucault (1995), one can identify what form of government one has by listening to him talk about the type of prison he has in his nation. This study describes how Ethiopian private press journalists suffered a variety of hardships while the government imprisoned them in various facilities across the nation. This phenomenological investigation of the trials, ordeals, and tribulations of private press journalists during Meles' era is especially significant because, as Confucius says in "The Analects of Confucius" (Legge, 2018, p.13), studying the past is necessary for defining the future.

The participants have shared their distressing memories of the general scenario of the jail houses where they spent years of their lives. According to one participant's account, the prisons were structured in

such a way that convicts were tormented by their psychological memories even after they were released and left the facility.

## Theoretical framework

### Life World Theory

Schutz's "Life World Theory". This study draws on the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology, particularly Alfred Schutz's "Life World Theory", to better understand the lived experiences of private press journalists who suffered at various prison facilities under Meles Zenawi's rule in Ethiopia.

Schutz (1967) took the idea of Inter-subjectivity, a term originally coined by the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), and defined it as: "the basis for living and sharing the understanding of the life-world with others" (p.124). For Schutz inter-subjectivity refers to "...person-to-person social interaction, in our day-to-day experience as human beings with others connected by actions, influences, ideas, etc., in the course of understanding and being understood by others, in mutual attempts in making sense of the world and others" (Schutz, 1967, p. 125).

According to Schutz "... our direct experience is formed in the life world, the past sediments in it, the present takes form in it, and the future is molded from it. Therefore, we cannot understand social interaction without the life world" (1967, p.123).

Schutz further elaborated his idea of "inter-subjectivity" in his theory in the following manner: "I assume that all that makes sense to me makes sense to all those with whom I share the life world. My actions make sense, and I suppose that others are interpreting them meaningfully as well, and I make sense of what others do too. In these reciprocal acts of giving and positing meaning to yourself and others, inter-subjective social life is built. It is also the social life of others." (Schutz, 1967, p.123).

Vargas (2020) also describes Schutz's idea of inter-subjectivity as "...basis for living together—with others—in specific dimensions of time and space and for sharing the understanding of the life world with them. Through inter-subjectivity we refine the stock of knowledge by validating or adjusting it to subsequent experiences where the stock is only partially originated by personal experience" (p.422).

The study used Alfred Schutz's theory of the North American Tradition, which emphasizes "how people perceive social phenomena" rather than the European approach, which concentrates on "the core of the human experience." Schutz, a native of Europe, immigrated to the United States a year after the German invasion of Paris in 1938. He lectured at the Exile University in New York, which later became the New School for Social Research, and established himself as an emigrant refugee scholar, just like many others did at that time. Despite his European birth, Schutz's theory was seen as a North American tradition (Walsh, 1967, p. xvii). The study analyzed, based on Schutz's definition of Life-World

Phenomenology, what is being experienced, rather than "attempting to unearth the essence of what is meant by the phrase" that the participants were trying to describe.

Another theoretical grounding used in the present study in exploring the prison life of private press journalists is the hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a theoretical underpinning of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, IPA (Tuffor, 2017). Hermeneutics is defined as the "art and science of interpretation" for this study (Ezzy, 2002, p. 24).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is both a theoretical perspective and a technique, or a strategy or plan that lies behind the methodologies applied in a given investigation (Crotty, 1996). This study employs Hermeneutics phenomenology and more specifically Paul Ricoeur's (1976) "Interpretation Theory" as a guide. The theory will be used as a lens for evaluating the prison life experience of private press journalists in Ethiopia.

### Authoritarian democracy

Arblaster (1994) states that Authoritarian Democracy is a type of democracy that aims to reflect the interests of society and is run by the governing elite of an authoritarian state.

According to Arblaster (1994), the idea of Authoritarian Democracy was originally conceived by Italian fascist political theorist Giovanni Gentile and used by Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini (1994, p.48). Soucy (1967), citing Maurice Barrès, a major fascist influencer, asserts that authoritarian democracy was the only genuine kind of democracy, rejecting liberal democracy as a forgery. According to Barrès, authoritarian democracy entailed a spiritual bond between a country's ruler and its citizens, and real freedom was achieved by "heroic leadership" and "national force" rather than individual freedoms or parliamentary limitations (Soucy, 1967, pp. 87–90).

In his discussion of how authoritarian regimes control the media, Schedler (2013) lists restrictions on communication channels, including prohibitions on private ownership in the form of state monopolies on print or electronic mass media; postproduction restrictions on media content, including censorship, license revocation, beatings, arrests and assassinations of journalists, harassment or other forms of pressure; and restrictions on means of production (Schedler, 2013).

Robert Dahl in his well-known book "On Democracy," argued that in the twentieth century, tyrannical rulers sometimes veiled their reign with a shadow of "democracy" and "elections" because of the attractiveness of democratic concepts (Dahl, 2000, p.49). This appears to be true regarding interpreting the era of Meles Zenawi's political control in Ethiopia for twenty years (1992–2012). Meles Zenawi was widely seen as an authoritarian leader, who also constitutionally guaranteed freedom of the press and expression.

In this regard, a 2010 Freedom House research indicated that 35% of the world's states allow press freedom, 33% have a "partly free" press, and the remaining 32% lack press freedom, even when their constitutions promise it. Even in its 2018 examination of the international press scenario, Ethiopia is classified as being in the lowest tier (Freedom House, 2018).

Of course, Ethiopia was held up as an example of how, despite having "critically awful" human rights records, its leader Meles Zenawi was able to achieve economic growth. For example, in *The New York Times* September 19, 2012 issue, under "The Opinion Pages - Room for Debate," the editor specifically accuses Meles of arresting and torturing journalists in his country, citing a Human Rights Watch report from 2010. "How should an influential country like the United States negotiate relationships with authoritarian regimes that have improved living standards in their countries, like Kagame in Rwanda and Zenawi in Ethiopia?" the editor asks after labeling Meles "authoritarian" (Ibid. 2012).

Bach (2011) who conducted a thorough examination of the ruling EPRDF party's political position concluded that it is "authoritarian." He says the following:

Since 1991 and the arrival of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) into power, Ethiopian ideologists have maintained revolutionary democracy (Abyotawi Democracy in Amharic) as their core doctrine. The notion inherited from the struggle (1970s–1980s) aims at legitimizing a political and economic structure that de facto implies the resilience of authoritarianism (ibid. p.643).

That means that, according to Bach's assessment of the EPRDF's philosophy, the term "authoritarianism" might be applied not just to those who have seized power through a military coup or without a democratic election, but also to those who have concealed their power under the appearance of democracy. One method to understand such governments is to look at how they "handle" their country's media and journalists.

This study argues that the concept of Authoritarian Democracy can be related to the context of Ethiopian politics during the era of Meles Zenawi's nearly quarter of a century rule of the nation. International human rights organizations accused Meles of "deceiving the world" as a democratic leader by simply putting the rights of freedom of press and speech on paper when in reality he was a true authoritarian whose government should be accused of committing numerous crimes and human rights violations in Ethiopia (Human Rights Watch - World Report, 2002; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2002). Theoretically, this study is informed by the literature on the concept of Authoritarian Democracy in its relation to press freedom as well as by examining its

contribution to the challenges and hurdles that journalists can face while performing their tasks under such an authoritarian regime.

## Literature review

Press freedom under Meles' rule. A country is considered democratic if it meets both contestation and participation requirements (Dahl, 1998). Indeed, there is no greater definition

of "democracy" than this, because contestation and involvement have never existed in Ethiopian regimes (Freedom House, 2018).

When Meles Zenawi took control in 1991, the public expected and predicted that Ethiopia would enter a new and better period of democracy. The forecast was reinforced when Ethiopia's new Constitution, which guarantees freedom of opinion and expression, was approved in 1995 (FDRE Constitution, 1995 E.C., Art. 29).

