

**Addis Ababa University
School of Graduate Studies**

Graduate School of Journalism and Communication

**Participatory Program Production, Public Deliberation and
Prospects for Practicing Public Journalism in Mekelle FM Radio
Stations**

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Prospects for Practicing Public Journalism in Mekelle FM Radio
Stations**

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University**

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List of Acronyms

AP – Associated Press

CommGAP – World Bank’s Communication for Governance and Accountability Program

DWT – Dimtsi Weyane Tigray

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

ABSTRACT

Prominent public journalism advocates hold that journalism should be done in a way that invites citizen participation in shaping news coverage. For, they believed, the purpose of journalism is to “help public life go well.” In similar realm, the aim of this study was to investigate the prospects of journalism practices in creating effective public sphere at a local context through the application of public journalism principles; based on the description and critical analysis of participatory journalism practices in Mekelle FM radio stations. With this end in view, qualitative research approach was employed. Hence, individual in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation and content analysis of broadcasts were employed to gather the data needed to scrutinize the aim of the study.

The findings of the study demonstrate that there are some promising activities that signify the ‘civic turn’ of journalism practice or the ends-oriented journalism is creeping into the practices of these media. Some programs are shaped in a way that encourages public engagement; and the participants, too, participate in discussions with due concern to the community issues. The editors’/managers’ and program coordinators’ considerable effort and keen attempt to work with the public by developing new participatory programs are also part of the promising activities to practice ends-oriented journalism in these stations. Nevertheless, the journalists obscure interpretation of the essence of participatory journalism in general and effective deliberation in particular may jeopardize effective application of public journalism principles.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The way we produce and transfer information, knowledge and culture in our society critically affects our perception of the world. Because of a radical change in technology we are in the realm of changes in organizing and producing information and in creating new opportunities for the public for exchanging information, knowledge and culture. “Enabled by technological change,” Benkler, asserted that:

We are beginning to see a series of economic, social and cultural adaptations that make possible a radical transformation of how we make the information environment we occupy as autonomous individual, citizens, and members of cultural and social groups (2006: 1).

The new arena of technology transformation helped public journalism flourish by enabling people to play a more active role than before in their participation in the traditional media. Public journalism, hence, create opportunities to the public serving, in the words of Benkler, “as a dimension of individual freedom, as a platform for better democratic participation and as a medium to foster a more critical and self-reflective culture (2006).

The advent of mobile phones and the Internet allow everyone to be a potential publisher/writer that helps fast and tremendous dispatch of news and information. They have created virtually “free” distribution of content that cannot be “controlled” and make conversation not only possible but inevitable. The role of the gatekeeper has reshaped and the traditional media no longer have the exclusive power of publication for user-generated content which eroded the sense of top-down control of media. In short, the public starts to share part of the gatekeeping activities. In describing how the new gatekeeping role of the public has emerged, Trench and Quinn aptly state:

The defining characteristic of this new practice, notwithstanding its actual and potential abuse, has been that it represented a mainly “horizontal” communication among peers, whereas traditional news represented an essentially “vertical” communication from authoritative sources, through the media, to the publics... many individuals within the publics addressed by

journalism are active as information-seekers, some too as information-providers (2003: 3).

We are in the era of public (or some call it participatory, civic, or citizen) journalism in which people without professional journalism training can use the tools of modern technology and the Internet to create, augment or fact-check media on their own or in collaboration with others. The hub of the concepts behind public journalism, however, is beyond the mere attachment of it to the technological advancements that enhanced the parting and sharing of information. This is because the essence of public journalism is more than giving citizens an opportunity to have their say; and it is even beyond the quality of posing ‘good questions.’ Rather, according to Lambeth (1998), public journalism proponents propose a significance change in journalism by “insisting that journalism accept more responsibility for trying to stimulate and raise the quality of public deliberation; [deliberation that leads to true solution].” To claim this responsibility, proponents of public journalism propose the media should give the space and air time for broad and open discussions; instigate the public to raise ideas about solutions; and encourage citizens’ commitment to carry out solutions to solve it themselves. Hence, it is possible; perhaps the most appropriate way is to practice it in the traditional media arena too. And in the practice of public journalism in the mainstream or traditional media the basic issue is that the mainstream media reporters and producers are not the exclusive centers of knowledge on a subject for that public journalism believes the audience knows more collectively than the reporter alone.

Thus, the theoretical underpinning of public journalism go beyond considering new media technologies as the only definers of citizen or public-oriented journalism. According to Banda in his exploratory study entitled “Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa,” although part of the approaches in public journalism involves a definition of technology itself, it does not mean that public journalism just happen only within the confines of new media technology. He states, “[public journalism] can happen even within the context of traditional and conventional media” (Banda, 2010: 72).

In line with Banda’s view, Sirianni and Friedland, eloquently state the philosophy of public journalism as follows in a way which clearly manifests it is beyond the confines of new media technology;

Journalists must assume responsibility for helping to constitute vital publics with the usable knowledge that enables to deliberate about complex issues and to engage in common problem solving. ..., they should frame the news to enable people to see themselves as active citizens, rather than as mere spectators, victims, or consumers of information. (2001: 186-187).

Moreover, the writers advise that, while involving in such activities journalists should be careful about not to advocate for advocacy journalism. They should not take the ultimate position in developing solutions for the problems. Rather the journalists should play the catalytic role by urging the public to come together to discuss on common issue (Ibid).

The premise behind the idea of public journalism, as Fujita (1998) discusses, is that journalism is not working well that the media are disconnected from people, not reporting what people want to know, and making people turn away from community affairs. According to Merrill, et al (2001:114), “traditional journalists have thought that the press’s duty was to provide information to citizens who could then use it to participate in government.” Merrill and other proponents of public journalism, however, believe that unless there is a room for participation, journalists should get rid of the idea that supplying information to the public will lead to debate and public conversation. Hence, Merrill, et al write, public journalists want a press that is community oriented and that encourages public conversation about serious matters (2001: 42).

Appraising the tasks of journalism based on the premises of public journalism; Merrill, et al, moreover, rehash the critics of liberal journalism which argues that the press has been deficient in giving different perspectives of the events and issues of the society and it is dominated by too much negative news. As Merritt, one of the founders of public journalism, cited in Merrill, et al, claims, such negative emphasis and sensational elements of news gives the public erroneous view of the reality around them. According to the same author the critique of the election coverage in 1988 presidential election in the United States was a turning point for Merritt to think about a new form of journalism and the initial take-off for public journalism (Ibid).

In relation to this, Fujita documented Merritt’s claim, saying,

Merritt was driven into public journalism by his deep frustration with the campaign coverage of the 1988 presidential election, which was dominated by

negative attacks...The media's coverage of the campaign turned it into a horse race, characterized by the "who's-ahead-who's-behind" type of candidate-oriented stories. Citizens' concerns about their communities or their interest in policy issues were more or less ignored by the politicians and the media (1998, No.9: 6).

Hence, with the advent of the internet and mobile phones, new interactive approaches to civic coverage have emerged. As of that time, therefore, anywhere, for public journalism proponents' people are at the center of their program. They are concerned with motivating the people for community service, stimulating a civic conversation for the people and to set their news agenda. But do we have such practice in our media? Are there studies concerning the concept of public journalism? As far as this research is concerned in Ethiopia's case, the researcher did not come across a research that has been conducted concerning the practice of public journalism in the Ethiopian media context.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

In nations like Ethiopia where millions are illiterate and plagued with minimal internet services, blogging and internet communication is less effective to practice public journalism. The same holds true for television which is a rare commodity in Ethiopian households. Therefore, radio is the most appealing instrument for the people to participate in various public issues. Nevertheless, in situations where sources for local news and information are more limited and public dialogue triumphs less emphasis in the day-to-day practices of this medium, it is difficult to witness that it serves the public well.

After 1990s, the initial take-off for public journalism, a mere information presentation role of the media has been taken as the manifest for deficient in giving different perspectives of events and issues of the society. Negative emphasis and sensational news coverage which wrapped with the mentality of "we read you listen or we write you read" toward listeners/readers is not the hub of journalism. Rather, according to proponents of public journalism like Rosen (1998, 1999) Merritt

(1998), Charity (1995) and Merrill, et al (2001) reporting what the people want to know is the central role of the media and/or journalism. The media have to be community oriented and should encourage public conversation wherein the people report their own news about themselves from their own communities.

Indeed, this [new] concept of journalism [public journalism], is an area which deserves scrutiny to understand its premises and application to Ethiopia's media environment since it is a highly marginalized area of study in the country. Besides Ethiopian government heralds that to support the development activities of the country, development journalism is the most appropriate form of journalism because this form of journalism facilitates the active involvement of the community. Thus it is worth researching to investigate the appropriate form of philosophy that can maintain the aim of this form of journalism. Based on the philosophical underpinning of development journalism, therefore, public journalism is the most expedient form of journalism to sustain its practices. For, both of them aimed at establishing a dialogue with community members on issues related to them and facilitating this dialogue between community groups: a shift from an "information" model of communication to a "conversational" model (Bessette, 2004; Compton, 1996).

