

# **Representation of power relations in Ethiopian newspaper front page photographs: A semiotic analysis**

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By  
Samuel Fitsumbirhan

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## **CONTENTS**

List of figures	iii
List of tables	iv
Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vi

### **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Background	1
1.2 Statement of the problem	2
1.3 Significance of the study	3
1.4 Scope of the study	3

### **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.1 Theories of visual representation	4
2.1.1 The reflective approach	5
2.1.2 The intentional approach	5
2.1.3 The constructionist approach	5
2.2 Photographic Representation	6
2.2.1 The iconic	9
2.2.2 The indexical	9
2.2.3 The symbolic	9
2.3 Photography, press and representation of citizens	10
2.4 Democratization of communication and media representation	14
2.5 Making media more democratic	17

### **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

3.1 Research questions	23
3.2 Hypothesis	23
3.3 Research design	23
3.4 Subject	25
3.5 Data collection procedure	25
3.6 Data analysis procedures	27
3.7 Threats to validity/limitation	27

<b>CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION</b>	29
<b>CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
5.1 Summary of major findings	49
5.2 Conclusions	51
5.3 Recommendations	53
<b>REFERENCES</b>	57
<b>APPENDICES</b>	60

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Image of Mengistu Hailemariam	17
Figure 2	Government officials visiting flower farm	30
Figure 3	Anthropologist briefing about a fossil discovery	30
Figure 4	House speaker talking to Bahrain delegation	31
Figure 5	A meeting on progress	32
Figure 6	President holding talks	32
Figure 7	Ministers chairing a meeting	33
Figure 8	PM Meles being seen off at Bole Airport	33
Figure 9	Ethiopian broadcast officials giving news release	34
Figure 10	PM gives press statement	34
Figure 11	A meeting on progress	35
Figure 12	PM holding talk with a foreign delegation	35
Figure 13	House speaker with Spanish delegation	36
Figure 14	Ethio-Somalia meeting	36
Figure 15	Newly appointed ambassadors and diplomats refreshing	37
Figure 16	People at a bus stop	37
Figure 17	Ruined houses after a bomb blast	38
Figure 18	Award ceremony of Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce	39
Figure 19	Government official and businessman talking	39
Figure 20	Ministers talking in a group	40
Figure 21	Insurance enterprise heads talking	40
Figure 22	People walking in a street	41
Figure 23	A minister and businessman	41
Figure 24	Opposition party leaders	42
Figure 25	Arrested CUD leaders taken to court	42
Figure 26	A meeting on progress	43
Figure 27	Opposition leaders at the gate of a court	44
Figure 28	A celebration	44
Figure 29	A minister and businessman	45
Figure 30	A street boy begging in car windows	45
Figure 31	President inaugurating Bole international airport	46
Figure 32	The PM and opposition leader interview	46

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1 Semiotic tools used in interpreting the photographic data	27
Table 2 Photographic coverage of citizens	29

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of social power relations in Ethiopian newspaper front page photographs. The portrayal of power relations between citizens through front page photos was investigated via semiotic analysis of photographs of the human figure. The researcher coded photographs of ordinary citizens and prominent persons and examined how meanings are created through signifier-signified relationships and denotative and connotative meanings attached to the photographs. The major coding parameters were coverage, portrayal, appearance, and activities persons in the photographs perform. The coding objects were *The Ethiopian Herald* (government-owned), *Fortune* (private) and *The Reporter* (private).

A major finding was that powerful persons were overwhelmingly dominant on the front pages. They tended to be portrayed positively, sometimes heroic. Ordinary people, on the contrary, had less coverage and were portrayed as victims rather than as newsmakers, experts, or citizens reacting to existing events. The power relations between citizens of different classes can, therefore, be said unequal in the studied newspapers. This implies that interests of the common people, and a balanced participation in communication and democratisation processes of the country have not been foregrounded.

The study suggests that the needs and interests of the mass are under-represented, while the few in power are over-represented, and the media influences this representational role. The media outlets under scrutiny, reinforces this representational inequality. The study found that the media do not challenge the conception that only the powerful citizens are newsmakers. The study therefore concludes with a critical note on the role of the media in democratization of communication, which should give all citizens a chance to be fairly represented in the media.

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# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Media history and practices have strong relations with political, social and economic conditions. Ethiopia is not an exception. Media represent and portray people with different social status in different manners. One group may be over-emphasised while others are under-represented or negatively portrayed. One of the tasks of journalism, according to Lester and Miller, (1995) is to present people in the community “accurately fairly and completely”. One reason for misrepresentation may be unequal power relations in society. The coverage may also be affected by stereotypes, reflecting conflicting ideologies that exist between groups and classes of people. In response to this, democratic media seek to increase “the extent and quality of social representation or participation in communication” (Calabrese, 2004:166).

One way of human representation in print media is through photographs, which have been used to record different aspects of human life and activity since the late 1800s (Lewis, 1991). Our outlooks about the world and people have been shaped through the media, and photography as a visual means of representation has played a central role. According to Stuart Hall, even though photographs show resemblance with items they refer to, they may not fully represent objects, and ideas in the outside world because they function as signs that carry meanings, which are interpreted differently according to the underlying ideology (Hall: 1997). Ideally, it is believed that the media should present and represent people of different status in equal manner. The way people use media and their level of participation in media production are considered indicators of social participation, integration and democratization (Devroe: 2004). In line with this, a democratic media should represent people fairly, accurately and comprehensively without stereotyping individuals and groups (The National Press Photographers Association, 2004: internet).

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to analyse front page photographs and pictures to determine how various segments of society are represented in three different newspapers. The study tries to investigate the representation of power relations and portrayal of so-called high status citizens and common or lower status citizens in three selected newspapers *Fortune* (private), *Reporter* (English version, private) and *The Ethiopian Herald* (governmental).

The purpose of the semiotic analysis in this study is to explore how societal power relations are reflected in newspaper photographs. Seeing familiar political figures, business giants and other people in higher social status in newspaper photographs is a daily experience for all of us. As several researchers have noted, the media across the world tend to portray these people positively; as newsmakers, providers, and experts that own information important to the well-being of the people (see for instance Curran and Park, 2000 and Thorvaldsdottir, 2004). The stereotypical portrayal of the powerful and the powerless in newspaper photographs can possibly influence on the way people think and reflect about power relations in society.

On the contrary, the large mass, the ordinary citizens, seem not well represented in media. The common people “traditionally appear in the news in subservient roles” (Curran and Park, 2000:100). The under-representation and sometimes negative portrayal of common people may reflect a dominant discourse in the media concerning the ordinary citizen, their values and interests. A more open media can create access to more people in the public sphere. In this regard, how do the Ethiopian media give common people media attention? How those in power or with higher social status being served by the media? Is there a fair and balanced media representation of all citizens? In a wider perspective, what is the impact of media representation on the democratization of communication? These are some of the questions that this study will interrogate using photographic representation as a primary data source.

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

The study is important because it tries to examine the media environment with the view to see, to what extent it represent various segments of society. If the media in Ethiopia is not representative of the entire society, they might not properly contribute to democratization processes of the country. The study can hopefully provoke reporters, editors, photographers, and other staffs in the media outlets to reflect critically on the way society is portrayed, and to what extent it is fair and balanced. Academia can make use of the study as a springboard to a thorough study of democratization of communication in different media and institutions.

### 1.4 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on front page photographs of three selected newspapers, *The Ethiopian Herald*, *Fortune* and *Reporter*, published in the first three months of the year 2006. Only photographs of Ethiopians have been coded. Photographs of expatriates are not included in the data interpretation because they do not represent the power relation in the Ethiopian society, but elsewhere. Persons who retain official authority due to their title or position were coded as ‘prominent’ or ‘powerful’ citizens, while the remaining persons were invariably coded as ‘ordinary’, ‘less powerful’ or ‘powerless’ citizens.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theories of representation

Three widely accepted theories of representation, the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist or constructivist approaches attempt to answer how meaning originates and how we can discern the “true” meaning of a word or image (Hall, 1997).

*Representation refers to the use of language and image to create meaning about the world around us. We use words to understand, describe, and define the world as we see it, and we use images to do this. This process takes place through systems of representation, such as language and visual media that have rules and conventions about how they are organized (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001: 12).*

Throughout history it has been debated whether representation is a mere reflection of the world as it is or if "we construct the world and its meaning through the systems of representation we deploy" (ibid: 12). These are the two main contradicting hypothesis that underlay theories of representation. A further division is suggested by Stuart Hall with reflective, intentional and constructionist approaches.

#### 2.1.1 The reflective approach

The reflective approach assumes that the meaning of things is embedded in the real world and assumes that "language functions like a mirror, to reflect the true meaning as it already exists in the world" (Hall, 1997: 24). This approach is related to mimetic theory that is based on the notion that language is simply the reflection of objects, persons, ideas or events in the real world. It, therefore, assumes representation as a system through which we use language or image as a mirror that reflects back the world as it is in a form of imitation (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001). Of course, visual signs and things represented by these signs in the real world may show some relationships, and people may equally understand words used to refer to the objects. Only different groups people who do not share the same code for a single phenomenon will disagree and fail to communicate until one group learns the code that refers to a certain thing in the other group.

### 2.1.2 The Intentional Approach

This approach to meaning in representation argues the opposite. As Hall (1997:25) puts it, "it holds that it is the speaker, the author, who impresses his or her unique meaning on the world through language. Words mean what the author intends they should mean." Though the idea of this approach claims that people have their own way of looking at things, perceive them and convey or communicate them through language, it opposes the general truth that man is a social animal (ibid). This means, as theory of representation, the intentional approach is flawed because it presupposes a single person can be a sole or unique source of meaning in language. Hall therefore points out that it is impossible to assume a person as a sole creator of meanings in language; he shares meaning with the rest of the society. That means, as long as a person lives in a society, he or she could not have his or her own individual language. It is when language is shared that people communicate interests and values. Therefore, "language can never be wholly a private game. Our private intended meanings, however personal to us, have to enter into the rules, codes and conventions of language to be shared and understood" (ibid).

### 2.1.3 The constructionist approach

The argument of the constructionist approach is that neither things in the real world by themselves nor individual users of a language can "fix meaning" in language. Sturken and Cartwright say:

*In this social constructionist approach, we only make meaning of the material world through specific cultural contexts. This takes place in part through the language systems (be they writing, speech, or images) that we use. Hence, the material world only has meaning, and hence only can be "seen" by us through these systems of representation. This means that the world is not simply reflected back to us through systems of representation, but that we actually construct the meaning of the material world through these systems (2001: 12-13).*

The constructionists believe in the existence of the material world but for them the material world is not a source of meaning. Rather "it is the language system or whatever system we are using" that represents our concepts. This indicates meaning making may differ according to the values and assumptions people carry in their minds. Therefore, "representation is not just about the way the world is presented to us but also about how we engage with media texts in order to interpret and assimilate

such portrayals" (Connor, 2001: internet). Images, sounds and other representational systems function as signs that carry meanings that can be understood by the people who commonly share the signs. The signs, materials, objects and effects can be meaningful entities through the practice of representation. "But the meaning depends, not on the material quality of the sign, but on its symbolic function. It is because a particular sound or word stands for, symbolizes or represents a concept that it can function, in language, as a sign and convey meaning...or, as the constructionists say, signify (sig-ni-fy)" (Hall, 1997: 26).