Indeed, many journalists and media employees had hoped that Meles' rule would encourage press freedom by enabling them to criticize and uncover wrongdoings by politicians and others from the start. But their optimism was short-lived, as the regime continued to detain, torture, and threaten journalists (Amnesty International 2001, Human Rights Watch, 2001).

In the twenty years of Prime Minister Meles' rule of Ethiopia, hundreds of private press journalists were arrested, tortured, or forced to shut down their newspapers and magazines; and some managed to flee from the country in fear of persecution (Amnesty International 2002, and 2008; Human Rights Watch 2001, 2005). Reports that had been made by international agencies throughout the world also routinely criticized the dictatorship of Meles Zenawi as "one among the predators" of freedom of the press.

Following Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's ascension to power by toppling the Derg regime, several international and human rights organizations expressed concern about "unlawful" arrests and torture of Ethiopian independent press journalists (Amnesty International 2002, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2001, 2005; Reporters Without Borders, 2001; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2001; Freedom House, 2011; UNHCR, 2001).

Despite the Constitution's guarantee of freedom of speech and thought, Amnesty International reported in its April 1998 report on Ethiopia under "Journalists in Prison - Press Freedom Under Attack," that at least 16 journalists had been imprisoned at the time, bringing the total number of journalists imprisoned in the previous year to more than 200. It revealed that approximately 200 private press editors and reporters were imprisoned on various occasions, with several of them being detained multiple times (ibid. 1998, p.1).

The journalists were held according to the article under the Press Law, which was enacted in October 1992, 17 months after Meles Zenawi's government took office.

Many scholarly publications as well as analyses on the rule of Meles Zenawi's lack of press freedom also

appeared (Alemayehu, 2003; Skjerdal, 2009; Dagim, 2013; Meseret, 2013). The government, on the other hand, accused the journalists of being “criminals and saboteurs” (CPJ, 2011; Freedom House, 2012); they were also branded as war and destabilization provocateurs, and some were even designated as terrorists (Abiye, 2011; Fortin, 2015; VOA, 2012; Human Rights Watch, HRW, 2015; Fesmedia, 2011). All those international human rights organizations accused Meles of “deceiving the world” as a democratic leader by simply putting the rights of freedom of press and speech on paper when in reality he was a true authoritarian whose government should be accused of committing numerous crimes and human rights violations in Ethiopia (HRW - World Report, 2002; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2002). Pausewang et al. (2002), for example, praised the Constitution for providing a democratic platform for all citizens, despite its flaws. The following is what the academicians had to say about the FDRE Constitution of 1995:

The Ethiopian Constitution of 1995 provides for a democratic structure of governance in the country. This is indeed an important innovation in the history of the Ethiopian state structure that one should not underestimate.

There may still be room for some improvements, but in principle, this constitution sets the legal foundation for a full-fledged democracy. (Pausewang et al., 2002, p.230)

After an extensive examination of Meles Zenawi’s regime by various scholars in a book titled “Ethiopia - Since the Derg,” Pausewang et al. concluded that the Ethiopian Constitution of 1995 provides for a democratic structure of governance in the country; however, democratic institutions are not allowed to operate in the spirit of democracy (Pausewang et al., 2002, p.230).

### **“Hell” of Ethiopian prisons.**

The trajectory of history, and particularly that of Ethiopia’s socio-political scenario, was shifted when the military junta, known as the Derg, overthrew Emperor Haileselassie from his throne in 1974. This marked the beginning of the nation’s dismal journey. Uncountable numbers of people from all walks of life were imprisoned at numerous detention facilities across the nation, particularly in the capital Addis Ababa, under the Derg, turning the entire nation into one giant prison.

Abera (2005), a state minister during the Emperor era and the author of “In the Lion’s Den”, which presents an account of the prison life of officials of the emperor incarcerated by the Mengistu regime, affirms that the regime even converted the stately palace which had been used as a royal residence since the reign of Emperor Menilik II, into a prison.

The TPLF-led administration of Meles Zenawi, which toppled the Derg regime in 1991, had also continued to build or use ancient cave-like prisons, such as Maekelawi, Kaliti, Ziway, and other jails across the nation, to toss individuals in there and allow them to

suffer after the oppressive Derg regime fell. It was also observed that people continued to be imprisoned and through other sorts of persecution and torture during the reign of Meles, as stated by Dowdon (2008), “The fact that Hitler committed genocide did not make Stalin a saint” (p. 5) (Wubeshet, 2016; Wosenseged, 2011).

Indeed, many journalists and media employees had hoped that Meles’ rule would encourage press freedom by enabling them to criticize and uncover wrongdoings by politicians and others from the start. This optimism was short-lived, too, as the administration proceeded to imprison, torture, and threaten journalists up until Meles’ untimely death in August 2012, at which point his successor Hailemariam Desalegn took over as president (Amnesty International, 2001; HRW, 2001).

The years of Prime Minister Hailemariam (2013–2018) were truly “not good years” for many Ethiopians, as uprisings and revolts occurred across the country (Aaron, 2014; Gettleman, 2016; Warner, 2016; Ademo & Smith, 2018; Allison, 2018; Jones, 2018). The protests began in 2014 and took an unexpected turn when they pushed the country into a crisis, prompting Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn to proclaim a state of emergency in 2015, and then pushed him to announce his departure from office on February 15, 2018, after nearly two years of fruitless attempts to quell the protests. Hailemariam Desalegn resigned following years of upheaval in Ethiopia, leaving a problematic human rights record behind (Burke, 2016; Maasho, 2014).

In January 2018, a new leader, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, came to power after two weeks of Hailemariam’s resignation. Dr. Abiy was a member of the OPDO Politbureau, one of the ruling party’s coalitions, but he was a fresh face to many Ethiopians with a new political outlook that promoted “National Unity” in contrast to the EPRDF’s “Ethnic-based politics” (Keane, 2019; Roth, 2018; Burke, 2018).

When Dr. Abiy came to power in 2018, after over a quartercentury of drama, he requested people to forgive him for all “his party” EPRDF had done during those years of turmoil (Reporter, 2018; Reuters, 2018; Tewodrose, 2018). However, the public continued to demand that at least the primary perpetrators of severe crimes against the nation and individuals be brought to justice. Private press journalists who were persecuted by Meles Zenawi’s dictatorship are also part of the popular demand for justice.

In this context, Birhanu Tsegaye, who served as attorney general during Dr. Abiy’s rise to power, informed the media that the police had found seven secret detention facilities in Addis Abeba alone where Meles’ regime’s secret service operatives tortured political inmates (Reuters, 2019).

In 2004, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRC) also reported that there were 120 prisons throughout Ethiopia and that practically all of them were considered locations of detainees’ pain and misery

(Wubeshet, 2016, p.53). Numerous crimes, including rape and murder, were perpetrated in the overcrowded prisons. Wubeshet (2016) noted that it was tragic that “people of various calibers, including politicians and journalists, were incarcerated in those awful areas with scandalous criminals” (Ibid. p.54).

In this regard, the study examined several works that can be regarded as historical accounts because they were written by individuals who were made to endure a variety of gruesome situations in those jails.

One of them, Wosenseged (2011), wrote a book called “Yekaliti Mistroch” (Secrets of Kaliti Prisons) in which he described his horrifying experiences at the Maekelawi and Kaliti prisons. According to Wosenseged (2011), his experiences in prison and his pain were “the most traumatic incident he’d ever had” (p.14). He claimed to have spent eight years in prison and was unable to adjust to the appalling conditions he was in. He was a journalist who had been charged with “producing wicked propaganda” that endangered public order, but he also accused Meles’ administration of punishing and degrading private press journalists by imprisoning them alongside violent offenders with murder and rape convictions (Ibid. p.15).