Hence, based on the existing participatory journalism practices of the FM radio stations found in Mekelle it makes sense to investigate how likely to adopt the philosophy of public journalism as their full-fledge working philosophy. With regards to participatory journalism practices of these FM radio stations there are some good beginnings. And it is easy to mention some programs that are inviting for active participation of the community. "Hello Fana" (from Fana FM 94.8, Mekelle) for instance, is a program which invites audiences to point out any kind of problem or an exemplary activity they observe in the city to discuss. If it is a problem, for instance, the journalists invite the concerned body to discuss about the problem with the public. Similarly, "Agebe'e" (አገብኝ) which means "dialogue" is a program presented by Dimtsi Weyane Tigray (DWT) FM 102.2 that aimed at facilitating open discussions about socio-political and economic issues among the people. "Ewanawi Zete" (እዋናዊ ዘተ) is the other participatory program from 104.4 FM Mekelle.

According to Haas, scholars agree that, public journalism's goal of involving citizens more actively and meaningfully is universally applicable (2002). However, the specific practices associated with public journalism would need to be modified substantially to suit particular characteristics of given countries. Therefore, in seeking to know how to suit public journalism in the Ethiopian local media context, the researcher claims that it is important to see the prospects of practicing public journalism in FM radio stations based on critical analysis of their existing practices of journalism.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The study has the following general and specific objectives.

1.3.1. General Objective

This study aimed at assessing the prospects of public journalism practice in FM radio stations and/or practices in creating public sphere at a local context through the application of public journalism practices. The process of forecasting and/or assessing whether these FM radio stations will pertain to the pursuits of public journalism has been assessed based on the existing practices of participatory journalism.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

Specifically the objectives of this study are:

1. To scrutinize how likely to incorporate public journalism principles in the context of Mekelle FM radios' journalism practices,
2. To examine the potential benefits of participatory journalism (like phone-in programs) for the diffusion of public journalism practices on Mekelle FM radio stations and to what extent journalists and editors are receptive to the idea,
3. To analyze the effectiveness of the participatory journalism, these FM radio stations practice, in empowering the public to decide on its issues,

4. To appraise whether public journalism is a set of techniques which might perhaps be put to use in pursuit of traditional news media goals or not,
5. To investigate how these FM radios create public sphere or public deliberation for their audiences.

1.4. Research Questions

To investigate the issues stated in the statement of the problem and objectives of the study, the following research questions are answered:

1. Is public journalism a set of techniques which might be put to use in pursuit of the goals of these FM radio stations?
2. Do these FM radio stations create public deliberation based on a democratic communication process?
3. Do the FM radio stations at Mekelle city create public sphere for their audiences and/or are they urging the public to raise issues and deliberate to find solutions itself?
4. What are the potential benefits of participatory journalism (like phone-in programs) for the diffusion of public journalism practices in Mekelle FM radio stations?
5. Are journalists and editors receptive to the idea of participatory journalism and/or public deliberation?
6. Does the participatory journalism that these FM radio stations are practicing help to bring diverse views and urge the media to be more responsible, especially in bringing transparency between the public and public officials?

1.5. Significance of the Study

As Alexander, F. states “the source of real power for journalists who are serious about their craft must lie in an engaged public” (vol.6, 2005:3). This is because superficial story that fails to effect necessarily social change and development, information that members of the society can’t do anything with, is not helpful for the society. To be immersed in situations where exacerbated by information technologies by itself is not a guarantee to be part of the public sphere that is appropriate to bring deliberative dialogue. For, as Postman, cited in Alexander writes, unorganized and excessive flow of information can expose the people for the problem of a diminished social and political potency (vol. 6, 2005: 4).

Hence, to solve this problem there has to be journalism which functions in its truest form that seeks to help citizens see their stake as informed participants in the life of the community. Similarly the purpose of this paper was to appraise the activities of FM radio stations in Mekelle city to understand how they are working on the involvement of the people in the affairs of their community (or the practice of public journalism).

Accordingly, there are difficulties and challenges in the practice of ends-oriented journalism, which have been identified by proponents of the concept that those who wish to embrace this form of journalism must reckon. Therefore, based on their existing practices, the hub of the significance of this study revolves around in bringing solutions to harmonize their practices with these challenges of ends-oriented (public) journalism. Among which are; a) how to maintain independence and trustworthiness [while they follow open door policy]; b) how journalists to report the news fairly, yet not as out lookers, but as citizens and members of the community; c) how to give due attention to the engagement of the public in their reporting are some of the benefits that the study concerned with.

Looking at the bigger picture, since the study is on FM radio stations the findings, more or less, indicate ways on how the FM radio stations can fill the gap left by national media that are stretching to cover national issues with less emphasis for the local.

1.6. Scope of the study

The study is limited to the three FM radio stations functioning in Mekelle city concerning their activities from the perspective of participatory program production; and their roles and activities in creating effective public deliberation and/or public sphere.

1.7. Thesis Organization

The study consists of five chapters. The first chapter deals with introduction (background of the study), statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, objectives of the study, design of the study and its scope. The second chapter reviews literature related to the study. The third chapter treats the methodology of the study. The fourth chapter discusses the findings. And the fifth chapter concludes the study highlighting the core elements of the findings and suggests areas for further studies.

CHAPTER TWO

2. Review of Related Literature

The essence, evolution, approaches to practice and debates surrounding public journalism, including the theories and concepts to define the term are the primary focus of this literature review. In addition, libertarian theory of the press, social responsibility theory of the press and the issue of public sphere in journalism discussed within the parameters of public journalism.

2.1. The Essence of Public Journalism

Defining public journalism is not an easy task and it is not surprising yet, because, according to Russell, “journalism itself is a continuum.” Which means journalism is always evolving from one end to the other across time renovating its practices to serve its basic principles well. Therefore, this nature of journalism prompts journalists to be overwhelmed with the dilemma whether to embrace the conventional or traditional form of journalistic practice or to redefine its practices in the contemporary world. To this point Russell aptly discusses as follows;

If a continuum were drawn with “detached” marked on one end and "active civic participant" on the other, journalists would find themselves at different points because of their own beliefs, as well as the policies of their individual organizations. For this continuum, "detached" would apply to journalists who report just the facts without the analysis needed to show why these facts may be important [and the reverse is true for “active civic participant”]. ... [Hence], some embrace a movement that calls to reevaluate the prevailing beliefs, principles and theories that shape today's journalism. ... On the other hand, other public journalists who believe that journalism needs a radical overhaul (1998: 6).

But there is always a struggle to define it. Thus, some professionals define it from the realm of new media technology diversification as definers. And some others including the leading founders of public journalism like Merritt and Rosen define it from the perspective of the relationship/attachment between the media and its audience.

The technology-driven definition of public journalism, confines its concept in the horizon of new technologies as sole definers of the information flow in the modern world. This concept, though, has a share to redefine the philosophy of journalism and the practices of news organizations in the contemporary media organizations, it is, indeed can't reflect the core-value of public journalism. This is because public journalism arose in response, to what Sirianni and Friedland called "a perceived failure of the press to constitute a public sphere" in which citizens could understand and participate productively and actively with public problems (2001: 20).

Based on the above assertion, therefore, the philosophy of public journalism relies on that journalists must assume responsibility for helping, in their own words, "to constitute vital publics with the usable knowledge that enables them to deliberate about complex issues and to engage in common problem solving" (Ibid).

Voakes (2004) too defines public journalism as a form of journalism that seeks to:

1. listen systematically to the stories and ideas of citizens even while protecting its freedom to choose what to cover;
2. examine alternative ways to frame stories on important community issues;
3. choose frames that stand the best chance to stimulate citizen deliberation and build understanding of issues;
4. take the initiative to report on major public problems in a way that advances public knowledge of possible solutions and the values served by alternative courses of action;
5. pay continuing and systematic attention to how well and how credibly it is communicating with the public (Voakes, 2004, cited in Joyce, Y.M., 2006: 6).

To put it in simpler words, to practice public journalism, as Sirianni and Friedland note that journalists must frame their coverage in ways appropriate to citizens to map their own "assets" and build "the knowledge base" needed for active and productive engagement (Sirianni and Friedland, 2001). Accordingly, this study defines and discusses public journalism in this essence of its emphasis on citizen-driven reporting (or ends-oriented journalism practice).

This is because the study builds heavily on the essence of journalism serving as a sphere for public deliberation and facilitating community involvement. Of course, it is crystal clear that the essence of public journalism: which concerned with facilitating community involvement may be best served by the Internet for it allows everyone to be a potential publisher because people have virtually free distribution of content. Yet, this study is relied entirely on the prospects of applying principles of public journalism in the mainstream broadcast media for the following reasons.

Primarily, as Alex S. Jones aptly expresses, “it is traditional news organizations that have the most consistent and direct role in performing the news function” (2009:46). According to him the traditional news organizations their primary value is to help people function as citizens in coping with the world giving detailed coverage of events. Here we have to be clear that in the current Internet-driven world too, citizens do have unlimited access to news and other programs production, through unlimited channels of social media, created primarily an environment for excess.