## 2.2 Photographic representation and semiotic analysis

Photography from its early beginning has been used as a tool for "the exploration of society" (Becker, 1982). Similarly, photographs have a representative role in promoting social and political change and development. Wright (2004: 3) says, "ever since its invention in 1839, photography has played a central role in representing the major changes that have taken place in society throughout the modern age." Over the past 160 years, photographic representation has remained an active facilitator of change "that has both generated and promoted the social, political, economic, scientific and artistic developments" (ibid: 3). It also introduced a "new language of mass communication" (Hardt, 2004: 10), that go beyond the written or spoken word. The relationship of a photograph with the physical world and human beings is not static, it rather indicates the connection between people and it has become a meeting place of ideas and promoted human social interaction. Rerlmutter and Wagner (2004: internet) say: "Once created, captioned and imposed on the audiences, however, the actual effect of pictures in the press is not simplistically predictable, and their interpretation is subject to change and debate."

Meanings of the photographic sign can, therefore, be a result of produced and transformed ideologies because we live in a world where "symbolic mediation"(Irvine, 2004-2005) and socially constructed values, hierarchies and ideologies prevail. Hall (1995: 19) also notes, "the mass media produces representations of the social world, images, descriptions, explanations and frames for understanding how the world is and why it works as it is said and shown to work." Roland Barthes claims that images have both denotative and connotative meaning. He

explains, “the denotative meaning of the image refers to its literal, descriptive meaning” (quoted in Sturken and Cartwright, 2001: 19), while the same photograph connotes more culturally specific meaning. “Connotative meanings rely on the cultural and historical context of the image and its viewers’ lived, felt, knowledge of those circumstances all that the image means to them personally and socially”(ibid: 19).

Photography is a representational system because there is a “natural correspondence between the photograph and the perceived environment” (Wright, 2004: 79). Photographs, therefore, play a communicative role through representations. Wright forwards,

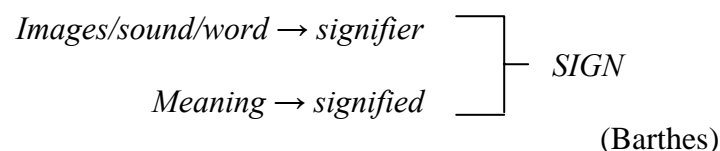
*They achieve their communicative function in collaboration with pictorial conventions some of which emanate from the medium itself and others which are determined by the culture in which we live. These are in part indebted to our inherited tradition of the visual arts as well as to the broader array of images that we encounter every day from popular culture (ibid: 79).*

Therefore, a photograph is one of the most suggestive and powerful signs with meaning attached among other signs in newspapers. We find these meanings embodied in the socio-cultural life of the people. Meanings and conventions can be identified through deep knowledge of the culture, and analysis of the cultural signs can be achieved through semiotic means. Nojima (2003) contends that photographs teach us a new visual code, and they confer importance of things photographed. These visual codes hold truths about the particular society that can be studied through investigating the sign system that is dominant in the social interaction. Semiotics tries to interpret "sign systems, signification, representation, and signifying practices" (Gunter, 2000:83). Interpretations of signs may vary from person to person; their knowledge of the codes of representation may also differ, and the media content, for example photographs, may have a variety of meanings depending on individual perspectives. It is through semiotics that we can identify meanings. Keyan Tomaselli defines semiotics as follows:

*Semiotics is the study of how meaning occurs in language, pictures, performance, and other forms of expression. The method incorporates not only how things come to mean, but how prevailing meaning are the out-comes of encounters between individuals, groups and classes and their respective cosmologies and conditions of existence (1996:29).*

Arnheim (1986) quoted in Wright (2004: 79), addresses how semiotics can be applied in relation to the photographic image: “in order to make sense of photographs, one must look at them as encounters between physical reality and the creative mind of man and answering the question how people make meanings is the centre of semiotics.” However, the complexity of examining the nature of physical reality and the creative mind of man made Arnheim’s suggestion difficult to achieve. For Hall (1997), language, signs and images stand for representing things and people in a certain culture can make sense out of them through communicating with what they commonly perceive about the signs. Tomaselli (1996: 30) indicates that signs are “the basic building blocks of communication”. Therefore, the knowledge of signs is a necessary step towards studying their representational function and meanings created through signification. For Corbin (1998) “the sign is material and implicated with power, but the main focus remains contingent practical discourse and the critical task is the enhancement of human agency within the given ideological context.”

Saussure developed a theory of semiology and structuralism. He “formalized semiology as a science of signs to include the studies of linguistic and non-linguistic communication alike” (Wright, 2004: 80). Wright further notes, “Semiology attempts to interpret human cultural activities through the identification of common principles and forms of signification” (ibid: 80). Thus, semiology is concerned with how signs create meaning through the interaction between the *signifier* and the *signified*. In our day-to-day life we interpret images around us, and this interpretation is a result of understanding what is signified in the image. We are using the “tools of semiotics to understand its signification, or meanings” (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001:29). Barthes developed a model that shows the relationship between the sign, the signifier and the signified. In this model “the image (or word) and its meaning together (the signifier and signified together) form the sign” (ibid: 29).



Peirce, as stated by Wright (2004), divides the sign system into three elements icon, index and symbol (or a combination of these elements). Distinctively looking into this widely accepted sign systems,

*An iconic sign is one which in some way looks like its referent (or the subject). With the index, we should expect some type of casual connection with the referent. In the case of the symbol, it achieves its communicative function through convention or agreement between the sender and receiver of the message (Wright, 2004: 81).*

### 2.2.1 The iconic

The iconic signs indicate a resemblance between the photograph and the thing it stands for; "the sign looks like the thing signified" (Tomaselli, 1996:30). A photograph in this case is evaluated for its resemblance with the photographed. This indicates the evaluation of the photograph in terms of its iconic relationship to the subject (Wright, 2004). According to Deacon et al (1999: 188), for a sign to be iconic, it must seem to match the physical characteristics of the objects. Thus the idea of iconic sign system represents things that can be visibly seen (Gunter, 2000).

### 2.2.2 The indexical

The indexical supposes association between the sign and the signified. Deacon et al (1999: 187) says, "with an index, the relation between the signifier and the signified is casual and linear: the sign is directly the effect of the object." Carter (2000) argues that though the resemblance or imitation of things makes a photo iconic, it achieves this using light from the subject. This in turn reduces the arbitrariness of a photo and makes it indexical. This indicates the direct physical or casual link between the signifier and the signified. Similarly, as there is small difference between the signifier and signified, photography is believed to be reasonably objective record of things in the natural world (Carter, 2000). For example, the links between symptoms and a disease or between cloud and rain show "the recognition of relationships or casual connections between phenomena" (Gunter, 2000: 83). Through indexical signs, our attention is directed towards "the existence of the unseen; it has an existential relationship to the phenomenon it depicts" (Tomaselli 1996: 30).

### 2.2.3 The symbolic

In a symbolic sign system, the connection between the object and the symbol is arbitrary. Thus except our conventional understanding of the idea there is no obvious connection between the symbol and the idea (Tomaselli, 1996). Cultural systems determine the meaning attached to the symbol (Deacon et al, 1999). Gunter, therefore,

points out, "symbolic aspects of signs comprised learned meaning associated with linguistic forms (e.g. words)" (ibid: 83).

### 2.3 Photography, press and representation of citizens

Photography has offered strongly convincing forms of pictorial evidence of human life and activity over the past one and a half centuries. According to Wright (2004: 1), "the photographic medium has provided one of the most important and influential means of expressing the human condition". Therefore, photographs are strongly linked to human culture and acquire meanings from the "way the people involved with them understand them, use them, and thereby attribute meaning to them" (Becker, 1982: internet). Hardt accredits photographs as a new language of mass communication when they come into use and claims that:

*they offered illustrations and explanation of nature and humanity... the picture advanced as a means of social and scientific identification, or proof and become a reliable language of mass communication, embedded in the context of words, and lead with confidence by those looking for empirical truths (Hardt, 2004: 10).*

In its history, photography's representational power has been an issue of debate.

Wright explains:

*Throughout the history of visual representation, questions have been raised concerning the supposed accuracy (or otherwise) of the visual images, as well as its status in society. Ideas and debates concerning how we see the world and the status of its pictorial representation have been central political, philosophical and psychological issues from the time of Plato to the present day technological revolution of the new media communications (2004:1).*

Nonetheless, what is produced in photo and what we see with our naked eyes remain in close approximation. This entails the assumption that all people would "naturally be able to understand photographs" (Wright, 2004: 1) because of the ability of the camera to replicate visual perception. It is justifiable to look into photographic representations to get the meanings attached with the cultural signs that represent the life of the people in one way or another. Moreover, the study of the representation of different members of society in newspapers has a tangible reason to be seen in association with news photos: they are the "most obvious symbols of representation in the newspaper" (Len Rios et al, 2005: 156). For Curran and Gurevitch (1996), meanings in photographs can either be signified directly from what is in the

photograph or depend on cultural knowledge that can be activated by the photographic image.

Because of the photograph's relatively high potential in representing the world and its deep penetration into cultural ideologies, it is "nearly omnipresent, informing virtually every arena of human existence" (Ritchen stated in Wright, 2004: 2). This medium is also in strong attachment with human development and played a vital role in instigating social change by representing the major social changes in the modern age since its invention in 1839 (ibid). Photography has not been a passive medium; rather it can contribute significantly in promoting social and political change and development. By the same token, photography has a major contribution in the recent media culture. "It has assumed the ironic role of bringing the harsh realities of the world to the coffee table" (ibid: 3). This might be why photography has retained its place in the highly competitive media environment, for example from television, because a single picture can convey an enormous amount of detail and emotion (Stephenson, 1998).

Appearance in newspaper photographs and other media outlets is an indication of being special and noteworthy, supporting why people of "higher social status appear more often in the news" (Len-Rios et al, 2005: 154). It goes without saying that images of powerful people frequently appear in news in particular and that information from them is often believed to be true. The news photographer, who selects a particular camera angle, the sub-editor or page designer who chooses between photographs and others in the news department, impose their input on the selection of photographs for news. Therefore, apart from the policies in the news institution each individual in the news department has the chance of reflecting their personal outlooks in news.