A book titled “Mogach Ewnetoch” (Challenging Truth) by journalist Wubeshet Taye was also consulted in this study. Wubeshet (2016) describes the terrifying situation he encountered at three separate prisons, Maekelawi, Kaliti, and Zeway, in a biographical account of his lived experiences in several jails throughout the Meles era.

For instance, Maekelawi prison was defined by Wubeshet (2016) as a location where one can brutally suffer all suffering and where all prisons were built to torture those who were sentenced to get into them. At the Central Investigation Agency, where he was initially detained, he was kept in a unique space known as the “8th House”.

Another author, Kiflu Yakob, recounted the unpleasant scenes he saw at several Addis Abeba prisons in his book “Yegna Neger” (Our Story), which was published in 2000. The author relates the horrific experiences he and his coworkers endured, as well as what they saw when imprisoned at various points in time, particularly in the infamous Maekelawi prison.

According to Kiflu (2000), both the Maekelawi and Kaliti prisons’ cells might be compared to an imagined “hell.” He claimed that the iron rod and corrugated sheet jail buildings were built specifically to torture inmates with the scorching sun during the day and the icy cold at night (ibid. p. 222).

Journalist Sinidu Abebe (2006) on her part published a fascinating biographical piece titled “Kerchele Prison - in an insider look” about one of Addis Ababa’s jails. In Kerchele Prison, several female inmates were charged with political crimes, and some of them were only 15 years old, according to Sinidu (2006). The judge ordered that female inmates who appeared in court underage be given hospital certificates to verify their age, but for more than three years they were ignored in the prison. No one, not even the courts, had

ever inquired about the young female convicts who were arrested (Sinidu, 2006, p. 19).

The five books listed above, which were written about the gross conditions in Ethiopian jails, were accessed by this study and discussed. To get a clear picture of the situation at the time and a solid understanding of prisons, the research study carefully examined the writers’ descriptions of them. This provided the knowledge needed to adjust the interview questions posed to research participants so that they would be in line with the realities of Ethiopia’s Meles era.

## Methodology

The study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as a methodology as it allows to “present and write the participants’ lived experience as it is; i.e., quotations from participants - how they describe things and how they see the phenomenon they encounter.” It also assists the study in “...focusing on a small number of persons and going deep to develop the detail and exploring the problem in an open-ended fashion” (Creswell, 2013, pp.138–139).

According to Alase (2017), “IPA is being used as a methodological approach in many qualitative research studies as it helps to investigate and interpret the ‘lived experiences’ of people who have experienced similar (common) phenomena, in addition to allowing researchers “to develop bonding relationships with their research participants” (pp.11–12).

Although IPA has its data analysis steps - aligned more with hermeneutics phenomenology and being used for an interpretative analysis of the study - this study adopts Pietkiewicz and Smith’s (2014) four stages of inductive analysis for the interpretation task. In this regard, familiarity, topic grouping, emerging theme analysis, and write-up are the four steps of analysis established by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) and used in this study (pp. 13–14).

Therefore, the study describes and interprets the interview data gathered from the participants through semi-structured in-depth interviews using thematic analysis and IPA with a qualitative phenomenological approach. Because the goal of IPA is to learn about the participants’ perspectives, the process includes the researcher’s interpretative activity, sometimes known as “double hermeneutics” (Tuffour, 2017, p.4). In other words, the researcher’s interpretation of experience is just as important as the subjects’.

The discussion of findings is reported “thematically across the individuals” (Ferm, 2004; Friberg, 2001; Carlsson, 2011), therefore the presentation and interpretation of the findings are based on the themes designed for the data-gathering process.

**Research questions.** The following two research questions are posed by the study and are addressed in this article:

**Research Question 1:** How do private press journalists describe the persecution they were

subjected to by the police and secret service officers as a result of practicing journalism?

The question aimed to discover how the participants were treated by the police and secret service agents, as well as what role they played in their suffering in prison.

**Research Question 2:** How do private press journalists' portray their suffering in prison houses? The study's examination of the participants' first-hand accounts of their time spent in various detention facilities will shed light on the authoritarian nature of the Meles era and its true scope.

**Type of data.** The type of data employed in this study is primary data, which consists of text transcribed from interviews conducted with private press journalists and is used to understand the phenomenon under investigation in this study.

There are two options available to research with this kind of data. The first sort of data is called a "Face-to-Face" or "One-on-One" interview since it was done in person with journalists from the private press who are either aware of or impacted by the topic being studied to get the necessary information.

Additionally, online interviews with journalists from the private press who were living abroad at the time were done for the study. Skype and other internet tools were used to conduct the interviews, which enabled face-to-face communication with the participants.

**Sampling procedure.** This study identified 12 private press journalists available to participate in one semi-structured indepth interview between December 2020 and January 2022. The study uses the purposive sampling method to identify a more narrowly defined group for whom the research issue is relevant. Purposive sampling, according to Creswell (2016), "is the act of selecting participants for a qualitative project by enlisting individuals who can help explain the study's key phenomena" (p.109). When performing a phenomenological examination, this research used sample data from "... only a few folks who have experienced the phenomenon" (Starks and Trinidad, 2007, p.1374) - and who can provide a thorough account of their experience that might be enough to identify its core elements.

According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), the typical sample size for phenomenological investigations is 1 to 10 people.

Flick (2007), on the other hand, claims that in qualitative studies, interview sampling "... is frequently done to know the right persons who have expertise and relevant experience for the study" (p.234). Further, "...sampling in interviewing should mean locating the right people and the right information they bring with them," Kvale (2007) adds, "and the specific number of interviewees essential for a study depends on the nature of the research" (p.5). As a result, this research study selected respondents after performing a thorough review of their prior records.

**Data collection procedure.** This study applies Reushle's (2005) principles of Connectivity, Humanness, and Empathy (CHE principles) relating to the ethical and methodological advantages of semi-structured interview research practices used to gather data.

Brown and Danaher (2019) elaborated on Reushle's CHE principle, based on which: "Connectivity is accomplished by being attentive, by acknowledging the participants' answers, by maintaining eye contact, and by using body language suggesting they're open to discussion. Humanness refers to this study as "... providing feedback, being engaged in conversation, and expressing his or her humanity" (p.78). Brown and Danaher (2019, p.80) added: "A researcher could include the humanness principle in a conversation by employing an informal tone, sharing a personal tale, and injecting humor". Empathy is the final principle. "A researcher exhibits empathy by displaying humility and listening to the participants without casting judgment," according to Brown and Danaher (Ibid. p.81).

In general, this study employed CHE concepts to establish a rapport with the participants and make them feel at ease.

**Participants' profile.** This study applies a qualitative phenomenological research design as it allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the reality of the phenomena that occurred during Meles Zenawi's era in Ethiopia by looking at the lived experiences of private press journalists who faced a variety of difficulties and tribulations at the time. The study drew on the participants' lived experiences with their demographic information listed below under

**Table 1.**

No.	Name	Educational status	Title/position	Remarks
1	Participant 1	MA	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
2	Participant 2	BA	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
3	Participant 3	BA	Editor	Imprisoned
4	Participant 4	BA	Editor	Imprisoned
5	Participant 5	Diploma	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
6	Participant 6	BA	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
7	Participant 7	Diploma	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
8	Participant 8	BA	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
9	Participant 9	BA	D/Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
10	Participant 10	BA	D/Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
11	Participant 11	MA	Editor-in-chief	Imprisoned
12	Participant 12	BA	Editor	Imprisoned

This research employs a purposeful sampling method, according to which 12 journalists are chosen, which is believed to be an adequate sample for phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013; Starks and Trinidad, 2007) that necessitates a deep examination of participants' lived experiences.

The study participants are chosen based on their lived experience, and data is collected through in-depth interviews in a semi-structured fashion. In qualitative phenomenology research, a semi-structured interview is a typical means of acquiring data.