Nevertheless, in this study the concern is not only ubiquity of news, but also it is the question of the media’s consistency and direct role in performing the real function of news media which is empowering the public to decide. Regarding this in its study the Associated Press (AP) illustrates that in the Internet-driven, “24/7 news world:” news consumers do have a ubiquity of news to select from at almost any time, from anywhere on a variety of technologies. “However, the reality is that the abundance of news and ubiquity of choice do not necessarily translate into a better news environment for consumer” (AP, 2008: 37). Moreover, a study by Joyce, Y.M. (2006), shows despite harboring the potential, interactive (or online) journalism is not achieving the higher goals of public journalism.

Public journalism engages people in a back-and-forth cycle “from listening to talking it over, talking it over to listening” in identifying the news agenda, framing the question to identify the public need, and deliberating options in solving the problem (Charity, 1995: 40). But, according to Joyce, Y.M. (2006) interactive (or online) journalism like blogging does not allow the public comparable opportunity to contribute to the news process. Moreover, Barnett states that online news content is largely homogeneous and particularly he found little evidence of new media

being deployed to allow journalists to do more journalism or to engage the public more effectively (2009).

In turn this situation can prompt the media to neglect its social responsibility function. Which means if the media perseveres in such role, indeed, journalism's own ideology like the influence to function as a 'fourth estate' which reflected through roles such as facilitating public knowledge, empowering citizens and increasing their ability to contribute to the public sphere (Harrington, 2009) will be jeopardized.

For the purpose of this study FM radio stations are selected. Chiefly, because, as Charity notes;

Public journalism is (and virtually has to be) an invention of each newspaper [or other media] that uses it. Just like every family invents its own way of talking, its own division of responsibilities, its own jargons, every community has to invent its own way of deliberating and taking action on its concerns (1995: 14).

In his study Burroughs, in particular, concludes that news organizations serving comparatively, small or medium communities are on highest rank in serving measures of improved civic competence, such as providing a problem-solving frame, inviting audiences' feedback and emphasizing citizens' input (2006).

The rationale behind that basically, according to Voakes, cited in Burroughs, is that journalists at smaller news media stations like FM radio stations are more amenable to some of key values associated with public journalism: enterprise, information for decision-making, facilitation of discourse and attention to citizens' concerns; and "perhaps exclusively; less reliance on externally produced copy; and often local ownership" (Ibid).

As a study by Barnett shows, "local newspapers [or radio stations] with their roots in the community have historically been crucially important vehicles for large-scale expressions of dissatisfaction." According to him, in so doing, local media can be champions of their own localities; which means they can draw the attention of governments (local or national) to particular achievements or inadequacies; economic investment or remedial action (2009: 6). And

this is in this ground that the philosophy of public journalism which resides in the realm of building an informed and participatory citizenry comes to the ground.

Moreover, according to Burroughs news media working in small communities can perform well in fostering a strong sense of local identity, “which corresponds to public journalism’s emphasis on community-building” (2006: 4). This is for these reasons that, according to Merritt (1995) cited in Burroughs, (2006); public journalism and news media functioning in small communities have close-knit relationship that can urge for intense deliberation.

Public journalism...seeks to provide information in a way that leads to true deliberation about solutions rather than mere debate or conflict. It does not attempt to dictate what those solutions might be, for that would not only futile but also democratically and journalistically inappropriate (Merritt, 1995, 80-81).

In such a way that the commitment behind public journalism is “inventing” new ways of reporting the news that help citizens deliberate on important problems, address and solve them, and increase their voices in the community and in the news stations (Friedland, L. and Nicholas, S. 2002). Therefore, Merritt quoted in Lambeth (1998) and Bare (1998) argues journalism needs cultural change from within. Journalists must undergo a “mental shift.” Furthermore, Bare states in order to clearly understand the idea of applying public journalism ideals in news media day-to-day practices, “public journalism research efforts should focus first and foremost on beliefs of editors and reporters, for they are the individuals who must turn the idea into a hands-on practice and create the editorial content.” Clarifying it more, he asserts;

It is proper to examine attitudes first because changes in content and practices should occur after changes in beliefs. Put another way, news staff members who adopt public journalism as their dominant belief must first modify their attitudes regarding journalism and community. Once these beliefs are altered, the attitude changes should reveal themselves in two ways: new types of editorial content and new types of newsroom practices (1998: 85-86).

This is because after the concept born sometimes in the past, according to the same author, it is not the discovery of public journalism techniques that is new; “it is how intensely the beliefs are

developed and how far up the priority ladder public journalism beliefs are pushed that is innovative” (Ibid).

Secondly, in the words of Alex J.S. “It is [public] journalism when a non-journalist with expertise in a given field posts something on a news site that reflects his special knowledge.” According to him again, “it is [public] journalism when non-journalists go to... meetings and send the local newspaper [or other news media] an account of what happened” (2009: 190). Thus, for the purpose of this study, in line with Charity’s idea, the latter form of public journalism practice [stated by Alex] emphasized for the following basic reasons.

Primarily, it promotes some of the basic tenets of public journalism like; urging the media to be a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism; and a means of projecting the opinions and attitudes of the groups in the society to one another.

Most importantly, in Ethiopia millions are illiterate and plagued with minimal Internet services, thus, blogging and Internet communication is less effective to practice the first form of public journalism. The same holds true for television which is a rare commodity in Ethiopian households and very difficult to record and send videos. Therefore, in this study radio is the primary concern because it is the most appealing instrument for the Ethiopian people to participate in various public issues.

2.2. Evolution of Public Journalism

Public journalism evolved as a response to criticism from both inside and outside the media. Particularly it emerged as a response to criticism that America’s press declining involvement in the public sector and to its consideration of citizens as bystanders to their own life. According to a report entitled, “America’s Struggle Within,” studied by the Harwood Group for the Pew Center’s Citizen Election Project cited in Claborne, “People felt betrayed and bewildered by the news media. They said that too much of what the news media convey is endless dirt and gossip, sensationized coverage and confused and polarized public discourse” (1997: 3).

Moreover, as Rosen states, there were a number of catalytic events which led to the need for public journalism. The increasing gap between journalists and citizens and the dichotomy of public reporting “being housed within an industry devoted to private gain” are some of the factors to ignite the need for a new form of journalistic practice (1999: 77). Hence, according to Rosen and Merritt, that was crucial to consider a significant shift in thinking about the role, purpose and practice of journalism (cited in Compton, 1986). And that shift was evolved to the idea of witnessing and writing the truth about public life. Thus to do so, Rosen (1996) suggests the following solution.

The way to secure a vital future for the press is to strengthen, in any practical way that can be found, all the forces that pull people into civic affairs, engage them in the give-and-take of political dialogue, make participants out of spectators, and illuminate the promise of public life (cited in Russell, 1998; 4).

The above assumption rests on the principle of journalism in general and public journalism in particular which argues citizens need information to make decisions about their lives. Thereby, the media must provide information about the state of the society and other necessary information the public may desire in everyday life (Ibid). Because, as most proponents of public journalism like Rosen (1999), Charity (1995) and Merritt (1998) argue, it is difficult for public journalists truly understand their role as citizens and journalism practitioners who seek solutions for the community problems together with the community without some form of involvement. Indeed, it seems based on this assumption that the demarcation between the philosophies of public journalism and conventional journalism at the two ends may be drawn too.

The contrast made by Rosen between the attitudes of public journalists and conventional journalists is crucial evidence with this regard because it truly braces Dykers’ idea which argues the change in journalism practice “was not in the citizens but in the journalists, who had a new view of people” (1998: 75). According to him public journalists believe, “citizens deserve a bigger place in the newspaper [or other media] itself. Papers/or other media should never ‘dumb down,’ but must reorient themselves around citizens’ concerns.” To the contrary, he asserts that, conventional journalists believe, “news is a profession; journalists write newspapers, readers

don't. Inviting citizens to judge what news [is]; making them the subject of coverage and the like are inherently dumbing down – a form of pandering” (cited in Charity, 1995; 10).

The difference between the two, according to Merritt, relies on the concept of providing citizens ways to act: letting them to write about solutions rather than only problems, and “including in public affairs stories some mobilizing information, so citizens [can] tell public officials what they thought” (cited in Dykers, 1998:75).

Too, the difference becomes profound with this respect for conventional journalists imagined good journalists are the ones who echo the slogan, “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” Yet, according to Charity, this concept missed the main point for, though, uncovering scandal and throwing rascals out of office is honorable work, “it does not build roads, and fix schools.” Thus during the initial take-off of public journalism, Charity and other proponents argue, “if newspapers are to play a truly useful watchdog role in the future, they have to come down to making sure that the public voice is the basis for public action” (1995: 133).

This kind of enterprise, according to Charity, hence, puts responsibilities not just only on officeholders but on citizens as well (Ibid). Because as Rosen aptly expresses a different way of practicing journalism needed not just to strengthen the usual sort of news reporting which emphasized only on telling the news. “But [to shape it] as a craft that builds up the world while simultaneously describing it” (1999: 2). He says “build up” to mean that journalists’ reports should contain more than “information” so that everyone’s cooperation is inalienable. According to Friedland, et al (1998) stakeholders should trace the patterns of ‘disconnections’ within the newsrooms, between citizens and politics, between citizens and the media, and among groups of citizens themselves. Thus, these authors argue, that “problem-solving orientation” should move beyond pure deliberation, “or the simple identification of problems” unless it will not involve citizens in developing their own solutions to community problems.