Representation in media may affect our mindset in shaping our identity, sense of selfhood and our sense of class (Kellner, cited in Denis and Humez, 2003: 9). For Hardt (2004: 106), the individual is invented and confirmed by mass communication in the roles of citizen, neighbor, sexual object, or human being. The respective attributes of these roles are constructed and reinforced through the process of recognition and identification that involve media events and personalities. Personal

appearances in news photography in terms of posture, attitude, and gesture are important in the creation of the connotation linked with the person (Chandler, 2002). Foucault tells us that the body has been considered as an object of knowledge since the seventeenth century. From that time onwards the body became a "signifier of political correctness and power in its multiple reproductions throughout media narratives" (Hardt 2004: 106). Based on Foucault's concept of the body as object of knowledge Hardt forwards:

*appearance- from posture, clothing, or the accouterments of luxury to attitude or mindset- is a form of ornamentation in its physical and psychological states which makes the body culturally visible and locates the personality in time and space... it is a surface constituted by size, shape and dress, which is projected through mass communication into the world in which appearance signals social standing, or life styles, efficiently and effectively for a fast moving society, while the ordinary remains unattractive and therefore marginalized. (2004: 107-108).*

Appearance in photographs, therefore, suggests power, which is subjectively drawn by mass communication in portraying the social status through clothing, the value of objects people in the photographs use, and the personal distances between people.

Under-representation is sometimes reported when it comes to the coverage of minorities. A study of Ungerleider (2005) indicates that:

*the relative importance attached to the needs and interests of minorities is affected by their inclusion and location in a broadcast, newspaper, or news magazine; in general, minorities are under-represented among the newsmakers, experts, and citizens presented by the news media.*

According to him, this is a result of how the news reports gather news. Most news media deploy their reporters to locations where they expect news will be made, and the most prominent locations where news is found are centers of political and economic power (ibid). These places, according to Ungerleider, are places where minorities are most under-represented, and this unfair portrayal of groups in media may be a cause for intolerance in the society (Devroe, 2004). On the other hand, the proper representation of minorities in media creates a sense of inclusion and acceptance. It is believed that media have a role to play in influencing public opinion, and creating "a feeling of 'belonging', a feeling of being included, of being part of society". This might be a result of "hegemony" in the socio-cultural code system. According to a debatable statement by James Lull, mass media are tools that ruling elites use to "perpetuate their power, wealth and status" (Denis and Humez, 2003: 62),

and they have the power of inculcating the idea into the consciousness of the media consumer.

Journalists focus on authorities in political, economic or social institution because of two main reasons, argues Ungerleider (2005): first, they speak about issues authoritatively; second, those on top positions are more authoritative than those below them are. Additionally, there is a thought that "government provides a steady flow of safe information, at least safe in the sense that it can be attributed to sources which people typically find credible" (ibid).

*The media are invariably related in some way to the prevailing structure of political and economic power. It is evident, first of all, that media have an economic cost and value, are an object of competition for control and access. Secondly, they are subject to political, economic and legal regulation. Thirdly, mass media are very commonly regarded as effective instruments of power, with the potential capacity to exert influence in various ways. Fourthly, the power of mass media is very unequally made available Mc Quail (Ungerleider 2005: 86).*

The so-called mass-society theory also emphasizes the integration of the media into the sources of social power and authority. Its "content is likely to serve the interests of political and economic power holders" (ibid). For example, in investigating women's role in election, Tuchman claims media representation and/or under-representation has a significant role in changing what the society values about power relations:

*The very under representation of women, including their stereotypic portrayal may symbolically capture the position of women in society- their real lack of power. It bespeaks "their symbolic annihilation by the media... for... just as representation in the media signifies social existence, so too under representation and (by extension) trivialization and condemnation indicate symbolic annihilation (Thorvaldsdottir, 2004: internet).*

By implication this means that any media consumer may assume the representation of the average person in the media to be directly related to his/her legitimacy in media like others who have received media attention. Cartel (2005) says if an individual perceives that his opinion is shared by a majority of the population, then he will be more willing to express his opinion. Conversely, if an individual perceives her opinion to be in the minority of not being widely shared in society, then she will be less willing to state her opinion publicly.

#### 2.4 Democratization of communication and media representation

The question of representation in media as part of communication has been debated. The print media attempts to accommodate the "conflicting interests of ordinary people and the commercial and political elites" Conboy (2002: 2) because the needs and desires of people are changed and enlarged as time passes, and the way communication functions in the society is dynamically changing. In line with this, Calabrese (2004) believes that it is the common people that are in need of qualitatively better and equitable communication and representation in media because this helps to ensure that the "public makes its voice heard and gets its wishes satisfied by means of bringing the spirit of democracy into the world of communication " (ibid: 166). Thus, he conceptualizes democratization of communication as a process whereby: (a) the individual becomes an active partner and not a mere object of communication; (b) the variety of messages exchanged increase; and (c) the extent and quality of social representation or participation in communication is augmented.

One of the important contributions of media (i.e. the formal media) to the spread of democracy is to "serve society fully and honestly" (Bertrand, 2003: 3). Sharing Bertrand's idea, Hydén et al (2002: 1) argues, "media have been relatively more influential in shaping the emerging, but still fledgling, democratic culture in Africa." The equal representation of different groups of the social members is a sign to greater equality in a democratization process. However, large parts of the world are still deprived of press freedom or of viable media. In some regions, the media are enslaved to powerful political, social or economic agents or on the other hand "journalists are corrupt, mainly because they cannot survive on their salaries" (Bertrand, 2003: 3).

On the contrary, Habermas, as stated in Bertrand (2003: 3) suggests that "radical democracy" should give access to public opinion for everyone, "however ignorant, stupid, insane, or malicious he/she may be". However, journalists have been criticized for focusing on fascinating news rather than going to greater lengths to search for the causes for social ills and disorders, for example, lack of democracy. In relation to this, Bertrand (2003: 8) observes, "Everywhere one finds the same mosaic of events because reporters move in packs. So certain aspects of reality are over-covered while others are covered very little."

Journalists' sometimes wrong assumption that news is made by personal contacts, may lead them to address "decision makers, the elite, and his peers far more than he/she speaks to the public. And yet it is indispensable that a large majority of citizens get a correct perception of the world" (Bertrand 2003: 8). Therefore, journalists' fear of taking the risk of getting down to the grassroots level has developed "the public distrust of the media" (ibid: 8). However, the pressure from management, sources and even the little constructive feedback they get from the public would further the causes for the failure of media in addressing social political and economic issues objectively and fairly. Nevertheless, a democratic media has an institutional organization that "attempts to guarantee the right of all individuals and sub-cultures to participate in the construction of public cultural truth" (Lee, 1995: 93). For objective and fair coverage of issues, the competence of the journalist should be increased. Bertrand says, "human affairs grow more complex. And journalists are no longer supposed just to cover the routines of a small town. In order to report accurately, they need far more knowledge, general and specialized than they used to (Bertrand, 2003: 8). In this case media "enhance the confidence of citizens to participate in the political process" through fair and balanced representation of all the citizens (Hydén et al, 2002: 5).

Media could not properly achieve the ideal of the "fourth state" if they were intertwined with same powers they were supposed to monitor (Waisbord, stated in Curran and Park, 2000: 53). This was proved in Mexico when the media served under the Mexico Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PLI) hegemony: media then were mostly integrated in the structure of power (ibid). The limited circulation of press in Mexico confined communication mostly to political elites and activists. Referring to Noam Chomsky, Cronau (1995) says media is an ideological system that serves the powerful elites in society. Today, media in Mexico have entered into a period of significant change; they have been able to move the majority and have their unheard voices heard. On the other hand putting the majority aside from media may develop what Neumann called 'spiral of silence'. Neumann thus concludes:

*Individuals, who... notice that their own personal opinion is spreading and is taken over by others, will voice this opinion self-confidently in public. On the other hand, individuals who notice that their own opinions are losing ground will be inclined to adopt a more reserved attitude.*

With the increased emphasis on visual communication in the media, photographs play an important role. Because of the nature of the medium, a photograph is considered to

be a proxy of the person photographed. According to Goldberg (1991), when Rumania was ruled under Nicolai Ceaucescu, his image in government offices stood for absolute power. On his downfall, the image too was thrown down. It was attacked and slashed as if it were the person himself. Goldberg (1991:76) also refers to an example from South Africa, where it was illegal to take or publish pictures of Nelson Mandela while he was in prison because the publicity could create political influence. Visual images, therefore, contain the power or powerlessness of the person being photographed.

In the previous communist government of Ethiopia, the photographs of Mengistu Hailemariam were everywhere. The firm facial expression, determination and his fit military uniform made him "larger than life" (Goldberg, 1991:152). As a result, in the mind of the people, he was able to create a feeling that he was a real hero who was fighting for the good of the people and for the unity of the country.



**Figure 1. Image of Mengistu Hailemariam**

(Source: [http://www.nazret.com/php/uploadnews/data/upimages/Tyrant\\_Mengistu.Jpg](http://www.nazret.com/php/uploadnews/data/upimages/Tyrant_Mengistu.Jpg))

Photographs are able to establish celebrity and express authority on behalf of the person portrayed. As such, the photograph is a highly efficient means of cultural communication: it has the advantages of credibility, easy mass distribution, and instant convertibility into a symbol. This symbolic medium according to Goldberg (1991: 21) is a "mute artifact" that is deciphered towards the education, culture and preference of interpreters.

The researcher of this study argues that the principles the Ethiopian private or government press establishes have a strong influence on the way they cover all parts of the society. As most private newspapers in Ethiopia began as sources of income or employment, they aim at making business rather than primarily serving the

information need of the people. To a lesser extent do exist to report the news, to act as watchdogs for the public, to check on the doings of the government, and to defend the ordinary citizen against abuses of power. A key principle of democratic public communication is the ability of each segment of society “to introduce ideas, symbols, information, and elements of culture into social circulation” (Hackett, 2001). Nevertheless, media democracy have goals of expanding the range of voices accessed through the media, building an egalitarian public sphere, promoting the values and practices of sustainable democracy, and equalizing or counteracting political and economic inequalities found elsewhere in the social system (ibid).

Therefore, for a country like Ethiopia that is on transition to a democratic system of governance, a civic model of journalism similar to the Mexican press model after the authoritarian media disappeared, seems constructive. The emergence of this type of media in Mexico in the mid-1980's evoked participation, offered information needed to form reasonable political opinions, and enabled participation that held government more accountable for its actions via elections, protests, and autonomous organization by crystallizing opposition values into a realistic alternative for political behaviour. In a nutshell, in the civic model, news media provide information that helps citizens to communicate their needs to government, hold government accountable, and foster deliberation and debate. This is accomplished by fostering a two-way system of communication between the government and the citizens, where the media act both as a monitor of news events, a watchdog of governmental behaviour, and an information provider from many perspectives.

## 2.5 Making media more democratic

The social, economic and political surrounding of the media influence their structure and practice. Conversely, the media have a particular role in transitional societies. Mazzocco (1994) argues that “the political and economic inequities and injustices inherent within our limited democratic society” must get attention. The rationale behind this concept, as Mazzocco stating James Curran says, “the media accurately reflect and present the prevailing structure and mode of power” (ibid: 143). Media, as a result, arguably focus on the powerful as their sources and give ample coverage to those who are believed to be newsmakers, elites and prominent persons. Meanwhile, those who lack power in society are deprived of media attention leaving their values

and interests untouched even though they have individual and collective right to speak their word. Freire (1983) argues that this should not be seen as a privilege of a few men (and women), but the right of every human being.