## Results and discussion

The three major themes that participants describe in their responses to the study question are (a) "Life in Prison" (b) Tortures, and (c) Affliction. As a result, the study divided them into three subordinate themes for interpretation, which are: (a) Getting into hell (b) "A place to lose humanistic demeanor", and (c) "The filthy, biting bugs", under the major themes.

### Life in prison.

In 2004, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRC) reported that there were 120 prisons throughout Ethiopia and that practically all of them were considered sites of pain and misery for inmates (Wubeshet, 2016). Numerous crimes, including rape and murder, were perpetrated in the overcrowded prisons. Wubeshet (2016) noted that it was tragic that "people of various calibers, including politicians and journalists, were incarcerated in those awful areas with scandalous criminals" (Ibid. p.54).

In this regard, this study finds that private press journalists were forced to undergo different forms of persecution and suffering at the hands of police and secret service officers while being detained at various prison houses in the country.

**"Entering prison".** The participants first gave the researcher broad details of the prison houses where they had been imprisoned and had witnessed various sorts of misery and afflictions. The study first analyzes one of the participant's descriptions of his initial prison interactions, which he claims occurred at the Central Investigation Bureau, where he was thrown into a dark, tiny room where he couldn't stand or sleep properly.

According to him, the prison homes' walls and roofing were made of corrugated iron sheets, which got so hot during the day that they felt melting down into vapor. A toilet room was built adjacent to the cell where he was imprisoned, and the foul odor that emanated from it was too much to stomach in the afternoon. As a result, the majority of inmates developed nasal and throat infections, while some developed asthma. He recalls that the darkness of the room rendered him unable to see his own hands and that he was only allowed to see the sun for 30 min every three days. He would only be out of the room for interrogation, which generally occurs after midnight.

This participant also had another prison life experience at Kaliti, where he was held in a cramped chamber with about 200 other inmates. It was often difficult for them to touch the floor with their feet, and the small room was filled with convicts who couldn't fit as they were forced to go to the toilet tiptoeing over other prisoners' legs and chests. The room was crammed with people accused of murder, rape, and theft, and regime officials ordered it that way on purpose to demoralize and frustrate opposition politicians and private journalists like him.

Some of the participants mentioned that the particular jail resembled hell on earth in comparison to the prison they were in.

Being taken to prison had offered them the opportunity to participate in the most gruesome adventure imaginable. For instance, participant 2 was imprisoned together with people who murdered, raped innocent toddlers and girls, and committed cold-blooded crimes. Surprisingly, he observed in prison that those criminals had far more privileges in terms of all services rendered in prison than his peers. This may be why politicians and journalists refer to themselves as "prisoners of conscience." Over a hundred inmates were crowded into the prison room where he entered, and they could only sleep horizontally. He tried on multiple occasions to sleep on his back or lay down on his chest, but he couldn't because the room was set up to torture them horribly.

The presence of only one toilet room for more than one or two hundred inmates was a nightmare for these participants. All detainees may have died in a matter of days from cholera or any similar outbreak if it hadn't been for God's miracle. In the morning and at night, they were only allowed to use "the only toilet room" for ten minutes. It's easy to imagine how difficult it would be for the convicts to use the toilet while their cellmates waited for their turn at the door.

For instance, one participant spent time in four separate prisons across the country.

He was originally apprehended at the Central Investigation Agency in a room known as "The 8th House". The room was completely black, and the brick walls kept any outside noise out, making it even more terrifyingly quiet every day and night. He was imprisoned for 90 days in that room, which was one of the only four of its kind in the Agency compound. These rooms are specifically for political detainees. This participant was accompanied by a member of the opposition political party in his little and horrifyingly built cell. They couldn't even talk to one other because of the room's coldness and quietness. They attempted to get warm because being flung and bearing such a horrific circumstance was difficult. For a normal human being, being imprisoned in that chamber for even one day, let alone ninety days, is excruciating.

After ninety days in prison, the participant was transferred to Kaliti prison and got locked up alone again, this time in a little room named "The 6th House", which also housed other private press journalists. Because Meles' regime deemed private press journalists to be political prisoners who had

committed major crimes against the government, they were not allowed to mix with other detainees. The prison was a restricted area, and only jail guards were permitted to enter it. Security agents patrolled the small compound where private press journalists and political prisoners were imprisoned at all hours of the day and night. This participant was allowed to get out of that small compound only when visitors came once or twice in a month. For more than two years, he had been languishing in a dark chamber inside a small complex, while murderers and rapists enjoyed all privileges that the government gave in the large prison facility. He was also imprisoned at Zeway prison in a gloomy room known as “The Number 8” (spent the next seven years in torment), where he

Participant 4 was under solitary confinement at the Central Investigation Agency and Kaliti prisons for 8 years, and in those years she was refused access to medical assistance, books, or any other reading materials, and for the most part, held incommunicado. The many detention camps in Ethiopia where the other participant was detained each had their distinct characteristics. For him, like for the other convicts, being imprisoned at the Central Investigation Agency’s prison was the most terrifying experience of his life, as he was locked in a dark room that resembled an animal cage for months. He had been dumped there for months, and every minute of it felt like an eternity to him. He was being treated unfairly in comparison to other inmates who had committed significant crimes such as murdering family members or raping children.

The most harrowing experience he had, which was considerably worse than his time at the Central Investigation Bureau, was at a jail camp in Assossa town, Benishangul Regional State, around 800 kilometers from the capital, Addis Ababa. The sweltering sun in Assossa town, combined with the dreadfully cramped chambers with an uncountable number of inmates, rendered the detention center where he was held an earthly hell. It was impossible for a newbie to Assossa town to even breathe properly while sitting beneath the shade of a tree, let alone be crammed into a small space with over a hundred criminals.

One of the participants was jailed in a tiny dark room where he couldn’t see a flash of light to enter on the day he was captured. He was only permitted to see the sun for fifteen minutes every other day for the next three days. He couldn’t see the sunlight easily because he was trapped in a dark chamber for three days, so he had to shield his eyes with a scarf or a jacket.

The other participant was imprisoned eight times and couldn’t even acclimatize to the dreadful situation he was in at the time. He was humiliated and degraded for months after being locked up among dangerous criminals charged with murder and rape. Because of his protests against being iron shackled whenever he was transported to court, he was frequently confined to gloomy chambers for weeks as a punishment.

Security agents took him to the Gerji Police Station initially. They tossed him in a jail where other violent

criminals were also incarcerated. In such a prison cell, the sole light source was candlelight, and incoming prisoners were obliged to pay one hundred birr for a place to sleep. He paid the fee to the “Cabo” (the prisoner’s chief) and was given permission to sleep on a cement floor in one of the room’s corners, where only the most fortunate could do so.

He was originally thrown into a prison cell filled with convicts accused of theft, rape, and murder. The prison room was dark and smelled like a toilet room that hadn’t been cleaned in a long time. He couldn’t find enough room in the room to sleep over on the first day, so he sat in a corner next to a tin can full of urine. He tried tucking his head between his legs to sleep, but it was futile. The next day, several inmates were moved to different quarters, and he was given a place to sleep called “Deboqa.” Deboqa was a term used in prisons to describe sleeping on one side of the body.

“Become a prisoner in one of your country’s jail houses if you want to gain a true view of your country,” when this participant recalls the situation of the prison houses where he was imprisoned, that says it all. He was initially detained at a police station near Piazza, and the prison cell into which he was thrown could hold no more than six to eight individuals, but he discovered approximately fifty inmates in his cell. He was imprisoned and forced to live in a cramped room with dangerous and notorious criminals for nine months.

He was initially taken to the Central Investigation Agency, where he was subjected to horrors he never imagined would happen in his lifetime. The cops transported him to a location where he was given over to the secret agents who had ordered his arrest in the first place. They then threw him into a pitch-black room with only door holes for illumination. He could view the day in light for thirty minutes every day. He was imprisoned in such a torturous room for months, where he was interrogated by the agents at night, and then transferred to Kaliti prison, where he was allowed to see the light of the day.