However, the task to create the right connection was tough as of the idea of public journalism born. According to Rosen, many, especially journalists, criticized arguing such as; the idea of public journalism is not new, this is what they’ve always done; this is a fad, a commercial ploy;

it is caving into the audience, endangering journalists' credibility. As quoted in Claborne, G. (1997), Howell Raines, the then editorial page editor of the New York Times blamed public journalism as a new movement of journalism that "calls on reporters to forswear partisan advocacy." Leonard Downie Jr., the then executive editor of the Washington Post, on the other hand, termed public journalism as "a great danger to the credibility of the newspaper" (1997: 5).

But these criticisms do not go in line with the aim of public journalism: (to restyle the work of the press so that it supported a healthier public climate) and they are rather, in the words of Rosen, "messing the whole thing up" (1999: 7).

This is because, unlike the conventional journalism practice, when it is evolved, the purpose of public journalism has been to see the public into fuller existence. And informing people followed from that. That means, as Merritt argued, cited in Rosen, if we can figure out what makes people connected to their communities and involved, that will tell us some things about what our agenda as journalists ought to be. But to realize this aim, Rosen asserts that the task was not something journalists could easily address for they were "accustomed to covering news, not rebuilding the logic on which the news was based" (1999: 25). Hence, Merritt highlighted that journalists and journalism educators should understand "journalists' values and practices do not easily mutate" (cited in Dykers, 1998: 58-59). Friedland, et al, too, confirmed that the change in newsroom culture to which many public journalists aspire may require "patience painful for many reporters and editors to embrace" (cited in Lambeth, 1998: 10).

However, despite the aforementioned challenges and negative criticisms of some media people and journalists, as of the time such concept of public journalism inundating scholars of journalism, changes in practicing journalism called for, and, according to Rosen, some big names like David Broder (political reporter of the *Washington Post* in early 1990's) were doing the calling. Broder emphasized that if journalists are to be seen as actors, it is reasonable to expect from them a desired outcome of their actions. He asserted that "not only should they [journalists] acknowledge an agenda, they should be able to persuade others-media owners, politicians, critics, the public - that their agenda is a proper one" (quoted in Rosen, 1999: 54).

According to Sirianni and Friedland by the mid-1980s newspaper readership was not growing with the population. Especially the younger people were not reading newspapers “at the same rates as their parents.” This long-term crisis in newspapers which manifested in declines of both readership and profitability ablaze the public journalism movement initially as a newspaper movement. Yet, latter on the movement spread to public and commercial television, public radio and a few commercial radio stations.

Following the crisis the newspaper industry struggled to identify its causes and among others, eroded readers’ sense of place on metropolitan papers was at the forefront. Thereby, several foundations sought “new ways of understanding and framing public opinion, rooted in the American tradition of reasoned and pragmatic deliberation” (Sirianni and Friedland, 2001: 188). But it blossomed into a full-fledged movement and/or debate following the 1988 presidential election (Russell, 1998). Regarding this Russell documented more as follows:

Throughout the 1988 presidential election journalists generally felt tied to an agenda provided by candidates, who realized they could control their message and the media by staging planned events. The more planned the event, the greater the opportunity to present the candidates’ view without error. They had evolved because of the media’s reliance on daily tracking polls rather than covering issues -“horserace journalism.” (1998: 8-9).

Russell claims during the election it seemed journalists were not concerned with urging candidates to emphasize on discussing basic public issues. Rather the media surrendered its power to the candidates to control the campaign issues. Using the cleavage, created out of journalists’ inactivity, therefore, it was easier for the candidates to attack their opponents than to concentrate on elaborating the substance/or the issue at hand. In the words of Russell “the source had become more important than the issue” (Ibid).

The cure if not the panacea they thought was, thus, to struggle to craft journalism in the way that can possibly urge citizens to make intelligent decisions about public affairs. Along with, to discover what would make it easier for people “to make responsible decisions” was the basic question (Charity, 1995: 2). To do so scholars in this “new” form of journalism like (Charity, 1995; Rosen, 1999 and Merritt, 1995) intend that to illuminate public trust to the press journalists

should help the public to set an agenda. How? Working cooperatively and even intimately with ordinary citizens as with the officials and/or professionals they cover (Charity, 1995).

And it was David “Buzz” Merritt’s the Wichita Eagle during its “People’s Project” which was intended to invite the public to participate in shaping what to cover in the upcoming election; and Richard Oppel’s the Charlotte Observer during its project “Your Vote in’92,” “that pioneered the idea of putting into practice public journalism in the 1992 American presidential election (Charity, 1995: 35). And by 1993 this idea would have a name, public journalism, or equally often, civic journalism (Rosen, 1999: 21).

2.3. Effective Public Participation; the Hub of Public Journalism and the Controversy

Some researchers like Joyce Y.M. Nip draw demarcation between public journalism and participatory journalism. But some others took them as synonymous and use them interchangeably. Of course, participatory journalism and public journalism do have some characteristics in common, such as the participation of the public as content producers and the emphasis given to the plurality of voices (Holanda, et al, 2008). However, when we see them deeply they are not always equivalent. Thereby that is why Joyce discusses participatory and public journalism as two kinds of journalism justifying as follows;

The term “participatory journalism” has been coined recently as mainstream journalism now accepts the idea of giving news users the chance to express their views about public affairs. ... Participatory journalism takes the form of news users generating content, more or less independent of professionals

On the other hand, according to her, public journalism is about engaging people as “citizens both in the news making process and the use of the news.” In public journalism sometimes citizens partnered with professionals in gathering the news. However, journalists remain the gatekeepers in editing and publishing and framing the news in a way that help people to participate in the community (2005: 10-12).

Joyce's justification in one or another way as discussed above has convincing reasons for not to take public and participatory journalism interchangeably. As we can understand from her discussion above they vary on the extent and forms of citizens' participation. Public journalism seeks to increase the capacity of the community to act on the news and to help the community deliberate its problems in search for solutions. It encompasses a wide range of experimentation in engaging citizens as advisors and partners in news gathering and reporting (Rosen 1999; Joyce, 2005) out of spectators (Rosen 1996 cited in Russell 1998). But, participatory journalism mostly gives due emphasis simply urging the users to gather the news (Joyce, 2005) or to contribute to the preparation of journalistic contents including commenting on stories (Holanda, et al, 2008).

And public journalism practice comes to the ground when it passes through all these stages. An effective public journalism practice should evolve from public listening to framing, from framing to deliberation, from deliberation to engagement [for solution development], from engagement to social capital [solidarity within a community; as defined by Bartkus and Davis; 2009] and then from social capital to public life (Charity, 1995). Therefore we can conclude that the scope of public journalism is wider than participatory journalism and participatory journalism can serve as a form of a theoretical underpinning as a prime mover to apply public journalism. Thus in this section, participatory journalism has taken as a first phase and/or deriving force to public journalism. Not as a distinct aspect of journalism.

As discussed above public journalism is about "telling citizens how to make their voices heard and portraying democracy in the fullest sense of the world." To achieve this tenet, thus, engaged public is crucial (Rosen, 1999: 178). Nevertheless some like Rem Rieder (editor of *American Journalism Review*) criticizes public journalism taking its tenet of creating an engaged public and polarizing as if it prefers to "usurp" the political process. To the flip-side these critics do not remain passive from recommending that journalists should inform and then people and their representatives should decide how they want to precede. However the basic argument in public journalism to that matter is that mere process of informing the public while the press is in disenchantment is not promising therefore the public has to be active participant to discover itself.

Most criticisms against public journalism, as stated above, do have conflicting concepts. On the one hand they argue the role of the press is only informing. On the other hand they state that the press should help the public to decide. However the basic questions here are; how can the public get the necessary information to decide without effective participation and deliberation? Can the media promote public life if it is “merely” report on it? Because quoting James Carey, as Rosen states that journalism in the absence of the conversation among the public will soon become a “menace to public life and an effective politics” (1995: 50).

The basic problem in all criticisms of public journalism, according to Rosen, is “critics fell back on ‘tradition’ as the best answer to problems in the press; the traditional separation between news and opinion, the tradition of caution against getting too involved, the traditional imperatives of independence (1999: 183). Accordingly, if journalists are abiding by such a “traditional” way of practicing journalism, they cannot be more than chroniclers of events. And the public will be only a spectator because traditional journalism mostly creates ‘informational citizen,’ saturated with bits and bytes of information (Schudson, 1995) for journalists embrace detachment from their communities (Russel, 1998).

The essence of accuracy in the context of traditional journalism is one of the basic reasons that propel lack of deliberation between journalists and the community. Because unlike public journalism which civic life is the baseline for measuring how accurate a story is, “repeating or paraphrasing what an interview subject says faithfully, according to Sirianni and Friedland, is “the traditional measure of accuracy” (2001: 220). The excessive detachment of the journalists from the public denied ordinary citizens not only access to news production but ordinary citizens are marginalized in their reports because of such their “routine use of elite sources as primary definers” too (Atton, 2008: 215).