Democratization of communication champions the idea of equal representation and positive portrayal of average citizens. “What is central to the democratization of communication that most social movements insist is that members - ordinary citizens - should participate in the administration, policy making and government of public communication” (Lee, 1995:93). The press, especially privately owned, are the necessary tools to speak up for the people by responding what people want, and express their views and interests. Taking the Swedish media as an example, Curran and Gurevitch (1996) note that the citizenry have a strong representation among the political elites and the state. It can mean, therefore, that more people have access to the public sphere and feel incorporated into society as citizens with actual participatory potential. In line with this, Mazzocco says “a democratic media system must be based on reciprocity; it is democratic only if it allows the nation’s citizenry to be heard and seen with equal force and visibility” (ibid: 145).

Mazzocco further argues that the media, should strive to go out of the vicious circle of worshipping the power owners and attempt to make the “media system more representative of the diverse interests and ideas of all of the citizenry” (Mazzocco, 1994: 145). In due course, diversity of ideas and programs that really touch the problems of the whole society must be entertained by the media. Finally, if media do not recognize the necessary “human needs of education, health, personal development, occupation, and for significant participation in local or national public decisions” (Lee, 1995: 95), and they simply focus on information important for power, control and decision making, they will become a threat to the existing relation of power.

News photographs add meanings to the reader in supplement to the written texts. As photographs “seem to be more real than the printed word” (Thwaites et al, 1994: 144), they have the power of creating impressions on the reader about the news they have been attached with. Different from other forms of photography such as family, fashion or advertising, news photographs have the power to convey a direct message because

they are often taken when a real news event occurs. It literally helps the reader to picture the situation when the news event happened. It also functions to justify the facts of the written story. Photos in newspapers can symbolically represent the relationship among different parts of the society. The power structure in a society determines appearances in newspaper photographs because prominence is one of the values used to evaluate the importance of news events.

The print media often depend on influential owners because they are believed to be important sources of information and knowledge. This has caused of criticism in some countries. For example, in Japan, Van Wolferen criticized “Japanese newspapers for contributing to the “system” of maintaining the existing power structure” (Ito, 2006). Shall and must media serve the interests of the powerful? Not necessarily. Throughout the world there are many examples of ownership models where stakeholders at different social levels, including the ‘ordinary’ citizen, are heard and visible because it is one of their basic rights in a democratic media model.

Information needs of the people and the necessity of disseminating a variety of information important to decision making have become the necessary conditions to look for alternative mode of journalism in some parts of the world. This mode of journalism, according to Leon, “is framed by the human right to information and communication” (quoted in Fisher and Ponniah, 2003: 195). It is also important to the enhancement of the development of democratic life in the society itself which strives to achieve a properly informed and deliberative citizenry, to be able to participate and assume co-responsibility in decision making on public issues. A libertarian model of journalism, however, has not succeeded in this. This model, which evolved in North America during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, has had large influence on the understanding of journalism throughout the world. Elaborating on the nature of the libertarian model of journalism, Shah says:

*Essentially this prevailing model emphasizes “objectivity” and natural observation; letting the “facts” speak for themselves; and heavy use of officials and experts as sources of attribution. It is a model that results in journalism that describes events with little analysis, relies upon polls and statistics to show social trends but without providing historical context, and provides no vehicle of expression for ordinary people at the grass- roots level (Shah, 1997: internet).*

Shah points out that there is no equality of coverage given to officials and experts on the one hand and the ordinary citizen on the other in what he calls the ‘prevailing model of journalism’. Supporting an alternative type of journalism, Rosen describes public/civic journalism as a creator of “a healthy public climate” (quoted in Lichtenberg, 1999) where journalists shouldn’t just report the news; there is also the job of improving the community’s capacity to act on the news of caring for quality of public dialogue, of helping people engage in a search for solutions, of showing the community how to tackle with and not only read about its problems (ibid). It is essential, therefore, that the right of the people to communicate should be achieved first because it is one of the necessary conditions where “social actors are also information producers and not merely passive receivers of information” Leon says

*The recognition of this right (the right to communicate) is necessary to exercise of all human rights and an element fundamental to the existence of democracy. The incorporation of this right into the agendas of social movements and development of strategies to bring it into being is a key challenge in the construction of alternatives more generally (Leon quoted in Fisher and Ponniah 2003: 199).*

Generally, the prevailing model of journalism does not fulfill the role of journalism in modern participatory democracies in which people participate in jointly deciding the direction and nature of civic life (Shah, op.cit.). In countries where democracy is at its infancy it is necessary to think of another sort of journalism that can produce news with facilitating role of discussions about pressing social concerns of the day among news consumers.

Ethiopia has long tradition of feudal ruling systems where the larger part of society was controlled by the upper class. The civic society had no major say in political decision-making. When the media came on the scene they became sources of power for the power holders; they functioned as “amplifiers” (Cohen, 1992: 127) of what the power holders said, adding more power to the ruling elite. Even after the 1974 revolution, in the communist regime of *the Dergue*, an authoritarian type of media dominated the style of communication. There was no private press and high censorship on private publications. It was difficult in this system to the masses to exercise their rights of communication. In fear of the social changes that can be fostered through media, the then government didn’t allow the private press to play their role in bringing social equality, freedom of expression and democracy in the country.

It would therefore be difficult to assume that the media that remained under tyranny for almost two decades, would, act as an agent of democratization of communication in the country over-night, soon after the coming of the recent government into power in 1991. The pioneer media outlets were still in the hands of a few elites from the previous government. Because the news produced at the time were biased, unprofessional and against the interests of the new government, they were in conflict with the government. Despite the fact that they were able to attract a large number of people to the newspaper readership and caused a boom in media consumption, it challenged the new government's stability.

As a result, the government accused them of propagating blind hatred and uncertainty among the people, resulting in a gap between the people and the government. The government took measures against these media outlets, which had become a source of criticism against the government by different international journalist associations and think-tank groups (CPJ, 1996). Many journalists scared of the situation left the country or quit their jobs as journalists. The growth of the media in Ethiopia subsequently came to stop and declined. The remaining journalists could not play their watchdog role properly; they started to take a safer ground by publishing soft news and few others write in favor of the status quo.

In short as Shah says, "as long as serious journalism is deemed unprofitable, it will take back seat to the sensational, superficial and 'soft' news stories of the day". As a result, the check on the government loosened and social questions of the ordinary citizen remained unexpressed. It would be possible, therefore, to argue that Ethiopia is yet far from the process of democratization of communication in which every citizen are invited to participate and be represented in the media. It is therefore paramount for the Ethiopian media to be developed so that more people can have access to important information and to enhance the public sphere. In media where diverse information is entertained, those segments of the population who may feel excluded can often engage, evoke responses and provoke discussions. However, arguably the ordinary people in Ethiopia and their wish of having equal voice in the media is suppressed because (1) media do not profit unless they come up with fascinating stories about prominent personalities and their deeds; (2) much important information is in the

hands of a few powerful personalities and public relation officers; and (3) the ordinary people have been passive listeners to the rulers for a long time and have experienced a media under the full control and influence of the government. The current media situation in Ethiopia and the mal-representation of the ordinary citizen should therefore be understood against the historic backdrop where people were forced not to be openly visible in the public media.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

How certain groups have been portrayed in media has been recurrent topic of research. Media representation of certain groups can be an important indicator of how the power relations in a given society. Catching the eye and mind of print media consumers, photographic representation is one such area that can indicate power relations. However, in the Ethiopian context, the understanding and reception of visual communication has not been much studied. Using visual analysis from a semiotic perspective, this study hopes to fill some of the gap. The present chapter explains the research questions, the hypothesis, the methods used to gather data and the procedures used to analyze the data collected from the photographs.

### 3.1 Research questions

The research will focus on the following questions:

1. Are those in a high social status represented more often in front-page photographs than ordinary citizens?
2. How do connotative meanings attached to the photographs relate to the power relations between ordinary citizens and the high status personalities?

### 3.2 Hypothesis

1. The photographic representation of ordinary citizens is quantitatively less and qualitatively poorer than people of high status.
2. The connotative meanings attached to the power balance between different groups in society are less relevant to issues of media democratization and citizen participation.

### 3.3 Research design

The purpose of this study is to look at the representation of social power relations in the Ethiopian society through an analysis of front-page photos. The method used to collect data is content analysis, while the analysis itself is governed by a semiotic approach to photo evaluation. Three newspapers were selected for the study: *The*

*Ethiopian Herald, Fortune and Reporter.* The analyzed issues were published in the first quarter of the year 2006. These newspapers are some of the newspapers that remained in the market after many others quit publishing with causes related to the May 15, 2005 election unrest in the country. It was assumed that photos, images and texts related to the election and the political unrest that followed the election had been minimized at the time of the study. A few months before, the many photos related to the election and events following the election could have given a non-representative sample for the study. However, it should be underlined that this event by itself can be a fertile subject to be studied by other researchers.

The chosen newspapers are among the few newspapers in Ethiopia with a fairly high circulation. They all remained in the market during the unrest periods in June and November 2005. *Fortune* is a private economic newspaper, and specifically targets stories in the economic realm. The private *The Reporter* is predominantly a political newspaper, from which one can discern some of power relations in Ethiopian politics. Obviously, *The Ethiopian Herald*, being a government newspaper, mostly focuses on government policies and strategies. The researcher believes that these newspapers represent some different and overlapping areas of dominance, within the political, economic or government realms.

The three newspapers under study have their own staff photographers and almost all of the photographs published during the studied period were taken by them. It is usual in the three newspapers to send a photographer with a reporter wherever it is believed that the photographer can take some shots. In *The Reporter* it is the reporter's duty to decide which part of the event should be included. Photos are selected according to the news message. The editor has a decisive role in the selection. The layout designer determines how to use the photo on the page. This process is similar with *Fortune*. Both these newspapers have their own archives containing mostly soft copies of photographs where they draw pictures from if they are not able to assign a photographer or if they assume there is no new image to photograph. They have not so far used photographs from news agencies or government sources because they do not subscribe to the service of the two news agencies in the country, Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) and Walta Information Center (WIC). Also, the photographs from these agencies are relatively expensive and are not believed to be up to the standard of

the two newspapers. *The Ethiopian Herald* has a well organized photo staff. It is published under the Ethiopian Press Agency which also publishes three newspapers in other local languages. It has its own photo archive and shares photographs with ENA and WIC. There is a close work relationship between them. Due to printing press limitations, all the three newspapers publish photographs in black and white. Except in some events where *Fortune* and *The Reporter* publish larger photographs, the photographs in these newspapers appear to be relatively small in picture size.