Initially, she was transported to the Central Investigation Bureau, where she was placed in a cramped cell with two other female inmates. She became scared when she saw the prison’s exterior building, which resembled a large furnace designed for wicked intentions. It features a short corridor through which two people cannot travel at the same time, and all apartments are built with large stones, much like a military barricade. She and her fellow inmates can only see light throughout the day when they go out to the small courtyard in the front for thirty minutes or to use the restroom. They were kept in their small chamber for the rest of the day, only allowing light in via small gaps in the window and door.

**Tortures.** One focus of this study’s theme was the participants’ actual experiences, particularly the torturous ones they had experienced in such prison institutions. A variety of reflections from the study participants reflected the anguish and torment they

experienced while in various prisons during the period.

**“Torture homes”.** Detention institutions around the country during Meles’ era were described by one participant as “torture homes” rather than “correctional facilities” since they appeared to be put up for such purposes. Security officials working for the regime utilized these facilities to torture opposition politicians and private press journalists.

According to him, government secret operatives arrived at night in many of the prisons where he was held and began torturing him with heinous cruelty that no one could comprehend. They hung him upside down and used an electric wire to remove his underpants for hours until blood flowed all over the floor. Outside the torture room, more officers assisted him in returning to his cell each time. They made him suffer by attempting to break every single bone in his body.

He had seen many opposition politicians go through various types of torture and suffering, and he was amazed at how they managed to keep going until he went through what he had seen others go through in prison. Many detainees were crammed into one small room, making it simpler for the cops to torture him and his cellmates at any hour of the night. He recalls that detainees, including himself, were frequently brought by the police late at night to the security agents’ room, where they were tortured until the morning and then returned bleeding all over their bodies.

Those who were severely injured and required immediate medical attention were not permitted to be treated outside of prison.

Another participant had seen hostages whose bodies, particularly their legs, had withered as a result of the physical pain they had endured, and listening to their agony every night was excruciating to him. He was familiar with the prison and did not feel fortunate to have survived such a torturous ordeal. It was because his detention was being closely monitored by several foreign organizations, human rights delegations, and local nongovernmental organizations. At least once a month, they paid him visits and checked on his condition. As a result, they were unable to find a suitable environment at the prison in which to physically harm him.

It was infuriating to him to recall the misery and torture he faced during his eight years in the Kaliti and Zeway prisons, places where “guys are put into even animals don’t deserve to get there,” according to him. For him, going to prison was like going to hell because it was a place where he had the “chance” to go through all types of torturing experiences in life. When he was imprisoned in the Central Investigation Agency, he was secluded and kept in a dark room where he was only allowed to see light for fifteen minutes each morning and night when he went to the lavatory. The guards offered him something that appeared to be food, but which no animal would eat. That is why, if a person could only survive in the

chamber for two days, he would lose his humanistic manner and mutate into a wild beast, similar to being transformed into a cat, he said.

She was severely tortured in a way that degraded her humanity. Citizens have the right to protection against cruel, inhuman, or humiliating treatment or punishment, as specified in the Constitution, but she was subjected to all of them in violation of her constitutional rights. According to her, you may have a democratic constitution, but it does not ensure you will have a democratic administration. She knew she had been stripped of all her rights and privileges throughout her eight years in solitary confinement, which she deserved at the very least. At any institution, she was not allowed to interact with other inmates in any way. Several detainees expressed interest in speaking with her but were afraid of the repercussions. She was tortured by isolating her from other people and abandoning her to her fate. She was taken to the Central Investigation Bureau’s interrogation chamber every night after midnight and physically abused and tortured until the early hours.

The interrogation was usually conducted by three to four secret service officers, who asked her to strip down to her underwear and stand naked in front of them. They used to complete their interrogation sessions by banging her head to the wall, passing out, and lying down on the cold cement floor. When they beat her with an electric wire or punched her in the nose and eyes with their massive fists, she usually passed out. She was denied access to adequate medical care for a long period, which culminated in a health problem in her later years.

He had to suffer a succession of horrible experiences in prison after being imprisoned nearly nine times. He was held captive in a dark room and interrogated at night by senior operatives of the Central Investigation Agency, including Director Tadesse Miheret, after his first arrest at the Central Investigation Agency detention camp. When the Bureau’s head, Tadessee Miheret accidentally side-shot him with his gun, he was severely injured, and blood spilled for more than half an hour. He wouldn’t even let him see a doctor, allowing only a small cotton pad soaked in alcohol to be applied to the wound on his skull. That experience became the most excruciating moment of his life to recollect until today, not because he watched his blood split on the floor, but because of the bitter taste of tears in his mouth dripping down on his cheeks.

This participant was held in a cramped, dimly lit room when he was arrested. He was allowed to view the light of the day for fifteen minutes every three days. He had to drape a scarf over his face when the soldiers led him out of the chamber because he couldn’t open his eyes to see out into the daylight. He told the judge about how he was mistreated and tortured in prison at one of his court appearances. Instead of commenting on his appeal, the judge spoke briefly to the cops in charge of his case and granted them an additional 28 days to complete their investigation. He realized right then and there that his appeal had been a major miscalculation.

When they got back to prison, one of the cops told him to be prepared for the impending punishment. As they approached the jail compound, they carried him to the opposite side of his last cell, where they waited at a little iron gate. One of the guards pushed him inside into a cage-like chamber after unlocking the fence. He couldn't even stand up because the room was only one meter by one meter and the ceiling height was only one and a half meters. In that confining space, a small mattress, perhaps for a boy, was set on the floor, and he spotted a small pail next to it for peeing and other similar uses.

They kept him in that cage for a month, allowing him every three days to see the outside world. He used to ooze into the bucket and hide it behind his back with his jacket. On the third day, he put on the jacket or used it to shade his eyes from the light as he left the room. In addition, by imprisoning him in such a chamber, secret service operatives blindfolded him and transported him to an interrogation room in the middle of the night, where he was grilled for more than three hours every day. It was one of their tactics for mentally torturing inmates.

The other participant was interrogated and tortured every day for up to six hours after midnight. He was a prisoner who was imprisoned in a dark chamber for three days and only allowed to see the sun for fifteen minutes. He was a prisoner for several weeks, confined to a one-meter-by-one-meter room in which he couldn't even stand up. He was a prisoner who had to sleep next to a bucket full of pee and feces since he was confined to a kettlelike room. He was a prisoner who had been tortured both psychologically and physically by Meles's secret service guys for months. Most people, he said, would go insane if they were forced to go through what he went through in the Central Investigation Agency prison for six months.

According to him, the interrogation, like that of the other detainees, occurred mostly at night, especially when people were sleeping. They interrogated him for up to six hours at a time, forcing him to speak about subjects he did not know of or would never be involved in. During interrogation, the commander would frequently set his weapon on the desk in front of him and tell him not to pressure him into doing anything he didn't want to do.

This participant was tortured and harmed in any manner they could to make him feel inferior to their position and authority. Security agents, for example, arrived at the prison unexpectedly and instructed the prison officers to bind his hands and legs to remind him that he was still a detainee. They frequently verbally abused him to hurt his feelings and diminish his humanity. He was subjected to a variety of psychological tortures intended to dash his dreams for a better future or persuade him that his sacrifice was in vain.

As per him, in prison, humans were regarded with far less respect than animals. Men were exposed to horrific treatment, including physical and psychological abuse and torture. He and his inmates were tortured at night by police and secret service

personnel whenever they uttered a single word in protest of what was happening to them or other prisoners. They were usually confined in a dark room for days at a period, allowing them only thirty minutes in the morning to see the light of day.

The secret service operatives tortured the other participant in a variety of methods, the most heinous of which was the midnight flogging of his under feet with an electric wire. Strenuous physical tasks that caused him to fall on the ground like a leaf of a tree were among the other types of misery he endured there. Interrogators frequently employ the punch with their massive fists or legs over his body in addition to all of these agonizing ways, in which any interrogation method might easily end in a broken nose or a bulging eye.