Moreover, for most of critics because of its due emphasis for public participation, public journalism is a “new” movement which is completely against the independence of the press and echoes advocacy journalism. However, at the hub of public journalism there is no breathing space that allows “tossing aside the virtues of an independent press,” and compromising objectivity. Rather the argument in public journalism, as Rosen aptly discusses, is that the

objective press has to be in conversation with the community rather than surrendering it to journalists as the only judges of what is objective. That means to serve the public well it is not the journalist to decide on behalf of the public but the audience by itself (Habermas, cited in Navasky 1995).

In public journalism, therefore, public's participation is at the hub of its theoretical underpinning for that the media should not "merely to depict social problems but to lead the community in seeking their solution." Accordingly public journalists frame facts appropriate to the public good rather than merely reporting on "empirical reality." As quoted in Rosen, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt of the New York Times wrote "traditional journalism is latitude-less, apparently because its rules prohibit editors from making any judgment at all." This assumption rests on the belief that traditional journalists' claim that judgment can abuse journalism's fundamental canon - objectivity (Rosen, 1999: 229).

Conversely, in public journalism the truth behind allowing judgment is not just to paralyze objectivity and to damage journalists' independence but it is to say that judgment in journalism is inalienable and journalists are not the only actors in framing public life only by providing facts at face-value. According to Kovach and Rosenstiel, independence means a "way to be a journalist without denying personal experience, but also becoming its hostage" (2001: 164). That means as the journalist is someone devoted to empower the public with the necessary information for decision making, he or she has to develop an "engaged independence" rather than "detached independence". William Glaberson's, the New York Times journalist (in 1990s), interview with Rosen, a journalism professor at New York University, illuminates this point more as follows;

Q. Do you think we make judgments?

A. Of course. And I think you think you make judgments all the time....I don't think the kind of bias journalists are usually accused of – ideological bias, personal animus – is generally worrisome. For more subtle and more dangerous are the conventions of journalism: the ways in which journalists go about dividing the world, framing the public life for us, picturing the world of politics. There are values and assumptions hidden in those decisions that are extremely important to name and debate, and I think, at this point, to change (quoted in Rosen, "press," New York Times, December 14, 1994).

The point is to tell the story of the public in a way that a true journalistic practice allows; and/or that invites people in and create public sphere where social capital blossoms. The primary purpose of journalism, as Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) discuss, is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governed. This sort of journalism also inevitably seeks judgment because to do so it is crucial to start where the public starts not from where the media starts. This is because in the words of Rosen, “journalism begins not with the search for information or story but with the models and metaphors that propel the search.”

For a good journalism to happen, thus, it is not what the “eternal” principles of journalism basically guide what to do. But the people tell what they need from the profession too for “there is no effective journalism without people on the other end who put it to some use.” Helping democracy is the ultimate goal of public journalism movement. The democracy, in Rosen’s terminology, that built on “‘public politics’- a politics based on citizen engagement and serious dialogue between citizens and leaders” (Rosen cited in Fishkin, 1995: 157). And this arena in turn can strengthen the practice of democracy because democracy, in simple terms, is about “paying attention to public business regarded as your own (1999: 283-293).

The notion behind the phrase-“paying attention to public business regarded as your own;” can be interpreted as accepting responsibility for one’s own action. This means, to our point, if the media do not accept responsibility for their actions, then democracy will suffer. And if the media to act responsibly, public journalism recommends they have to be a forum for the exchange of comment(s) and criticism(s) and a means of projecting the opinions and attitudes of the groups in the society to one another (Russell, 1998). “In contrast, traditional news organizations are set up to filter information before they publish it” without opening their doors to public scrutiny and involvement (Bowman and Willis, 2003: 9).

2.4. Why Public Journalism for the Contemporary Ethiopian Media Context

These days media are inundating with “fundamental changes driven by technological and market forces.” For this reason the new technology creates a new media-audience relationship for it facilitates privatization of media use and the “media are becoming detached from their local and national roots, where politics properly belong” (McQuail, 1998:14). This situation is also threatening for socio-political activities. If practices in the media proceed in this arena and pace, the public sphere for deliberation surely diminishes, therefore, as McQuail asserted “democratic politics are nothing if not public and collective.”

Most of the time the new media as well as the mainstream media devote their time for covering personalities and wrongdoings, than issues that enrich public discourse that strengthens the attachment of citizens to their leaders. It is crystal clear that, thus, such tendency can deplete the public trust and altruism to their leaders. The partisanship, in some aspects like politics, demonstrated in Ethiopia’s mainstream media might stem from that they give privileged access to those on power than the ordinary people. Strained relationship between the public and their leaders, thus, manifests the media failed to bring social cohesion.

Closing the cleavage created between the media and the public, though the media environment in general in Ethiopia is at its infancy, is not a task to be procrastinated. Otherwise it will prod citizens to be suspicious of their social problems now and their active political involvements for the future on the part of the media.

Directly or indirectly the role of the media is part of the crucial determinants of quality of life we lead. As McQuail (1998: 17) aptly expresses “what the media choose to do or not to do is going to matter to the quality of democratic [as well as social] life.” McQuail’s assertion shows that media have the power to divert our perception from our own agenda for we are overwhelmed with the ubiquity of media messages. The ubiquity of the media message and its influence in countries where diversified media and literates exist indeed may not be challenging like it happens on us. This may not be only because of the public’s conscience towards the implication

of the media message but also understanding of the media's share in treating issues. According to McQuail, "currently the tasks of political communication are shared across the media more or less as follows;"

Print media provide fuller accounts of events act as critics and help to anchor political beliefs and party commitments. Television and radio are showcases for personalities and vehicles for planned publicity. They also provide a window for spectatorship and observation on selected kinds of political events (1998; 18).

Thus, nations with diversified and free media do have the opportunities of being spectators or participant citizens. However, at the existing situation the opportunity of Ethiopian citizens to be spectators than active participants in their own life is very high. It is not an irrational fear. In Ethiopia millions are illiterate thus newspaper is not appropriate medium to address the majority. Moreover, plagued with minimal Internet services so that Internet communication is less effective at least for those who are "literate" and do have the access to use as an alternative media. The same holds true for television which is a rare commodity in Ethiopian households. Therefore radio is the most appealing instrument for the people to participate in various public issues. Hence, if the detachment between citizens and the existing media deepen, the outcome will be a journalistic practice with a bewildered role.

And journalism for the future in Ethiopia will seize hold of public issues and the essence of deciding jointly. That is why this study tries to indicate advantages and identify the prospects of public journalism practices diffusion in FM radio stations. For an engaged and informed public, alert to common problems and prepared to play its part may emerge when the essence of public journalism creep into the media practices.

Moreover, many scholars including McQuail agree that radio talk shows and other participatory formats do have high potential to reconnect politics with everyday life and ordinary people. Most importantly, McQuail states that these days the availability of a rich potential in the variety and abundance of media (for example the Internet) do not guarantee vital form of socio-political communication. He justifies that because "sources of information, ideas and comment which can be perceived as trustworthy will remain indispensable, especially in the age of overabundant

information.” Thus he concludes that, “mass media will still be needed to define and publicize the shared issues, objectives or problems of the society....” (1998: 18). The media is superpower in its own way. To note the great deal of media’s responsibility for our common fate, Havel claims that “in its own way... the information and communication system of today’s civilization is a soul of the soul of all mankind” (1998: 27).

To the flip-side there is a clamor echoes the importance of absolute freedom of the media and the importance of the media to claim responsibilities. Nevertheless absolute freedom of the press may not always fetch blessed opportunities. Free markets alone are not sufficient to induce open society too. Among others, unqualified and even rancorous critique and various slanted interpretations of the same event are the fruits of the free press. Thus, though, in Ethiopia the media is at infancy and there is murky democratic arena thereby no many alternative media, the struggle to cement a responsible press foundation should start now. This is because the media we have now, the researcher thinks, do have the potential to thwart effective relationship between the public and its leaders.

Hence, to justify how essential public journalism for the contemporary media arena Merritt, one of its principal architects and editor and senior vice president of the Wichita Eagle documented the following:

Journalism’s authority - its right to be attended to - is disappearing in a cloud of cynicism and loss of credibility brought on by the routine and detached way we go about our business. But public journalism offers a solution to this problem. As its core, public journalism suggests a close examination of the alleged overriding value of detachment and seeks to develop more useful journalistic reflexes (1998: 122).

This notion of public journalism, therefore, indicates if journalism stands to serve the public well the media should function beyond serving as only information conduit. Schudson too raised similar concern. He states that “the news gain power not in its direct impact on audiences but in the belief, justified in viable democracies, that the knowledge of citizens can from time to time be effective” (1998: 30). The rationale behind Schudson’s assertion is clear and convincing; a public with information available to it is not necessarily an informed public. Thus, in Ethiopia

too, when we evaluate the existing media context based on the notion of public journalism, we cannot certainly argue the media is serving the public well. So, why we remain passive in searching for a “new” theoretical underpinning of journalism like public journalism that can help it to attain power to serve the public in its truest form?

To discuss from a bigger perspective too, unless we do our homework now to be vigilant enough, sometimes technological invention(s) from abroad and internal economic transformation may prod unusual transformation in the media landscape in Ethiopia like what happened in China and India. Primarily let’s see China’s experience for it can be a case in point for Ethiopia’s case. As Orville Schell writes China’s system of media control works primarily through “party branches” located in every media outlet. Schell moreover states;

The print press...overseen by the state General Publishing Administration under the control of Party General Committee’s Propaganda Department, while the electronic media and film industry fall under the aegis of the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television. What officials within these control organizations are discovering, however, is that as China’s economy is put ever more on a market basis, as state subsidies are reduced and the survival of media outlets grows more dependent on income from advertising rather than on political rectitude, and as China fragments into increasing self-sufficient regional economic units, central control is being challenged and a revolution in media programming is occurring (1998: 36).