Only the front-page photographs of the newspapers were examined. When examining the photographs, the unit of analysis was each individual image of a human form (e.g. face or full body) within the photograph. Only human forms were coded because they represent the main social actors, and the power relations can be interpreted from the photographic presence of the person. The power relation can be expressed in the way the person interacts with others in the photo and his/her level of communication with the outside viewer. These signs were subsequently interpreted to determine the power relations. By using semiotic content analysis for each case, the sample was coded with four different coding scales: overall coverage, portrayal, the action in the photograph, and appearance in the photograph. Based on these coding scales, the signifier-signified relations and the formation of the denotative and connotative meaning assigned to each photograph were identified. The coding categories were adapted from similar studies that focus on gender, minority and election photographs in newspapers (see Waldman and Devitt, 1998; King, 1997; Devroe, 2004; and Len-Rios et al, 2005).

### 3.4 Subjects

The subjects for this study were human forms in each photograph. The human forms that were identified as Ethiopian origin by their race, names and appearance were coded in six main coding categories: overall coverage, ways of looking, portrayal, the action in the photograph, and appearance in the photograph.

### 3.5 Data collection procedure

The samples were collected through purposive sampling. Before the data were collected, election news filled the front-page photographs of the studied newspaper.

The researcher had the intention of increasing the representative samples, but when piloting on photographs of 20 selected issues in the 6 months before the studied time, it was observed that there was a large degree of similarity between the photographs. It was therefore concluded that taking photographs of three consecutive months would be a reasonably representative sample.

After the coding scales were identified, each was in turn again divided into coding units that comprise photographic signs to identify the signifier (what is seen at first glance), the signified (mental concept or meaning derived from the material manifestation), the denotative meaning (the literal meaning of the text) and the connotative meaning (the imposition of second meaning on the photographic message proper) (Tomaselli and Dodo in Eeden and Preez, 2005; Ali in Seal, 2004).

The data collection instrument was adapted from studies conducted by Waldman and Devitt (1998); King (1997); Devroe (2004); and Len Rios et al (2005). The first two researchers based on Sandra Moriarty's study on election photographs concluded that a candidate who was favored in photographs had a better chance of being elected. To come to this conclusion they examined newspaper photographs by preparing coding units which indicate who was favored in news photos and who was not. For instance, Devitt (1998) considered smiling and looking determined in photos as a more favorable expression, whereas frowning and looking sad indicates the opposite. In the present study, the meaning-creating process is based on the photographic signs in each photograph under study. The final meanings beyond what is materially manifested in the photographs are embodied in the indexical or "second order sign" (Tomaselli and Dodo in Eeden and Preez, 2005: 227), which in turn form the connotative meaning or meaning given based on the societies level of understanding, education and preference. A focus group has not been included in the study because this issue is a point of discussion within different members of society in Ethiopia. That is to say, the research is designed by indirectly observing varying points of view about photographs in Ethiopian newspapers.

Based on these assumptions, the researcher tried to develop related but different coding instruments. The basic direction of the paper is to identify the symbolic or connotative meanings attached with the coded photographs. The different types of

instruments for understanding the meanings of the studied photographs are presented in the coding tables below.

**Table 1** Semiotic tools used in interpreting the photographic data

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<b>Signifier</b>	In pictorial representation the signifier refers to the material manifestation of what is seen at first glance.
<b>Signified</b>	In photographic presentations it refers to the mental concept or meaning derived from the material manifestation.
<b>Denotation</b>	In photographic presentations denotation refers to the literal meaning of the text (photograph) or the basic factuality of an image.
<b>Connotation</b>	It refers to the imposition of second meaning on the photographic message proper. This second meaning comprises associations that exist over and above the literal meaning of an image and can be personal or societal.

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### 3.6 Data analysis procedure

Each photo/frame of photos was coded using the identified coding categories. After all data were coded, most of the data were analyzed descriptively using the critical semiotic approach. For each photograph in a frame unless it is a portrait taken above the shoulder focusing mainly on the face, the four semiotic tools stated above in table 1 were equally used. Portraits, which show only the face of the photographed person, have been investigated by the frequency of individual appearance to measure how prominence affects media representation between different groups in society.

### 3.7 Threats to validity/limitations

Perceptions about visual images differ from person to person, and interpretations may vary according to the socio-cultural value of the person. This study too is necessarily not free from the subjective interpretations of the two coders when coding the photographs. Obviously, if there was element of subjectivity in the data gathering, the interpretation and the discussion might also slant to it. However, scholars underlined that "semiotic analysis involves greater reliance on personal interpretation of the researcher and is less concerned with objectivity and generalizability" (Ali in Seal,

2004: 272). Still, the researcher tried to interpret the photographs within the context they appeared as to maintain a degree of objectivity. It is worth mentioning that the poor quality of many of the photographs in the studied newspapers also has an impact on the interpretations.

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and discusses, the individual photographs printed on the newspaper front pages. Even though, across the three newspapers the names of photographers are not posted along with the photographs, they usually use photographs of their staff photographers. Accordingly, therefore, 13 photographs from *The Ethiopian Herald*, 10 photographs from *Fortune* and 8 photographs from *The Reporter* are presented and discussed.

Among the 66 photographs posted, 59 are interpreted, the larger proportion of the photographs, 31 are interpreted according to the signifier/signified relationships and the denotative and connotative meanings. The other large proportion, 28 of the photographs are portraits taken above the shoulder focusing on the face of the person photographed. All of these photographs are of political leaders, officials and other prominent personalities (see the appendix). These photographs therefore are not individually interpreted because they show similar characteristics, action less still photographs. It was therefore found convenient to put them together in the presentation. From the remaining 7 photographs, two are hardly visible, other four are similar photographs in two issues of *The Reporter* and *Fortune*, and one is only showing the backs of the photographed people. These are therefore not included in the analysis. The 31 photographs presented and discussed are photos with actions and appearances which were interpreted by coding signifiers in them. The chapter, therefore, presents findings of the study focusing on the coverage of the ordinary and high status citizen and what the photographs denote and connote for the Ethiopian newspaper reader.

In the studied newspapers, one can hardly find a portrait of an ordinary citizen who is photographed sharing his concern in news issues. Portraits in the studied newspapers are mostly related to prominence; in all the newspapers under study only portraits of political, economic and social giants in the society are presented. As such, they do not reflect the "visual democracy" (Swanepoel in Eeden and Preez, 2005: 214) that photographs can manifest in the publications. One cannot expect the newspapers to publish many full portraits of men/women from the street, but there must be a balance of representation between different stakeholders in society.

Totally, 66 images of human beings were published on the front pages of the three selected newspapers in the first three months of 2006. Hypothesis one stated that ordinary citizens or people in lower status would be shown less than the people from higher status in the photographs.

**Table 2** Photographic coverage of citizens

Type of citizen	Frequency	Percentage
Ordinary citizen	8	12.1
High status citizen	58	87.9
Total	66	100.0

The study focuses on differences between citizens by taking the positions they have because of official assignments and business volume. Table 2 supports the hypothesis. Photos of high status people constituted 58 or 87.9 percent of the published images. Conversely, photos of ordinary citizens accounted for 8 or 12.1 percent. Prominence given to political, economic and social figures and lesser attention given to the ordinary citizen is clear from Table 2; the selected newspapers ignore the ordinary. They are replaced by the rich, the well to do, top government officials, and heads of government.



**Figure 2. Government officials visiting flower farm**

This image is from the 25 March 2006 issue of *The Ethiopian Herald*. "Ministers, ambassadors laud flower farm development"

The image of officials visiting a flower farm signifies that the government looks after the sector to see if the business is running well and if the government investment policy is working. In terms of denotation, the image illustrates officials who appreciate the progress on the farm while the investor explains his work, the profit he is making, and says the number of unemployment is minimized because of the investment.

The photograph connotes that the government is proud of the success achieved in the flower farm sector though there are disagreements on government land and investment policies. This indicates that the success is gained even though the policy is criticized; the government is correct. If the photograph and the news story had contained the voice of the farmer who left the land for investment and daily laborers who working on the farm, there would have been more equity in the presentation.



**Figure 3. Anthropologist briefing about a fossil discovery**

This image is from the 25 March 2006 issue of *The Ethiopian Herald*. "New fossilized cranium of human ancestors found"

An anthropologist's briefing about a newly found fossil in the country signifies that Ethiopia is the cradle of human life and the country is fertile for scientific studies and contains tourist attractions. Exhibited in this photograph are collections of skulls in front of the researcher, which indicate discoveries of different times.

A possible connotation of the photograph is that Ethiopian leaders in the past have to be blamed for the underdevelopment of the country. Even though it is the cradle of human being and has long history, the country has not achieved remarkable political, economic and social progress. Apart from its scientific importance the fossil can therefore be a sign of the country's regressive development.



**Figure 4. House speaker talking to Bahrain delegation**

This image is from the 18 March 2006 issue of *The Ethiopian Herald*. "House speaker holds talks with Bahrain Parliamentary delegation"

The meeting of the House Speaker with the Bahrain parliamentary delegation indicates Ethiopia's need to strengthen its ties with Arab states by holding diplomatic talks, sharing experience and getting assistance and access to their markets. Denoted in this photograph are the home side officials seating in one line and the guests on the opposite facing each other. The photograph connotes that the politics and the foreign policies of the country are working to meet challenges.



**Figure 5. A meeting on progress**

This image is from the 11 March 2006 issue of *The Ethiopian Herald*. "AU-PSC to decide on UN role in Darfur"

This ministerial meeting of the Peace and Security Council of Africa Union (AU-PSC) on the Darfur case shows that Ethiopia is one of the stakeholders in the issue. Though it clearly indicates Ethiopia plays an active role in the Horn, it connotes that the country's foreign policy and the agenda towards Sudan are based on mutual benefit. It also points out that Ethiopia plays a central role in the region and that the Ethiopian government and officials are part of the solution, not the problem.



**Figure 6. President holding talks**

This image is from the 11 March 2006 issue of *The Ethiopian Herald*. "President says Ethiopia will contribute towards minimizing problems related to aviation safety: International Air Transportation Assistant hails Ethiopia"

The President's talk with the Assistant Director General of International Air Transport Association (IATA) signifies Ethiopia's important role in the aviation sector. The image connotes that Ethiopia is getting recognition of the international community regarding her role in the air transport sector. Moreover, it indicates that the country will keep on fighting terrorism that targets passenger airplanes. After 9/11 air transport has been on the global agenda, and becoming an active participant in this issue could possibly be interpreted by the audience as a support to USA's fight against terrorism.



**Figure 7. Ministers chairing a meeting**

This image is from the 4 March 2006 issue of *The Ethiopian Herald*. "Education, research networking launched"

Ministers opening a meeting on educational research and networking shows that they were the speakers of the event. The three government officials having water on their table in front, chair the meeting. The picture connotes that it is the officials' duty to

speak while the rest of us should listen. Almost all photographs in the study make government officials speakers rather than listeners.