She was first detained in a dark solitary confinement cell at the Central Investigation Bureau detention center, where she was only allowed to see light for an hour a day. In the middle of the night, several secret service agents tortured her naked. They came in the middle of the night to take her from her cell to their interrogation room regularly. She was forcefully interrogated every other day, and it was generally after midnight, so she had to sleep largely throughout the day to treat and restore energy from all the violence and cruel acts that were being perpetrated against her.

Electric wires and devices, iron chains, and various types of bumping sticks were among the torture instruments she saw there. Before they started punching and smacking her, they told her to take off all of her clothes but her panty. They began questioning her with words once she stood naked in front of them, then slapping, striking, and slicing her with an object.

Standing barefoot on the cement floor at that hour of the night nearly killed her, in addition to the psychological trauma caused by being naked in front of a gathering of men. They flogged her with an electric wire after severely chaining her hands. They told her she had to confess to a crime she hadn't done when she asked them to stop. She didn't tell them anything, though, because she hadn't done anything wrong that she was aware of. As a result, they kept torturing her, and she ultimately grew accustomed to it. Solitary confinement was the most severe kind of torture utilized on her, as it was on the other individuals in this study.

**Afflictions.** The word "affliction" is defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005) as: "pain and suffering or something that causes it" (p.26). As the study focuses on the participants' lived experiences in such jail institutions, investigating the afflictions that they were forced to go through and make their life in prison more miserable is one research theme.

The study found out that various types of afflictions made these journalists suffer at various prison homes during those trying times, particularly at Central Investigation Agency (Maekelawi), Kaliti, and Zeway prisons.

### **“The most terrifying experience”.**

In prison, he has endured a variety of hardships and afflictions. He was beaten and held in a dark chamber for days or weeks without a court order, surviving with a cup of water and a little meal once a day. He was forced to use the bathroom while tiptoeing over other inmates' knees and chests in a tight room with roughly 200 other detainees, where the feet couldn't readily touch the ground and prisoners were forced to use the bathroom while tiptoeing over other inmates' knees and chests. Bedbugs and lice flooded the space every few seconds due to the heated temperature inside. Then they sustained themselves drinking prisoners' blood, he remembered.

For many, including him, the food they served to the convicts was a cause of discomfort. According to him, during Meles' reign, the daily allotment for a prisoner meal was 4 birr, which is barely enough to buy breakfast, lunch, or dinner in Ethiopia. Even you would not set aside such a modest amount for animal feeding. As a result, they were fed food that even animals would have refused to eat. Only when the prisoners' families came to visit them regularly or fortnightly did they get a nice supper. The guards would sometimes deny their families access or allow them to pass the food on, forcing them to bring the food 300 km back to Addis Ababa. Prisoners developed many parasitic problems connected to sanitation and contamination as a result of being compelled to eat the garbage delivered by the prison.

The other participant was denied access to services such as the library, cafeteria, sporting activities, and religious prayers or rituals that other inmates enjoy. In addition, mosquito bites and lace stings made his entire situation unpleasant. In some of the prisons where he was held, a variety of bugs covered his body from head to toe. He was denied a blanket from the prison or even his family, so he slept with his clothes on a cement floor. He had endless restless nights as a result of all of these situations, in addition to the physical suffering secret service personnel inflicted on him after midnight.

The most terrifying experience he had at Zeway prison was being bitten and stung all over his body at all hours of the day and night. When he started removing those creepy-crawly insects from his body with two full hands at a time, he cursed his life. The bugs were plentiful on the walls and ceiling, and when they bit him, he felt like the bane of his existence. He became numb to their venomous bites over time, and he fell asleep dead while they crouched all over him. Red Cross International authorities paid a visit to the prison where he had been thrown in and saw the conditions, and to his relief, they arrived a week later with a range of pest killer sprays and insecticides.

According to another participant, there is no access to drinkable water at the Zeway prison. A prisoner may be given water to drink once in a week, or even once every fifteen days. He had been taught in elementary and secondary science classes that a human could not

spend more than three days without water, but what he witnessed at Zeway prison disproved his previous knowledge when he observed others, including himself, go more than a week without water.

The meals supplied to them at Zeway prison tasted like animal feed. When such food was offered to them, they would frequently fail to eat it right away and leave it on the plate for only two minutes. Then it started emitting a horrible odor that made them want to puke and flee the table, much less eat it. They were constantly surprised to learn about the ingredients in their meals. They were used to seeing grass and wood within injera (local bread), and he suspected Zeway Prison was the first to make injera with teff and Segatura (wood waste).

He had learned a lot about how to survive without food for days at Zeway Prison. He had been eating barely a quarter portion of injera per day to stay alive. He was underweight when he was arrested, but he was nearly skeletal when he was released from Zeway after eight years. He asks, is there any type of affliction that a person may endure more than this?

The filthy biting bugs that were discovered all over the place at Zeway prison added to his misery. According to this participant, the mattress was full of bugs, and he felt no pain when they drew his blood, and when they started stinging or biting his flesh, he stopped scratching it.

She was imprisoned alone for more than a year in a gloomy solitary confinement chamber at the Central Inquiry Bureau, where she endured a variety of terrible hardships and painful afflictions for seven years. They put her in solitary confinement, as they had done before, and subjected her to the most terrible punishment imaginable. She contracted a respiratory problem because the sanitation room was close to the toilet room.

The prison cell's walls were composed of corrugated iron sheets, so it's easy to imagine someone getting burnt during the day and freezing at night. She remained alone in that small room for six years, with no one to talk to or share her feelings with. She was alone and segregated within the next compound, staring through the barbed wire at the criminals who were playing and conversing with each other. She was only permitted to read a limited number of works, none of which were political or critical of the government at the time.

The Assossa Prison experience Participant 5 had firsthand, been the most gruesome, and was intimately connected to his long-standing reputation as a journalist born and raised in a city. He related that malaria, yellow fever, typhus, typhoid, and other deadly diseases are common in Assossa Prison. When he was ill with two of the diseases listed above, he was lucky enough to avoid death in prison twice by seeking medical care. Many prisoners died as a result of a lack of medication and care at the detention facility after consuming poisoned food and drinking polluted water. Many of the inmates had also been bitten by poisonous bugs and had been threatened by

dangerous animals such as snakes, which would occasionally enter the chamber and harm them.

The other participant recounted that he was incarcerated in a cell with roughly 300 other inmates at the time. The cell was filled with detainees like a grain silo, and it was difficult to envision a prison like this in stateless Somalia at the time. Every prisoner began to break out in a cold sweat on their foreheads around sunrise as if they were having a bath. They also felt obliged to breathe quickly, as if the room's oxygen supply had been restricted. The sweat on the prisoner's brow had evaporated, generating dew on the ceiling, which subsequently fell as raindrops on the inmates. He had been tormented in that horrific prison cell for more than a year.

Sleeping on one's back, tummy, or chest was not an option in the cell, which held over 300 inmates. A prisoner could only sleep on either his left or right side! Inmates refer to sleeping on either side of the body as Deboka. When convicts are unable to sleep Deboka style, they are forced to stand or sit in the corner of the room until they are awakened and replaced. He was tormented by being forced to stand or sit in a corner of a prison cell for an entire night in the hopes of finding a vacant area to sleep, only to have a morning light enter the room instead.

This research participant was not allowed to seek medical treatment in a government hospital when he became sick. He was suffering from asthma, and the warden refused to let him go to a health facility. He and other inmates of his type had been allowed to visit a tiny health station staffed by a health officer or a nurse. In such situations, anti-pain drugs, primarily Paracetamol 500 mg, were the conventional treatment. When he gained his freedom, he completely lost his ability to smell.