Despite government officials’ control of the media, according to the same author, the encroachment of foreign satellite transmissions and the competition for advertising revenues between stations induced to broadcast previously unimaginable programs. The same holds true for India. Sevanti Ninan documented that “until 1991 India had only one state-owned network, Doordarshan, with two channels.” Television in India first started to help remedy underdevelopment. But now it is preoccupied with commercial programming. According to her “the change began in 1991, when a Hong Kong-based private broadcast network called Star TV started telecasting to several Asian countries” (1998: 43-45).

The researcher discusses media experiences of these two countries just to demonstrate the power of foreign satellite channels and internal economic boom to change a country’s media context.

Indeed we have a lot to learn. The most salient point is it is not to be too ambitious to expect similar media revolution in Ethiopia within short period of time. Thus it is wise decision to visualize how to maximize the gains and minimize the dangers that will stem from the change. Because as Ninan argues “market-oriented [media] competition can skew a nation’s priorities, further marginalizing segments of society that are already on the margin” (1998: 49).

But how do we know the sane way to solve the problem that Ninan forecasts? Practicing public journalism will be the best solution. For it is committed to avoid such attachment and seeks to develop more useful journalistic reflexes (Merritt, 1998) for both the societies on the margin and the few to be privileged from the change. Public journalism is a kind of journalism that assumes journalistic freedom with both legal and moral responsibilities for every stride.

But some may suspect the feasibility of this kind of journalism in a country like Ethiopia where media censorship may thwart effective deliberation thereby citizens may not express their views well. To this point the researcher acknowledges this is a rational fear. However he argues that media independent from government does not guarantee effective deliberation among the public. Why? As Fishkin (1995: 143) aptly states, “Participation requires not only the legal opportunity to vote [or debate] but also a social context that effectively motivates people to vote [or deliberate] and to express their views.”

And obviously media are the prime movers to create social context that motivates people to deliberate and/or express their views. Thus, the media should update their “house-style” in a way that motivates citizens to invest time and effort in information gathering and stage discussions together with the media people. Hence a free media context may not be always a prerequisite to allow public input surge into the media. Rather the reverse, might be true. For, among others, creating civic engagement at local level and reforming the media to allow meaningful public input, as Fishkin writes, are the two basic “strategies for democratic reform” (1995: 15).

2.5. Doing Public Journalism; the Theoretical Underpinning

As discussed in detail in the aforementioned sub-topics, public journalism is a kind of journalism that does have a purpose beyond telling the news. Its theoretical underpinning too revolves around this concept. In traditional journalism since “detachment is widely believed to be the fount of [journalists’] credibility,” journalists’ do not have a lasting stake except reporting. Nevertheless, in public journalism journalists should have a lasting stake so that, for instance, if there is a problem to be reported in a given town, mere reporting is not acceptable. If journalism to serve the public well, the problem should be solved and that is why journalists expected to have a lasting stake in the community. Hence, techniques of reporting should promote democratic deliberation, unless they will happen to be “value-neutral.”

Here we have to be clear in one thing that, in public journalism when we say engaging the public is its primary objective, according to Merritt, it is to mean that the journalist should find ways for journalism “to serve a purpose beyond - but not in place of - telling the news.” Lambeth (1998: 25), moreover, states that most proponents of public journalism say “they do not wish to replace either traditional storytelling or investigative reporting but to supplement both with new approaches.” Accordingly to serve this objective, the argument in public journalism is, thus, changes in both perspectives of the traditional journalists and the ways they illustrate their philosophies are required. It needs a change in perspective because it seeks journalists to think the people not as an audience or spectators but as “citizens capable of action.” It needs changes in ways of reporting because it requires journalists to report about issues in ways that “reflect the true array of choices.”

Therefore, Merritt stated that;

A key tenet of public journalism is that the “line” of detachment defined by [traditional] journalism is a false construct. Traditional journalists speak of “crossing the line” as if three questionable this were true: that a single line defines all possible points of moral, ethical and professional concerns; every journalist understands precisely where that line lies; and that anything on one side of the line is “good journalism” and everything on the other side is something else (1998: 121-123).

Both traditional journalism and public journalism acknowledge credibility in journalism is a crucial element. But their interpretation of credibility is quite different. Traditionalists believe credibility stemmed from detachment. To the contrary public journalists believe credibility achieved when journalists think of the people as citizens reached by their efforts and while inviting them to engage in the public life. According to Merritt the value of public journalism resides on reinvigorating public life. Public life also requires “shared information and shared deliberation” (1999: 124) because, according to him, democracy’s fundamental question of “what shall we do?” will not be answered unless people participate.

Hence, public journalism seeks to define another set of five W’s and an H because proponents of public journalism believe that the traditionally designed five Ws and an H urge journalists to write less detailed, sensationalized, personalized political stories and pseudo events. This is because these days the traditional form of journalism mostly gives due emphasis to gather “marketer-defined news products” rather than complex government policy issues that matters the public life. This norm of news coverage obviously is devastating for the survival of journalism as well as mutual deliberation among the public. Because, according to Gordon, if journalists keep publicizing mostly scandals and conflicts marginalizing achievements or outstanding performances, the public will develop “little trust in government.” Ironically, the public will also develop little trust on the media (1998: 145).

New journalistic reflexes are needed, therefore, because people want journalism to do more than “merely recount the day’s events;” it must fashion issues or events into “a narrative that makes sense of what often seems senseless” (Tucher and Bischoff, 1998: 151) even while telling the news too in addition to urging the public to deliberate. A mere reporting of journalistic activity will also be avoided only if citizens are given frequent access to the media for they can easily scrutinize whether their issues are treated well by the media or not. Regarding to this, Pavlik and Thalheimer affirm that “...to determine what is necessary information in a given community might begin by examining the information needs already met by existing sources” (1994: 76) and by evaluating the existing demands of the society. Unless, according to them, whatsoever its potential value, information is worthless to those who cannot effectively obtain it.

Similarly, the main concern of public journalists is not just heralding merely that people have rights to get certain information thus to consider themselves as the convenient sources. Rather the main point is to empower the people how to get it themselves. Thus public journalism is challenging traditional notions of journalism which emphasize the concepts of “fairness” and “objectivity.” It does not, however, mean public journalism entirely abandon conventional journalistic values. But to mean that for the sake of rendering mere “objectivity” or “fairness” it does not allow journalists’ detachment from the public emphasizing on “he said, she said” journalism because the concerns of citizens tend to become the primary concerns of journalists and these concerns tend to derive their reporting.

In short it “prioritizes the active and concrete participation of journalists in the democratic process” (Eaman, 2009: 42). Thus, based on these notions Merritt has identified a number of basic public journalism tenets that help as indicators of the practice of public journalism in a given medium including the following basic ones:

1. Public journalism moves beyond the limited mission of “telling the news” to a broader mission of helping public life go forward.
2. It moves from detachment to being a fair-minded participant in public life.
3. It moves beyond only describing what is ‘going wrong’ to also imagining what ‘going right’ would be like.
4. It moves from seeing people as consumers ... to seeing them as public, as potential actors in arriving at democratic solutions to public problems (quoted in Russell, 1998: 12).

2.6. Public Sphere and Public Journalism

According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001), these days some suggest the definition of journalism “exploded by technology,” thus, they suggest everything carried by these technologies seen as journalism. Nevertheless, as the writers, state “the purpose of journalism is not defined by technology, or by journalists or the techniques they employ. ...the principles and purpose of journalism are defined by something more basic - the function news plays in the lives of people” (2001: 17). For this reason for writers like Carey, journalism means (the researcher agree with this definition too because the definition is beyond the realm of only telling the news), “carrying on and amplifying the conversation of people themselves” (quoted in Kovach and

Rosenstiel, 2001: 18). To practice journalism in this notion, thus, it necessitates creating a sphere where public deliberation illuminates.

According to the definition given by the World Bank's Communication for Governance and Accountability Program (CommGAP), the public sphere is the arena where citizens come together, exchange opinions regarding public affairs, discuss, deliberate, and eventually form public opinion. Accordingly, the public arena can be a specific place where citizens gather (for example, a town hall meeting, like public journalists do gathering the public to discuss the necessary public issues and to solve problems), can also be a communication channel through which citizens send and receive information and opinion. In such a way that public sphere is a prime mover for the creation of the arena public journalism strives for where public participation illuminates.

Promoting free expression and free debate thus promoting democracy and political accountability are the relevance of the presence of both public sphere (Hohendahl, 1992) and public journalism. German sociologist Jurgen Habermas is the leading proponent to provide a comprehensive analysis of the nature of public sphere. According to him public sphere is a network that helps the public to communicate information and point of view, to debate, to discuss and to deliberate on common concerns. Habermas, Boyd-Barrett writes, takes the 18th century coffee houses as a "bourgeois" 'public sphere,' where newspapers and journals were read and discussed in face-to-face groups. The salient feature of the then public sphere, as Boyd-Barrett states, was that "discussions were framed with reference to and on behalf of broader social interests than merely the interests of those who were physically present..." (2007: 230). With reference to that, Habermas argues, to flourish, democracy demands continuous conversation, open argumentation and debate (Navasky, 1998; Calhoun, 1992).