**Figure 8. PM Meles being seen off at Bole Airport**

This image is from the 11 February 2006 issue of *The Ethiopian Herald*. "Meles heads to South Africa to Attend Progressive Governance Summit"

The prime minister (PM) leaves for South Africa to attend a Progressive Governance Summit. The government officials in the queue reflect loyalty. The officials' sense of loyalty, due respect and courtesy to the PM is reflected in the photograph as some of them put their arms crossed before their turn is reached to shake hands with the PM. The connotative meaning of this photography may be related to the country's situation at the time the photograph was published; in the aftermath of the controversial 2005 election. The PM is expected to come up with good news for the country and the ruling party after the turmoil of the May 15, 2005 election (it was in this meeting that British PM Tony Blair confirmed that EPRDF was the winner, and the international media that had hinted at the undemocratic nature of the Ethiopian government were silenced).



**Figure 9. Ethiopian broadcast officials giving a news release**

This image is from the 11 February 2006 issue of *The Ethiopian Herald*. "Authority to give FM Commercial Radio licence to two organizations"

In this photograph Ethiopian Broadcasting officials gave a briefing on the licensing of FM commercial radio to two organizations. It indicates that there is a progress in liberalizing media. The denotation is that the deadlock of the airwaves is raised, but it is known that the licensing of private broadcasters came soon after the election and the reader may suspect that the government wants to renew its name by being "generous" to media. It was also said from other sources that the two licensed

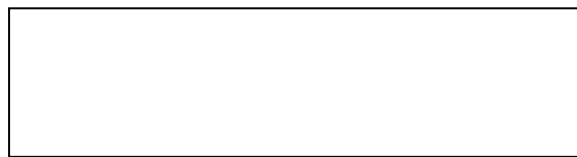
organizations had affiliations with the government. The photograph also signifies that to give or take this right is in the hands of the government.



**Figure 10. PM gives press statement**

This image is from the 28 January 2006 issue of *The Ethiopian Herald*. "Post election Problems not hindrances to National Economic Growth; Premier"

The PM's press statement after the problems of the May 2005 election period in the country was aimed at pacifying the situation. The PM announced on this occasion that there was no hindrance to the national economic growth after the election but the second level meaning of this photographic sign points out that the ruling party publicizes that it was still strong, and its policies were not a failure though things went bad in the election. Moreover, it indicates the government's reluctance to liberalize the broadcast media to opposition groups.



**Figure 11. A meeting on progress**

This image is from the 28 January 2006 issue of *The Ethiopian Herald*. "Commissioner urges AAU to be a role model in corruption battle"

The photograph of AAU staff members attending a meeting on corruption signify that steps have been taken to avoid corruption in the university. AAU elites and other staff attending this meeting were expected to participate in curbing corruption in the country as well as produce students who would fight it in their future career. This connotes that the university has been found to be one of the corrupted institutions in the country by the Anti-Corruption Commission. It also implies that the intellectuals are part of the problem the country is facing because they have misused the power they acquired through their educational excellence.



**Figure 12. PM holding talk with a foreign delegation**

This image is from the 18 February 2006 issue of *The Ethiopian Herald*. "Meles holds talks with Spanish, Chinese Senior officials"

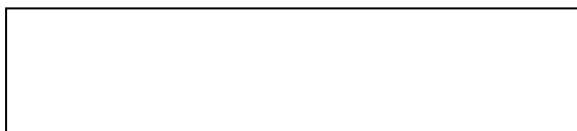
The PM's talk with Spanish and Chinese officials indicates that the country and the government have good faces in front of the international community. The talk between these officials in the spacious office of the PM is probably aimed at improving relations between the countries, but it connotes that the country has credibility and recognition and the photograph serves to add more power and recognition to the government.



**Figure 13. House speaker with Spanish delegation**

This image is from the 18 February 2006 issue of *The Ethiopian Herald*. "HPR speaker meets Spanish delegation"

The House Speaker's talks with the Spanish delegation implies the international acceptance the country gains. The aim of the talk is improved relations with Spain. It connotes that the country has had a democratic election and that the international community has an interest in Ethiopia because of this.



**Figure 14. Ethio-Somalia meeting**

This image is from the 4 February 2006 issue of *The Ethiopian Herald*. "Ethiopia, Somalia agree to work for East Africa Peace."

The Ethiopian Foreign Minister meeting with Somalia's Transitional government delegation signifies Ethiopia's strong interest to resolve the problems in Somalia. The friendly talk between the two parties is underlined by their smiling faces. The photograph connotes that Ethiopia wants to have a strong hand in the Horn. The war torn Somalia's transitional government is powerless and it seeks supports from neighboring Ethiopia. The context uplifts Ethiopia's position in the Horn of Africa.



**Figure 15. Newly appointed Ambassadors and diplomats refreshing**

This image is from the 26 March 2006 issue of *Fortune*. "The New Face of Ethiopia's Diplomacy"

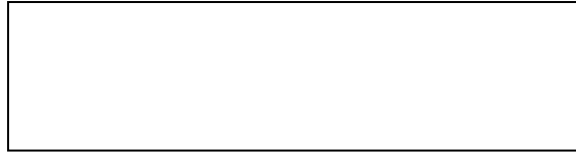
Four high government officials are seen refreshing, having one focal figure in the middle at the Sheraton in the photograph. This occasion was after newly appointed diplomats finished one month's training and were handed over certificates. It is understood from the picture and the title that Ethiopia wants to get market for its products through Economic Diplomacy. It is denoted in the photo that four high government officials dressed formally are drinking, talking with each other warmly. The photograph shows in its second level meaning that government officials are enjoying the privileges of their positions while the rest of the people suffer from poverty, disease and social disorders. It also shows that high government officials, even if they can't win elections in their constituencies, as long as they keep loyalty to the exiting power, will be rewarded by one means or another.



**Figure 16. People at a bus stop**

This image is from the 19 March 2006 issue of *Fortune*. "City bus under siege"

People squeezing each other to get a city bus ticket just at the rear gate of an empty *Anbessa* city bus signifies that the masses are suffering from shortage of transportation in Addis Ababa. Denoted in this photograph is the mass of people, poorly dressed, pushing and pulling each other by the side of a standing bus. It connotes that people are leading a life of misery and poverty. Transportation costs are unaffordable to the poor in the city though the government says it provides the buses with much subsidy.



**Figure 17. Ruined houses after a bomb blast**

This image is from the 12 March 2006 issue of *Fortune*. "Bombing in Addis Ababa"

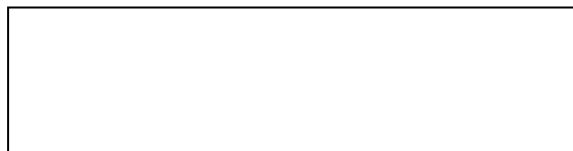
The photograph shows a crowd of people watching at a place where a bomb blasted, while a cleaner is cleaning and security members are checking the spot. The photo signifies that the victims of such activities are mostly the large mass. The damaged restaurant materials indicate that people who are offended by politics sometimes fail to weigh their own reactions. The second level or connotation of this photograph implies that this reaction damaged civilian lives though they had nothing to do with the cause of the blast. It also reads that the government should reconsider its politics because there are grievances from certain groups of people. Whoever did the action, for any reason, it is the masses that become the victims.



**Figure 18. An award ceremony of Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce**

This image is from the 5 March 2006 issue of *Fortune*. "Satisfied"

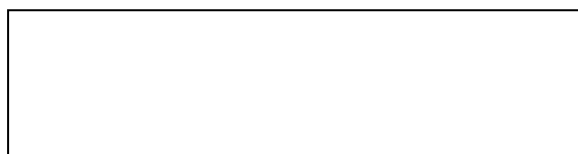
The photograph illustrates an award-giving ceremony after the achievements of the Chamber of Commerce that operate under the banner "Yichalal" (it is possible). Visible in the photograph are high business personalities shaking hands. It implies that people who can work in conformity with the existing political situation will achieve. This award and the success reflected in the picture was registered after the previous head of the Chamber left the country, after he was accused of cheating at the misuse of Value Added Tax (VAT). He is recently one of the strong supporters of the opposition party, Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) abroad.



**Figure 19. Government official and businessman talking**

This image is from the 26 February 2006 issue of *Fortune*. "NOC fastest growing Co: says Al-Amudi"

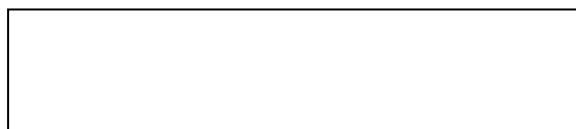
The signifier in the photo is the personal talk between top personalities in the country and it tells us that these people are intimate and they have some secrets to share that are out of the reach of others. It is denoted that a top government official is whispering to a "tycoon" having a drink with deluxe glasses. The businessman is listening to the words from the mouth of a government official with utmost attention. The photograph clearly indicates that government officials and business people have strong ties because the former gives protection and land to the latter and the latter- apart from creating employment opportunities to many people- can fulfill the material needs of the officials. They are in mutual benefit to keep the status quo.



**Figure 20. Ministers talking in a group**

This image is from the 12 February 2006 issue of *Fortune*. "Bole's Billion Birr contrast; President Girma can leave His Lunch Box Behind"

Government officials inaugurating the Bole international airport signifies that there is development in the country and the government is doing well by constructing such a grand airport. Denoted in this photograph are top government officials, formally dressed, talking intimately. The photograph shows us that even though they are top officials, who have oaths to serve the government and the people without partiality, they reflect "partisanship" whenever they get a chance because the three people talking are members of one wing of the ruling party. The photograph also shows that indicate the ruling party comprises different groups from varying situations.

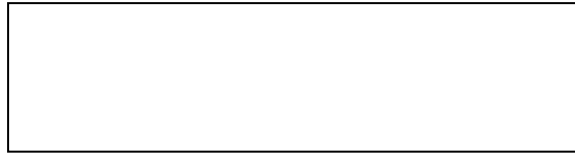


**Figure 21. Insurance enterprise heads talking**

This image is from the 5 February 2006 issue of *Fortune*. "One generation of insurance service"

In this photograph, four people are seen talking at a meeting break. It signifies that the insurance industry is getting profitable. Also denoted in the photograph are managers of top insurance companies discussing and refreshing. The increase of investment

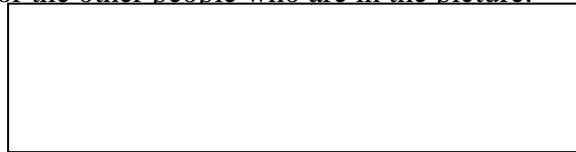
volume in the country helps insurance companies to be competitive. It is connoted in the photograph that even though the profit in the whole industry is growing, the one with government backing is the most successful. It has stayed in the business for a long time without an equal competitor and the trend will continue as long as the government is in power.



**Figure 22. People walking in a street**

This image is from the 29 January 2006 issue of *Fortune*. "Ministry gives nod to Total-Mobil buy out"

This photograph shows people walking in a street. It signifies that ordinary citizens are not on the attention list of most media. It also shows workers of a fuel station and some people walking on the station side pavement. This photograph was published to illustrate the sales of Mobil Oil Company to Total, not to emphasise on the fuel station workers or the other people who are in the picture.