The stings and bites came thick and fast, and his prison cell was crawling with insects. He recalls the bugs covering his body the day he was imprisoned and his inability to withstand their sting. He cried and screamed at first because of the pain all over his body, but the other convicts helped him wipe some of it away from his back, and he felt a little better. "Being a human has the advantage of being able to quickly adapt to the environment in which they find themselves," he bitterly said.

Prisoners were only allowed to use the toilet in the morning and evening, and the rest of the time they were compelled to use the tin can in one corner of the room. Their cage began to stink like hell as the day continued and the temperature rose. As a result, several of the convicts, including him, got a lifelong sinus condition.

A life in prison cannot be regarded as such for the other participant. "You'll get a taste of what it's like to live in a hell on Earth once you arrive" he described depressingly. He has seen how convicts fight and languish in prison until they loathe their Ethiopian heritage. At first, the bugs' stings and bites made him weep for several days until he learned accustomed to them.

Because everyone was scratching their bodies, the inmates dubbed it "playing guitar."

Another participant described the filthy circumstances in the prison as "too much" for them to tolerate. The toilet rooms, one of which was connected to their prison cell, had very little water. In the jail section, which held hundreds of inmates, only two toilets were located. As a result of the terrible odor that had pervaded their chambers, many of them were suffering from throat and nose problems.

They were only allowed to use the toilet in the morning and evening; otherwise, they had to pee in a tin can in the corner of the room. They were driven wild by the toilet's terrible odor coupled with the pungent odor of the tin can. One day, the cops were painting the wall with iron paint, and the strong odor forced them to sit for two nights in a row because they couldn't breathe properly.

He was once transported to another dreadful prison in Addis, where he went through hell on Earth. The room was comparable to the preceding one in size and was connected to a bathroom. He couldn't tell the difference between being imprisoned in a bathroom and being imprisoned in that prison cell. After the court allowed him to be bailed out with two thousand birr, he was incarcerated in a suffocating prison cell. By that time, he had deduced that the secret agents had prepared him for a lengthy voyage to suffer and languish in one of their covert jail centers, which he did for a year.

He remembers that he was forced to sleep on a filthy mattress that no one had the patience to clean, let alone sleep on, because security agents refused to allow them to obtain adequate services at the correctional facility. They also sent him to sleep in the room's corner, near a tin can where the detainees discharge themselves at night. The bugs had covered his entire body within minutes of his incarceration and were stinging and biting him severely. He's still shocked at how he was able to endure such excruciating pain for months. He thought what had happened to him was similar to having a nightmare or seeing a horrific incident.

This participant was not allowed to speak with other detainees and was forced to eat, sit in the sun, or use the lavatory after everyone else. She was entirely shunned and confined to a small, dark room to suffer alone. After the court ordered that she defend herself against the charges against her, she was transported to Kaliti prison. Because she could communicate with other convicts, Kaliti Prison was a better fit for her. But she had other problems to contend with, one of which was a food problem. It was revolting enough to look at the food supplied to convicts at Kaliti Prison, let alone eat it.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that listening to someone about the kind of jail they were imprisoned in can reveal a lot about the character of the government. Based on the journalists' uneasy memories of the overall jailhouse environment in which they spent

years of their lives, the study concluded that the pain the participants suffered as a result of practicing journalism was largely connected to Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi era. Although few admit to making mistakes in terms of ethical and professional transgressions while executing their duties, the majority blamed Meles' administration for everything that had gone wrong in their personal as well as professional life as journalists.

In this regard, the study highlighted two key points in much of the evidence: (i) Private press journalists during Meles Zenawi's era went through countless forms of torture and affliction while they were jailed at various prison houses, and (ii) the regime was promoting authoritarian democracy, as it did not genuinely show any respect to the constitution which itself ratified. As a result, the study concluded that Meles Zenawi's regime pursued an authoritarian form of democracy that fell short of meeting international standards and was anti-press and intolerant of free expression.

This empirical study investigated how private press journalists in Ethiopia were harassed, imprisoned, and subjected to torture at various detention facilities during Meles Zenawi's era. These atrocities continue to haunt many journalists who experienced them during the stated period. As a result, the majority of the participants do not believe that Ethiopia's print media will flourish shortly for a variety of reasons they detailed in their accounts, one of which is the unpleasant memory of the arrest, torture, and harassment of journalists and publishers that occurred during the aforementioned era.

The participants acknowledged that some laws, notably the Anti-Terrorism Law, had been revised since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office, but they remained adamant that the laws needed to be thoroughly revised once more because they thought there were still numerous articles that promoted the bad intentions of an authoritarian democracy type of regime.

The study finally suggests that media organizations and associations need to create a policy for protecting journalists without regard to their qualifications, or political and ethnic background. Journalists must be able to work freely regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, or gender. They should be able to report on a wide range of viewpoints and attitudes. If this diversity is reduced just to mean political, ethnic, gender, or other targets, then there are problems with its fundamental premise.

This research also makes a stringent recommendation that the government should formulate a policy requiring its officials to provide information to journalists irrespective of their political, social, or other relationships with the media.

While they deserve their full freedom and independence to do their job, journalists must maintain their independence in practice and should not take sides in political debates, but maintain objectivity and impartiality. Their reports must meet industry standards of balance and fairness and never be

weaponized. The study advises that a regulatory agency be established to supervise such works and check and correct them.

## Limitations of the study

This study is limited to interviewing 12 journalists from the private press who were detained, tortured, harassed, or had to leave the country out of fear of reprisals. As a result, the study participant's ability to fully explain the lived experiences of the then Ethiopian private press journalists may be limited, although diverse viewpoints may be able to offset the potential limitation.

## Data availability

Data could be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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## Author contributions

The corresponding author did the original drafting, conceptualization, formal analysis, project management, validation, and research required to complete the task. The coauthor completed the essential language editing, proofreading, validation, and supervision.

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## Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

## Ethical approval

At the time the study was initiated, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) in the researchers' college was still being constituted and did not start officially functioning in the review of research proposals for ethical adherence. However, the study was conducted in accordance with the principles stated in the Declaration of Helsinki as may be applicable to studies in the social sciences and humanities. The ethical considerations addressed in the study included respect for study participants, their right to self-determination as well as informed consent. Further, the school-level relevant institutional body, the Office of Coordinator of Graduate Programs at the School of Journalism and Communication of Addis Ababa University supported the conduct of the study.

## Informed Consent

The researchers provided proper anonymization of the study participants, and informed consent, both written and oral, was obtained at the time of the first data collection.

## Additional information

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to Hailegiorgis Mamo Darge.

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## **Appendix B: *Links of the articles published in international journals***

1. Exploring how absence of judicial freedom undermines press freedom in Ethiopia

Front. Commun., 07 September 2023

Sec. Media Governance and the Public Sphere

Volume 8 - 2023 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2023.1151812>

Front. Commun. 8:1151812.

The article is available online here:

[http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fcomm.2023.1151812/full?  
&utm\\_source=Email\\_to\\_authors &utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_content=T1\\_11.5e  
1\\_author&utm\\_campaign=Email\\_publication&field=&journalName=Frontiers\\_in  
\\_Communication&id=1151812](http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fcomm.2023.1151812/full?&utm_source=Email_to_authors&utm_medium=Email&utm_content=T1_11.5e1_author&utm_campaign=Email_publication&field=&journalName=Frontiers_in_Communication&id=1151812)

2. Making sense of Ethiopian journalists' prison experiences during Meles Zenawi's administration: a phenomenological inquiry

Springer-Nature (Humanities and Social Sciences Communications **11**,

Article number: 97 (2024) (Humanit Soc Sci Commun), January 07, 2024

ISSN 2662-9992 (online))

DOI <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02584-z>

The article is available online here <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02584-z>  
or as a PDF here: [https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1057/s41599-023-  
02584-z.pdf](https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1057/s41599-023-02584-z.pdf).