As manifests in the World Bank's CommGAP article entitled "Public Sphere," the most general understanding of the public sphere comes from the ancient Greek city-states, where citizens directly participated in political decisions. The earliest democracy, the Greek, according to Kovach and Rosenstiel, "relied on an oral journalism in the Athens marketplace in which nearly everything important about the public's business was in the open journalism" (2001: 21). But

these days it strongly tied to the media because the media permit the circulation of opinion and offer the conditions in which the forum can function (Garnham, 1992). According to the World Bank report the media “in addition to providing communication channels, it also introduce and shape topics of public discussion” (www.worldbank.org/commGAP, accessed on July 20, 2010). Hence public journalism is at the hub of all these notions for it is a form of journalism that urges the media to function in the realm of active public participation thus helps to flourish an effective public sphere.

Up to the sphere of this study some may argue the defined form of public sphere may not be formed in the arena where this study conducted since there is no strong media democracy. And that is true. Nevertheless, we can have our own public sphere which is compatible to our media environment and the public need. This is because, in the words of Hohendahl, “there is no single model of public sphere, rather different societies [can] develop a variety of models with specific institutional and formal (procedural) features” (1992: 107).

Furthermore, as Boyd-Barrett clearly states since the media no longer feed in face-to-face group discussions of public affairs, public sphere may not appear in a manner Habermas invented it. Instead, he notes that, the media “invented their own publics and public forums for discussion” (2007: 231). On the other hand, in the era of the liberal free press theory, we cannot surely argue the media invent the public sphere the way expected from it. As Garnham aptly discusses, the rationale is that in liberal free press theory “there is a fundamental contradiction between the economic and the political at the level of their value systems and of social relations which those value systems require and support.” He furthermore explains;

Within the political realm the individual is defined as a citizen exercising public rights of debate, voting, and so on, within a communally agreed structure of rules and towards communally defined ends. The value system is essentially social and the legitimate end of social action is the public good. Within the economic realm, on the other hand, the individual is defined as producer and consumer exercising private rights through purchasing power on the market in the pursuit of private interest, his or her actions co-ordinated by the invisible hand of the market (2007: 245-246).

For Ethiopian condition though government control is high, FM radio stations are allowed to operate privately. Thus, as Garnham strikingly states, “If we made voting [or debating] rights dependent upon purchasing power [because when we liberalized the broadcasting, socio-political freedom and deliberation will be constrained by the level of material productivity] or property rights and yet according to the mass media, as both channels of information and for a of debate, [will largely be controlled] by just power and rights” (2007: 247).

For this reason, it is necessary to design a value system and/or journalistic philosophy and “set of social relations” within which commercial or any other media must operate and which they serve to reinforce (Ibid). For the public sphere, as Habermas (1974) writes, could only be realized today, “on an altered basis, as a rational reorganization of social and political power under the mutual control of rival organizations committed to the public sphere in their internal structures as well as in their relations with the state and each other (Cited in Garnham, 2007: 249).

2.7. Libertarian and Social Responsibility Press Theories: the Perspective of Public Journalism

2.7.1. Libertarian Theory of the Press

As Rosen writes, once, James K. Batten the Knight Ridder newspaper chain president said “those who feel a real sense of connection to the place they live are more likely to become newspaper readers” (cited in Rosen 1999: 22). This means individuals who feel little responsibility for their communities may avoid the “whole sphere of politics and civic life.” The audience’s active participation in the media is thus crucial because it promotes the community’s active participation in the sphere of politics and civic life.

Hence, as long as, according to Robertson (1983), journalism is the “exercise by occupation of the right to free expression available to every citizen,” the media has to open its door for the audience’s opinions and comments (quoted in Frost, 2001: 1). However the researcher argues it does not mean that the media should be wide open for irresponsible actions of individuals too just for the matter of giving the opportunity to speak. Because the aim of journalism, as public

journalism argues too, is to build close relations between the public, its government, and its media outlet. Similarly in the libertarian press theory John Stuart Mill argues that “the right of the mature individual to think and act as he pleases” extends as long as “he harms no one else by doing so” (Siebert, 1984: 45-46). But whatsoever freedom of expression allowed and responsibilities side by side imposed, through a mere activity of informing the public without acknowledging its power to derive solutions for problems, we may not practice the true sense of journalism.

According to Rosen (1999: 21) “journalism’s purpose was to see the public into a fuller existence.” And “informing the people followed from that.” Thus, to serve this purpose of journalism, the media should endeavor as the libertarians aptly discuss, “to assist [the public] in the process of solving political and social problems by presenting all manners of evidence and opinion as the basis for decisions” (Siebert, 1984:51).

Of course libertarians argue to serve its underlying purpose which is “helping to discover truth” the media essentially should be free from government control. The researcher argues freedom from government, however, does not become an end in itself unless there is intense desire and altruism of the media to reach the public and struggle to create connection among the community. In societies based on libertarian principles the media is also plagued with conglomeration thus private owners control and take the media deeper into their chosen agenda. With no shared concern between the media and the public freedom from anybody is an obscure solution. Rosen, too, asks:

In a society so commercialized, in a political culture so consumed with impression management, in an age of suburban living technologized experience, information overload (especially of tabloidized), what had become of public opinion, which was supposed to emerge from the clamor of democracy with recommending force (1999: 63)?

Of course the notion of libertarians freeing the media from government control stemmed from the assumption of letting “every man who has something to say on public issues express himself regardless of whether what he has to say is true or false and [to] let the public ultimately decide” (Siebert, 1984: 51-52).

Libertarians believe that "...truth when allowed free rein will emerge victorious from any encounter" (Siebert, 1984: 70). It might be true. But the true sense of journalism, as public journalism proponents argue, is beyond presenting that truth. Rather, the central question remains how to engage for common interest and "enliven-rather than merely inform... [the] public" (Rosen, 1999: 69). For this reason libertarians' philosophy of self-righting process and free market place of ideas led by individual freedom and judgment is in the realm of only informing the public without worrying about how a public gets informed in the first place on a given issue. This is because they give due emphasis only on revealing a truth but forget about investigating the common sense of the public towards that truth. So how can people arrive at a sense of common interest and the media activate it?

2.7.2. Social Responsibility Theory of the Press

As Rosen (1999: 57) states "good journalism requires more than good journalists - even more than enlightened ownership and strong economic base." According to him, "without an engaged and concerned public even the most public-minded press cannot do its job." However, libertarians' philosophy of "self-righting" process seems primarily considers the public as the market for information and that struggles to form a society that gives due emphasis for private and separate affairs in expense of facing common problems.

Nevertheless, according to the same author "a public is something more than a market for information [and] an audience for spectacle" because publics are formed when committed to face common problems and to face each other in dialogue and discussion (Ibid). Hence here comes the difference between the principles of public journalism and the libertarians' philosophy of the media. Libertarians encourage journalists to declare neutrality so that they become only spectators in the public life. To the flip-side, public journalism encourages journalists to declare an end to their neutrality "on certain questions-for example: whether people participate, whether a genuine debate takes place when needed" and so forth for "public journalism tries to place the journalist within the political community as a responsible member with a full stake in public life" (Ibid).

Based on this, when we come to social responsibility theory, relatively, it shares common notions with public journalism than the libertarian theory of the press does. And alike public journalism this theory importantly supports the media to work on urging the public to take part into politics and public affairs. As Theodore Peterson states the major premise of social responsibility theory is that: “Freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under [a given] government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society” (1984: 74).

Most importantly some of the functions of the press which stated under social responsibility to realize this premise make this theory closer than the libertarian press theory to public journalism. One of the functions of the press and/or the media in general is that it should service “the political system by providing information, discussion and debate on public affairs” (Ibid). This function of the press is congruent with the idea of public journalism proponents as they justify the power of the press “depends on people’s willingness to attend to current issues, take responsibility of public things, and recognize the importance of what they hold in common” (Rosen, 1999: 74). Social responsibility theorists put at the forefront of the press functions that the press, in addition to informing, should serve the public activating debates in public affairs. Public journalism proponents like Rosen and Merritt, Jr. too state that “... common interest in common affairs cannot be secured simply by improving the presentation of news...” (Ibid) unless strategies designed that help to re-engage citizens in public affairs.

Similarly the Commission on Freedom of the Press, which had crucial role in formulating social responsibility theory of the press, heralded “merely reporting the news is insufficient.” Thus, according to the Commission, the press has to serve as “a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism” (Peterson, 1984: 89). Alike libertarians, in public journalism as well as in social responsibility theory of the press freedom of the media is always the requirement to function effectively. However, the argument is the application of that freedom should not urge journalists to remain detached just only for the matter of being in the vein of keeping objectivity in reporting.