**Figure 23. A Minister and businessman**

This image is from the 15 January 2006 issue of *Fortune*. "Government reclaims plot designated for dry port; plans to expand prison facility at Kaliti center"

The personal talks between the two prominent figures indicate that there is a burning issue in the business sector that they share. The talks show that business people have the necessary support from government officials even though the two may have an illegal, give-and-take relationship. Moreover, the focus and attention given to these personalities by the media increases their level of popularity and prominence.



**Figure 24. Opposition Party Leaders**

This photograph is from the 8 January 2006 issue of *Fortune*. "Besieged city"

These political leaders talking in a group are bitter of being defeated by the governing party in the election. One can read a distressed feeling from their faces, because they could not even get hold on Addis Ababa City Administration where the opposing party CUD won all the chairs. The photograph signifies that in an emerging democracy there will be chaos that should be handled wisely. Therefore, one cannot be certain about election results until the counting is over.



**Figure 25. Arrested CUD leaders taken to court**

This image is from the 25 March 2006 issue of *Reporter*. "Charge withdrawn for CUD defendants et al one count for all whole charge for 18 defendants"

It is seen in the photo that people get into a police shuttle, waving hands. This indicates that while still under arrest, these people strongly believe that they are winners rather than losers in the election and their supporters come to encourage them. The literal reading of this photograph is that the opposition party leaders who are under arrest are getting into a police shuttle waving hands in "V" shaped fingers. This shows that they are one of the strongest political party leaders in the country. However, they have no alternative than to go to courts to defend their cases. The connotation is that the democratization process of the country that was anticipated through the election ended up in a threat to democratization in the country. The government has also insisted on settling the case in court rather than through political means, even though the push from local and international community was high.



**Figure 26. A meeting on progress**

This image is from the 11 March 2006 issue of *Reporter*. "Journalists to Establish Press and Editors Club"

Journalists attend a meeting to establish a press club which by itself has nothing to do with the development of the media, unless it is allowed to exercises freedom of expression through transparent media laws. The photograph denotes journalists wish to establish a press and editors club and this may pave way to journalists to join hands. However, as the press club has so far done nothing, it is not much contributing

to the democratization of communication in the country. But this meeting is a step forward to see a glimpse of democratization of media in the country if the journalists are successful in forming the club.



**Figure 27. Opposition leaders at the gate of a court**

This photograph is from the 25 February 2006 issue of *Reporter*. "CUD leaders, others refuse to enter plea"

The signifier is that people at the gate of a court salute supporters who are gathered in the vicinity. The signified meaning is that courts will take the cases and there won't be a political solution. It denotes opposition party leaders and journalists are guilty of their political struggle. Whereas this photograph implies a major failure which occurred in the country's democracy as this, ever contested election, ended up in controversy. As a result, there is fear among the society that the democratic process will be endangered and the future of the country in this regard is under question.



**Figure 28. A celebration**

This image is from the 25 February 2006 issue of *Reporter*. "NOC going strong"

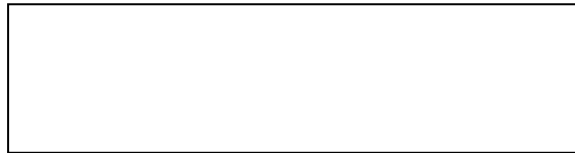
In the photograph prominent figures cut a cake at the anniversary of one of the biggest oil companies in the country. They put hands together showing their unity and success which is reflected in their faces. The connotation that we can derive from this photograph is that those businessmen who are near to the government officials are getting richer and richer (i.e., we have seen how closely these two people were talking with top government officials in Fig. 18 and 22). So it will be easy to know that their interests have been fulfilled through support from government officials.



**Figure 29. A minister and businessman**

This image is from the 25 February 2006 issue of *Reporter*. "Addis Chamber attracts more participants"

A minister and civil society leaders and businessmen photographed together shows that they are in cooperation. The photograph therefore connotes a growing culture of working with the civil society, which in turn indicates there are some progresses in areas that had been neglected previously.



**Figure 30. A street boy begging in car windows**

This image is from the 18 February 2006 issue of *Reporter*. "Government to increase price of petroleum"

The photograph is from a traffic jam where a street boy is begging in the car windows. This reflects that the life of the ordinary people is going from bad to worse. Moreover, because of different problems in the country, the mass is victimized and from the photo one gets the impression that poverty and unemployment are increasing.



**Figure 31. President inaugurating Bole international airport**

This image is from the 11 February 2006 issue of *Reporter*. "Expansion project puts Bole on to of Africa Airports"

The President inaugurating the Bole Airport expansion project indicates that the country is making progress. The photograph denotes that the airport puts Ethiopian Airlines among the leading airlines in Africa and the rest of the world. Similarly, its second level meaning shows us that government officials are successful by accomplishing one of the biggest business projects in the country at the time.



**Figure 32. The PM and opposition leader interview**

This image is from the 4 February 2006 issue of Reporter. "Addis Ababa didn't work, but more time" "Yes, More time to decide on the issue"

In a frame the PM and an opposition leader give out a press release or have an interview with journalists. It shows us that the last political decision about the future of the city administration of Addis Ababa is in the hands of the PM or his government. The way the PM is presented with the microphone in front and the dressing style down sizes the opposition leader below him with no microphones and with casual style. The connotative meaning, therefore, is the question of whether the opposition has been suppressed because the ultimate decision is in the hands of the government. Even the position of the photographs indicates the inequality between what the two persons.

It is appropriate at this point to underline that interpretations may vary from person to person based on their knowledge, interest, socio-cultural status and other situations. In the three newspapers studied the positive appearance of government officials may convey a message that the media in Ethiopia are directly or indirectly controlled by the people in power. On the other hand, it can be assumed that government officials and other top personalities are actively involved in the activities of the society. This can enhance citizens' involvement in government activities. The media therefore should aim at involving other members of the society, as the role of media is increasing variety of opinion.

## **CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the representation of power relations in front page photographs of three newspapers through semiotic analysis. The researcher tried to find out what meanings the photographs convey for a typical media consumer. Based on the socio-cultural and political situations in Ethiopia, the photographs were examined according to what type of meanings they hold vis-à-vis power relations and the emerging culture of democratization of the media. The data were collected from 36 issues containing 66 photographs that were from January to March 2006. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the major findings, and to present conclusions and recommendations.

### 5.1 Summary of major findings

Hypothesis one stated that there would be less ordinary citizens in newspaper photographs than persons of higher status. This study confirmed that photographs of ordinary citizens were significantly less than high status people, 12.1% and 87.9% respectively. The data showed high status people were dominantly represented in photographs. It is therefore clearly observable that the private as well the government presses in Ethiopia seem to favor power holders in the photographic presentations. Yet, it is of primary importance that the ordinary citizens' needs and interests are kept in view and addressed in media as the representation of the mass of ordinary citizens is an indication of the growth of democratization of communication (Leon in Fisher and Ponniah, 2003).

Hypothesis two stated that ordinary citizens were mostly portrayed negatively in the studied photographs and high status citizens were positively portrayed. Moreover, the researcher asserted that the needs and interests of ordinary people and their democratic rights of representations are not reflected in the news photographs. The study clearly showed that there was a remarkable difference in the meanings attached to photographs ordinary citizens and high status citizens respectively. Government officials and other renowned personalities appeared to be the sources of achievement

and success stories in the newspapers while the larger mass is put aside. The news photographs therefore do little to narrow the gap between these groups.

It is also observed that elements that are considered to be pillars of a democratic media are not well represented in the newspapers. According to Calabrese (2004), such elements are: (1) The individuals' active partnership and not a mere object of communication; (2) The increment of variety of messages exchanged and (3) The expansion of the extent and quality of social representations or participation in communication.

Though there are many social ills that could be depicted in the photographs, the studied newspapers rarely raised issues of corruption, unemployment, health and education problems. In almost all photographs, political, economic and social activities relevant to the daily life of the people are depicted as the responsibility of officials and authorities as if the rest of the society has no duty in them. This shows that the studied newspapers fail to follow the basic journalistic principle of diversifying news sources (Hackett, 2001), and to report important societal issues from different angles. It is only the meetings, speeches, field visits, refreshments and success of the government and other business firms and high personalities that were photographed. The role of the ordinary citizen in the communication process is left out; the photographs presented them as inept, unable to exercise power, and ineffective in seeking solutions to either private or public problems. Therefore, the individuality and the role that the ordinary citizen can play were not well addressed in the newspapers.

In the few instances where we find the ordinary citizen, the photographs connotatively represented them as people who face problems, who submissively accept what is said and who do not have anything important to say for the development of the nation. The three newspapers exerted little effort to get hold of the ordinary citizen and include him/her in the social-political discussion. Deliberately or not, the studied media did little to make the government accountable. They rather presented officials as newsmakers and successful in their work. The researcher, therefore, suggests that journalists in the Ethiopian media either do not have the necessary training on how to

enact democratic media principles by respecting all citizens' right to expression, or they intentionally report in favour of the status quo.

It was also found that relatively little attention was given to make photographs illustrate occurring news events in the three newspapers investigated. The photographs were of poor quality and sometimes cut outs from previous publications. Duplication of photographs that do not really reflect the news event occurred frequently in the studied newspapers. It was also found that there are some differences between the usage of photographs and the representational role they play in portraying citizens. *Fortune* prefers closer shots of extraordinary events. This may indicate the photographers' access to the subject and the newspaper use somewhat larger photographs with more focus on expressions. Moreover, they attach an explanation to the photo underneath. In *Reporter* larger photographs appear with texts written over them. This to some extent diminishes the expressive value of the photographs and the reader may feel there is clutter on the photographs. When photographs stand alone in a frame, their artistic and journalistic value tends to increase. *The Ethiopian Herald* mostly publishes formal meeting photographs which can be said to be duller and action-less. *Fortune*, then, gives more emphasis to the visuals.

## 5.2 Conclusion

Most of the portrait photographs (i.e. shots taken above the shoulder) of prominent people were similar across the three newspapers. They were pictures of the Prime Minister, ministers, other government officials or business people. These people were mostly found together cheering or addressing journalists or a crowd of people. The positive depiction and high frequency of these images add power and plausibility to the messages of politicians and elites in society. On the contrary, the voice of the mass was less illustrated and did not have much variety in the news coverage.

What are some of the reasons behind this schism in the media coverage between 'important' and 'less important' people? The researcher would like to give some reflections on this question towards the end of the research.

Putting the role of the media in a wider perspective, the recent history of Ethiopia with a dictator-like rule means that people still do not have the free mentality to openly express and debate public issues unless they feel they are in a “secured” environment. Important information, therefore, is still concentrated in the hands of a few, and some private media rather than trying to point out the problems of the mass and bring it to the public agenda, have remained profit oriented and do not want to offend their owners. As a result, they take the safer side in representing and portraying high status people even though they insist, “We do not report in favour or fear” (*Fortune*). By the same token, society gives values to images they see in media (Goldberg, 1991). Various actors want to be visible in the public debate and have their voices heard and their images presented in media. Society at large clearly wants a democratic media that gives equal opportunity to all. Newspapers therefore need to give attention on how to include as many voices as possible by presenting images of excluded groups without partiality.