### **Appendix C: Lists of Interview Questions**

1. How long have you been a journalist?
2. How would you characterize journalism during Meles Zenawi's reign?
3. What charge did you face as a result of reporting the story or writing the article? Or any other allegation that resulted in you being prosecuted in a court of law?
4. Have you ever been sentenced to prison by a court of law? Was the prosecutor accusing you because of your reporting or because of other journalistic practices?
5. What may have prompted the prosecution to accuse you as a transgressor if you believe you were indicted for being a journalist and not for your reporting?
6. Were you a member of any of Meles Zenawi's political organizations at the time?
7. When you were writing an article, did you get any advice or counsel from your editorial staff or any of your sources?
8. How do you double-check an issue or incident before writing or publishing it?
9. How do you express the regime's intervention in various forms?
10. How did you end up in jail? Was it on the basis of a court order, or were you simply apprehended and hauled to jails by security officers?
11. How would you describe the conditions and treatment in the prisons where they were imprisoned in terms of human rights?
12. What offenses did you commit that resulted in you being imprisoned, tortured, or forced to abandon the country?
13. How would you describe the prisons you've seen in terms of how they treated inmates like you and others accused of crimes unrelated to yours?
14. How would you describe the court's method and its ability to investigate your case?
15. Are you still satisfied that your reporting was insufficient to hold you accountable, or do you believe it was a political decision?
16. How would you describe your tribulations and ordeals, and how did you manage to survive them?
17. How would you characterize Meles, who was once lauded for bringing economic development to his country and claimed to be a proponent of the state's developmental role, but is now regarded as "an authoritarian one" in his political leadership for abusing journalists' rights through the use of the police and courts?
18. How do you think the Meles regime, which for the first time in Ethiopian political history adopts "freedom of speech and thought" in its constitution and in essence supports the idea of a

libertarian form of government, can be accused by many of being a "Authoritarian regime" that restricts freedom of the press and speech?

19. What do you think of Meles' government in light of its incorporation of the United Nations Human Rights Charter in its Constitution, which is one embodiment of a democratic state?
20. How would you characterize the police and judiciary in the practice of law during Meles' era?
21. How did they adjust to life following their experiences in prison and abroad?
22. Are there things in your current life that you regret when you think back on the past?
23. As a journalist, how well do you know the Press Law and the Anti-Terrorism Law, both of which were enacted in 2002 and 2009, respectively?
24. How do you see the future of journalistic freedom in Ethiopia.

**Appendix D – Pictures of the research participants**



Iskinder Nega



Temesgen Desalegn



Wubeshet Taye



Reiyot Alemu



Sileshi Hagos



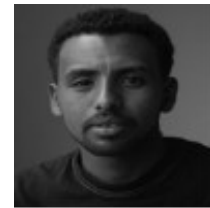
Wosenseged Gebrekidan



Befekadu Moreda



Elias Gebru



Habtamu Minale



Eyuel Fisseha



Mahlet Fantahun



Befekadu Hailu

**Appendix E: A few of the literatures the researcher uncovered that detailed the horrific circumstances in Ethiopian jails**



Appendix F – *Some of the private press publications published under EPRDF rule*



(Source: Committee to Protect Journalists)



(Source: World Media.com)



(Source: Media Insight)

Appendix G – Cartoons from the EPRDF era in Ethiopia that showed a lack of democratic rights



(Source: warrandhabmedia.com)




(Source: Ethiopian Review)

## Annexes

### Annex I: Letter of appreciation for participating as a reviewer in academic journals during study time

(While pursuing his PhD, the researcher reviewed academic papers that were submitted to be published in two distinct journals: *Ethiopian Journal of Language, Culture and Communication* - Bahir Dar University, and the *Common Ground Scholar Journal*, USA.)

1.




**BAHIR DAR UNIVERSITY**

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
GRADUATE, RESEARCH &  
COMMUNITY SERVICE  
VICE DEAN OFFICE

### LETTER OF APPRECIATION


This letter is issued in recognition of the contribution that **Mr. Hailegiorgis Mamo** has put in to the *Ethiopian Journal of Language, Culture and Communication* (EJLCC) as a reviewer of one manuscript, the mention of whose title is withheld for confidentiality reasons.

The Editorial Committee of EJLCC highly appreciates the voluntary intellectual contribution that you have made to the Journal. We thank you for your participation in the review process and hope that you will keep helping us with similar tasks in the future.



Awarded on this day, fifth of May 2023.

Ayenew Gnadu (PhD)  
Editor-in-Chief, EJLCC  
Faculty of Humanities, Bahir Dar University  
Bahir Dar, Ethiopia





Dear Reviewer,

Thank you in advance for reviewing the following article. Peer reviewers are selected from members of the Editorial Board, a list of volunteers, or current authors. Volunteers are given assignments if they have volunteered as a reviewer and possess qualifying credentials. Authors/co-authors of submitted articles who have passed our initial quality inspections are also eligible to be selected as reviewers. We request that you respect the peers reviewing your own submission by reciprocating this responsibility. We thank you for offering your time and expertise.

Please be mindful that you belong to a community of scholars, educators, and practitioners who devote their energy to sharing knowledge. Always be respectful and professional when providing feedback. Reviewers are encouraged to be critical, constructive, and, above all, respectful.

Reviewer responsibilities and resources can be found via the following links:

- [Duties of Reviewers](#)
- [How to Complete a Peer Review Report](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

If you have any questions about the peer-review process, please contact us for assistance.

Sincerely,

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Champaign, IL 61820 USA  
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**Annex II: *Interview Invitation Letter***

**Interview Invitation Letter**

Dear .....

I am writing regarding a study which examines the challenges and hurdles that the private press journalists had gone through during Meles Zenawi's era. It is a fact that you were one of the private press journalists who undergone various forms of sufferings and hardships while practicing journalism during the stated era.

Therefore, I would like to invite you to participate in a one-on-one interview in order to help me better understand the experience. The interview will last approximately one hour and take place in a convenient way you like, i.e. face-to-face, over the telephone, or through e-mail by writing your answers.

Please find the attached informed consent form that contains information about the study and participation. If you are willing to participate, I will schedule a time to discuss the informed consent and conduct of the interview.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

**Annex III: *Consent-to-participate form***

**Consent-to-participate form**

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Lived Experiences of the Private Press Journalists during EPRDF era of Ethiopia**

Dear Participant,

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study.

The purpose of this study is to explore lived experiences of private press journalists during Meles Zenawi's era using a qualitative phenomenological analysis. The method of data gathering is interviewing with the journalists who have gone through different forms of hurdles and tribulations during the stated era.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. I would be happy to share my findings with you after the research is completed.

There are no risks associated with the research study as it only attempts to conduct detailed examination of your life encounter by investigating how you sense and describe your personal trial and tribulation you undergo, and how you interpret your lived experiences.

Interview will be carried out and transcribed with the participants with the aim of letting participants tell their own story and allow them give expression to their lived experiences of suffering, ordeals and tribulations.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the study. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Signature of participant .....

Date .....

**Annex IV: Letter of Approval to Reputability Check to published articles**

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የሥነ ጥናት ቤት



Addis Ababa University  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Date: February 09, 2024

Ref.No. AAU/UL/27/24

To: - Dr.Yohannese Shiferawe  
School of Journalism and Communication

From:- Melkamu Beyene (Dr)  
Director of Addis Ababa University Library



**Subject: - Recommendation of Journal Reputability Confirmation Request**

It is to be recalled that your office has requested us to check the reputability of two Journals mentioned below.

1. Humanities and Social Sciences Communications (ISSN:2662-9992)
2. Frontier in Communication (ISSN: 2297-900x)

As per your request, my office has established a mini committee to assess the reputability of the two journals. Finally, we have discovered that the journals are indexed in reputable indexing databases and also checked that the two articles are actually available.

Thus I would like to confirm that the journals are reputable.

Regards,