Neumann (1991) argues that putting the prominent, the powerful and the rich within the frames of success stories and always in imposing positions will let the people develop a subordinate ideology and silence. If the ordinary citizens do not show any inclination to debate and participate in the public sphere, it would be an obstacle to form informed citizenry or it will put the people under a sentimental thinking as the Ethiopian proverb goes, "ጥላይ ላይ ማሳኛ" (literally, “as it is impossible to plough the sky, it is impossible to sue or accuse a king”). The researcher is not against appreciating good deeds by officials and elites in the society, but balance of coverage and incorporating a variety of points of view should be kept to see a better culture of democracy in the country because visual culture is integral to ideologies and power relations (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001).

The Ethiopian society is mostly oral and there is no tradition of interpreting visual images like photographs in depth. Many of the culture values have been transferred from generation to generation with words of mouth. But as the emerging digital culture is rising, the visual media understanding will grow correspondingly. Media, therefore, need to reflect on how to equitably represent society visually. As there is little oppositional voice that checks the accountability of the government in the country, there is limited participation and debate among the society regarding social,

political and economic issues. It is therefore felt that, journalists and the news media have missed this important element of democracy in their representation of different groups; they do not serve the interests of the society at large; ordinary citizen. Similarly, in almost all of the studied issues photographs gained little attention. Moreover, it is common to see action less, uninteresting photographs in the studied newspapers. Their picture quality is also poor.

Differences in photographic coverage of the ordinary mass and those in higher social status indicate important trends and issues in representation of power relations in the Ethiopian society. One of the major purposes of this study was to determine who were shown more often in the contemporary Ethiopian newspaper photography, people from higher social status or the common people? When shown, who portrayed positively and how did the power relation symbolically mediated? In this regard it was clear that the people from higher political, economic and social sectors were dominantly shown in news photographs. This is the reflection of the unbalanced media representation of power in society and might also be a manifestation of a top down communication style prevalent in the social and administrative institutions in the country. Reasons for this imbalance in representation might be, (1) journalists' dependence on few prominent people for their sources; (2) the photojournalist does not have the necessary knowledge of playing a pivotal role in the democratic media; (4) the concentration of important information in the hands of few powerful bodies make them the sources for the media; (5) the high social value given to people in top official places is also reflected in media and (6) profit motives.

### 5.3 Recommendations

Personnel in newspapers, photographers, photo editors, designers and editors have an opportunity to change the contents of Ethiopian newspapers. One possible remedy to achieve equal representation of high status citizens and ordinary citizens in newspaper photographs is to be aware of the consumer feeling about representations. These days, people are conscious to make their voices heard and their images presented in media because “what is seen and counts as ‘evidence’ is most usually linked to corrective action” (Hall, 1997: 195). In the Ethiopian situation, the audience is also tired of listening to the same voices and seeing familiar faces in photographs. We have observed this fact at the early age of this government when the private press was

mushrooming in the country (mid-1990s); it is arguably possible to say this was the time when newspaper readership and media consumption reached its peak. A variety of ideas and images, therefore, should be incorporated to increase social participation and democratization of communication.

The images in newspapers should serve a story telling purpose and they are believed to answer the classic journalistic questions: who, what, when, why, where and how. Therefore, if photojournalism is performed properly, it can be a powerful means to explain the larger world essential facts about the human conditions. In most occasions photos in newspapers are not only the photographers' products. The assignment begins by the request from the reporter or editor, and the photographer's duty of being at the spot to take pictures can be decided by the editor or the graphic section or chief photographers depending on the availability and staffing in the newspaper. The photograph, therefore, is a product of all these personnel in the newspaper. This implies that all those involved in the process should take the responsibility about how to represent different people and ideas visually.

Though the role and task of mass media may vary from medium to medium, and from country to country, they are considered to be fundamental elements of a democratization process. At the end of the day, according to social responsibility theories of the press, the news media are there to provide a representative picture of various groups and activities of a society, serve as a bridge to connect the public and the government and to promote democratic process and public enlightenment. Serving these purposes needs an editorial policy in the media to serve democracy and fair representation of citizens as to keep the power balance in the society to show that the ordinary people are able to exercise power and participate in the public sphere. These are the responsibilities of every journalist who wishes to enhance democratic communication.

Studies show that media have a great impact on reality formation through representation of ideas and images. The media should therefore give a place to the mass as they should go to the grassroots and present the ideas and images of marginalized groups. If they aimlessly focus and present the images of the high status people for the sake of popularity or profit, they make the risk of supporting only the powerful and bravo unequal power relations in society. Many urban Ethiopians have

some interest in the contents of newspapers one way or another. Thus, they need the media to forward at least some of their words and to answer another few of their questions of democracy. It is believed that the representation of equal power in the photographs and the other media can have an impact on more people than before. The inclusions of the ordinary citizen, therefore, increases representation and attract people to be active participants in the production of newspapers and opens doors for a free-flow of information which is the base for the democratization of communication. If newspaper photographs under-represent the ordinary citizen, then they unintentionally contribute to public consent of strengthening the power holders, adding more power to those who are already exercising it. The press in Ethiopia, therefore, should develop the capacity of exposing stories the authorities want to hide and pushing the powers that want to work for the good of the public or individuals in need of assistance. It is only when this type of media gets root in the society that we can confidently speak of democratization of communication in the country.

A democratic media system should empower people by enabling them to explore where their interest lies. In this media system there must be effective representation of group interests and it should seriously inspect the government and centers of power; “It should provide a source of protection and redress for weak and unorganized interests; and it should create the condition for real societal agreement or compromise based on an open discussion of differences rather than a contrived consensus based on an elite dominance” (Curran and Gurevitch, 2005: 114-115). This can be best realized according to Curran, through establishment of a core public service broadcast system in encircled by a private, social marketed, and professional and civic media centers.

Most, if not all, news issues have a social consequence that can affect the large masses one way or the other. It is, therefore, democratic to seek and reflect the news perspectives of ordinary people if the media are to be a watchdog proper and democratic because communication has a lot to do in shaping democratization (Hydén and Leslie, 2002: 1). This is a pressing issue of the day for a country like Ethiopia, where the growing media culture is facing a serious threat from power holders and from its own faults. Democratization of communication is not a miracle that we expect to happen at a flick of time, it is rather a process of improvement that should gradually be developed by exercising it through the inclusion of a variety of thoughts,

going deep into the social problems the country is facing through more assertive journalism.

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## APPENDIX

### Newspapers issues examined for the study

#### 1. The Ethiopian Herald

Number	Date of issue	Photographs	Photographer
Vol. LXII No. 102	Jan. 7, 06	Christmas benediction	Staff photographer
Vol. LXII No. 114	Jan. 21, 06	Official from Ministry of Labour	Staff photographer
Vol. LXII No. 120	Jan. 28, 06	PM giving press release AAU staff on meeting	Staff photographer
Vol. LXII No. 126	Feb. 20, 06	Ethio-Somalia ministerial meeting	Staff photographer
Vol. LXII No. 132	Feb. 11, 06	Meles being seen of at Bole Officials of broadcasting agency giving press release	Staff photographer
Vol. LXII No. 138	Feb. 18, 06	House Speaker, PM and the president talking with delegations	Staff photographer
Vol. LXII No. 150	Mar. 4, 06	Officials of Ministry of Education chairing a meeting	Staff photographer
Vol. LXII No. 156	Mar. 11, 06	Ministerial meeting on Darfur case Expert explaining about Ethiopia's economic growth President conferring international aviation official	Staff photographer
Vol. LXII No. 162	Mar. 18, 06	Ethiopian parliament members with their Bahrain counterparts	Staff photographer
Vol. LXII No. 168	Mar. 25, 06	Officials visiting flower farm, expert briefing journalists and State minister giving press statement	Staff photographer

#### 2. Fortune

Number	Date of issue	Photographs	Photographer
Vol. 6, No. 297	Jan. 8, 06	CUD leaders after the May 2005 election	Staff photographer
Vol. 6, No. 298	Jan. 15, 06	Minister of Trade and Industry with a renown business personality	Staff photographer
Vol. 6, No. 299	Jan. 22, 06	Former AAU vice president assigned to be a diplomat	Staff photographer
Vol. 6, No. 300	Jan. 29, 06	A view of a fuel station	Staff photographer
Vol. 6, No. 301	Feb. 5, 06	Insurance managers talking	Staff photographer
Vol. 6, No. 302	Feb. 12, 06	A crowd at the inauguration of Bole Airport and ministers talking at the inauguration	Staff photographer
Vol. 6, No. 303	Feb. 19, 06	CUD leaders claiming Addis Ababa Administration seats	Staff photographer
Vol. 6, No. 304	Feb. 26, 06	Top government official whispering with a business tycoon	Staff photographer
Vol. 6, No. 305	Mar. 5, 06	Chamber of Commerce Award ceremony, Ex-president of Development Bank	Staff photographer
Vol. 6, No. 306	Mar. 12, 06	Ruin of a bomb blast in Addis Ababa	Staff photographer
Vol. 6, No. 307	Mar. 19, 06	People hustling at a bus station	Staff photographer
Vol. 6, No. 308	Mar. 26, 06	Diplomats refreshing, Manager, Ethiopian Electric Power Authority	Staff photographer

#### 3. Reporter

Number	Date of issue	Photographs	Photographer
Vol. X. No. 486	Dec. 31, 05	Minster of Finance and Economic Development	Staff Photographer
Vol. X. No. 487	Jan. 7, 06	CUD top leadership after the May 2005 election	Staff Photographer
Vol. X. No. 488	Jan. 14, 06	Election Board registrar and one of CUD leadership	Staff photographer
Vol. X. No. 489	Jan. 21, 06	The PM	Staff photographer
Vol. X. No. 491	Feb. 4, 06	The PM and Lidetu (opposition leader) giving press statement	Staff photographer
Vol. X. No. 492	Feb. 11, 06	President at Bole inauguration, PM	Staff photographer
Vol. X. No. 493	Feb. 18, 06	One of CUD leaders, a street boy begging at a car window	Staff photographer
Vol. X. No. 494	Feb. 25, 06	CUD leaders rushing to court, anniversary of a private oil company (NOC) and opening of a trade fare	Staff photographer
Vol. X. No. 495	Mar. 4, 06	Opposition Leader Dr. Admassu	Staff photographer
Vol. X. No. 496	Mar. 11, 06	PM giving press Statement, Journalists on a meeting and an agricultural expert interviewed	Staff photographer

Vol. X. No 497	Mar. 18, 06	EAL manager Girma Wake giving press release, Ethiopian Electoral Board Registrar	Staff photographer
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Vol. X. No 498	Mar. 25, 06	CUD leaders at a court's entrance, ETC GM giving press statement	Staff photographer
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