According to Peterson social responsibility theory of the press too is born in the assumption of amending such 'insufficient' freedom of the media. Freedom of the press and/or the media under the context of libertarians is insufficient and ineffective because, according to social responsibility theorists, "libertarian theory was born of a concept of negative liberty" which they defined as "freedom from external restraint."

Negative liberty, according to social responsibility theory, is an "empty liberty; it is like telling a man that he is free to walk without first making sure that he is not crippled." On the contrary social responsibility theory rests on the concept of positive liberty or "freedom for." To be freedom effective, according to this view, "it is not enough to tell a man that he is free to achieve his goals; [moreover] one must provide him with the appropriate means of attaining those goals" (Peterson, 1984: 92-94).

Hence the Commission on Freedom of the Press states that "press freedom means freedom from and freedom for. A free press is free from all compulsions, although not from all pressures. It is free for achieving the goals defined by its ethical sense and by society's needs..." (Ibid). This is because freedom of expression under social responsibility theory, according to Peterson, is a moral right. And a moral right, as Hocking quoted in Peterson describes, is "a value which [one is] not free to relinquish, as [he is] free to relinquish a personal interest." In the words of Peterson too, "if one claims free expression as a right, he claims it for others as well as himself and he binds himself to respect their exercise of it.... It is a society's sole source of intelligence, the seeds from which progress springs" (Ibid). To realize this, therefore, public journalism should be exercised for public journalists work to ignite citizens need to "participate more intelligently in public life" and they believe journalism has a role in making public life work in such ways (Charity, 1995: 10).

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

3.1. The Research Design

This study requires the description and critical analysis of situations and activities along with the tenets of public journalism. Thereby, the qualitative method of enquiry is the research approach. This approach was appropriate for this study primarily because it encouraged the researcher's interaction with the subjects thus enabled him to gather a rich data out of observations along with discovering meanings attribute to events and activities (D. Porta and Keating: 2008: 29) in the newsrooms of these FM radio stations. The approach was equally essential to gather data through individual in-depth interviews with chief editors/managers and program coordinators of the FM radio stations; and focus group interviews with the journalists.

The study attempts to appraise practices that are triggering to create public sphere (one of the basic attributes of public journalism) for the audience to deliberate effectively on various issues. Hence, qualitative analysis was required to interpret data gathered through interviews (individual and focus-group), observation and from content analysis of broadcasts (Bray, 2008: 265).

To create an environment amenable to effective public deliberation the role of journalists to inspect issues to the public interest is crucial. For this reason, individual in-depth interviews with the editors (editor-in-chiefs and program or news editors) and focus group discussion with the journalists along with participant observations employed to this study to inspect whether the journalists and the editors are receptive to the idea of participatory journalism.

Furthermore, taking sample broadcasts from each FM radio station the study tried to appraise qualitatively whether these stations do have program production styles that encompass the attributes of public journalism. In so doing the combined efforts of these instruments and the extensive volume of literature reviewed herein (in the Chapter two) helped to investigate whether public journalism is a set of techniques which might be put to use in pursuit of the goals of these FM radio stations.

3.2. Data Collection Methods and Sampling

In qualitative research it is essential to use data collection methods that help the researcher to develop an open attitude in order to understand how others experience their situation. The followings data collection methods enabled the researcher to understand the specific organizational realities from the perspective of those involved in the study and occurring phenomena as they appear in the study area.

3.2.1. Primary Sources of Data

To answer the research questions of this study primary data was crucial. Thus In-depth Individual Interviews, Focus Group Discussions and Participant Observation have been selected for their immense role in qualitative research and/or to gather a rich primary data for the weaknesses in each method can be compensated by the strengths of another. The three techniques are treated one by one as follows.

3.2.1.1. Participant Observation

For this study participant observation was essential to observe (guided by the participant observation guidelines) and understand the meanings that journalists ascribe to their activities in the newsrooms in general and to their participatory journalism practices in particular (Maanen, et al, 1982). The researcher was working as an overt observer and his presence there as an observer did not make any difference. That was because most of the journalists working in the three FM radio stations were his ex-classmates (in his undergraduate studies) and ex-students thus they knew the researcher was doing his MA thesis, and hence it seems they did understand nothing would happen in relation to their activities or life. The participant observations dominantly conducted while the journalists were conducting vox-pops and in participating on discussions of pre and post-program productions with journalists.

3.2.1.2. In-depth Individual Interviews

The editors'/managers' and program coordinators' guidance as leaders and icons in bringing effective journalism practice is immense. Hence, for the researcher believed that the editors'/managers' and program coordinators' of the three FM radio stations are the appropriate stakeholders, he selected them purposively as informants, to explain their own perspectives and experiences based on policies of their respective stations on participatory program production and future plans in their policies. Therefore, for this study six persons (editors/mangers and program coordinators) from the three FM radio stations were asked.

Aiming at the detailed account of the participants' perspectives and experiences on the existing journalistic practice of their respective stations, the in-depth interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. And these informants were the appropriate sources to explain how they have been negotiating the professional challenges posed by participatory or/and public journalism like in the gatekeeping control over content.

3.2.1.3. Focus Group Discussions

The focus group discussions were helpful to this research to understand the journalists' reception towards the extended participatory journalism practice. In other words, the focus group discussions enabled the researcher to look at the ways in which journalists interpret the 'civic turn' in their working environment.

In selecting participants for the focus group discussions, journalists who usually prepare programs that invite active audience participation were selected with the use of purposive sampling technique for the researcher believed that they have been experiencing participatory journalism thus are at ease to brief its pros and cons deeply. And he had discussions with three focus groups. Each group had five members. Most importantly the focus group discussions enabled the researcher to generate more ideas within short time.

3.2.2. Secondary Source of Data

3.2.2.1. Content Analysis of Sample of Broadcasts

To analyze the contents of the programs in line with the theoretical explanation of public journalism the researcher selected a program (which ran for five weeks) from each FM radio stations. The programs were selected purposively based on their nature, comparatively, of the need for active public participation. Programs with participatory nature were selected because it is in such situation that one can clearly analyze activities and developments that can lead to public journalism practice. And it enabled the researcher to investigate; the present status of the programs, how they got that way (what has been happening in the past) and what will likely to happen in the future thus to elucidate features of those programs evaluating based on the theoretical explanations of public journalism too.

3.3. Analyzing the Data

As indicated earlier, the aim of this research is to discover the prospects and/or indicators for practicing public journalism and the nature of participatory journalism practice in the FM radio stations in Mekelle city. Thereby the data collected was qualitative and illustrative. Thus the mode of analysis was thematic coding based on the objectives and questions of the study.

To do so, all the individual and focus group interviews were tape-recorded. Then, I translated from Tigrigna and Amharic into English. Results obtained through FGDs, participant observation, content analysis of sample broadcasts and individual interviews were described and interpreted against existing realities on the ground and the principles and experiences of public journalism discussed in the review of the literature. The presentation of the data was then structured in a narrative form with pertinent quotations used to illustrate and serve as supporting evidence for the major findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the presentation and interpretation of findings of the thesis by analyzing the practices of participatory journalism in the FM radio stations in Mekelle city in terms of their role in creating public sphere and/or the prospects to practice public journalism in the long run. The study, as discussed in the aforementioned chapters, is qualitative - involving explanation and interpretation of results. Thus important issues pointed out in the literature review are also incorporated as part of the theoretical framework in the discussion of the research findings. The discussion of the findings treated under three parts as follows.

4.2. The Existing Nature of Participatory Journalism and Public Deliberation in the Three FM Radio Stations

4.2.1. Introduction

Applying the concepts of public journalism to the medium of radio primarily requires the involvement of the communities that are served by the output of the station. Public journalism is an effort to reach out to the public in the reporting process, to listen to how citizens frame their problems and what they see as solutions to those problems. Hence, decentralization of decision making from the perspective of the media which was traditionally centralized news gathering and distribution on public issues is a crucial activity (Merritt, 1998; Charity, 1995; Rosen, 1999).

4.2.2. Public deliberation that builds on shaky foundation

Access to the public sphere, alike other democratic nations in our country too, is open in principle to all citizens. As the results of focus group discussions reveal the journalists note that they accept this essence as part of their professional principle to practice it well. But to put this principle on the ground these news media organizations should primarily allow citizens to act as a public by urging them to deal with matters of general interest without subject to coercion. And

by guarantee them to express and publicize their opinions freely through, like, 'Live' programs and instigating their journalists to work with the public in different public issues. And there are such practices in these stations but are not managed in the true sense of participatory journalism or public journalism. Of course telling journalists what ought to be; to practice participatory journalism or public journalism hurriedly, as we can understand from the history of public journalism and observed in these FM radio stations too, is not something journalists could easily address for they had highly accustomed to covering news, rather than, in the words of Rosen, "rebuilding the logic on which the news was based" (Rosen, 1999: 25).

Moreover, as the results of focus group discussions from the three FM radio stations with the journalists and the content analysis of sample broadcasts along with the researcher's observation indicate, more or less, journalists prefer to have the public as partners in choosing topics or angles for their point(s) of discussion(s). This is, according to the informants, because they do believe that their audiences are not only spectators, but they need to act in the life of the community they are living in. On top of that, they do believe that the ordinary people can also have deeper understanding of their own fields and their community for they are immersed in the real environment of the issue under discussion. One participant from Focus Group two (FM DWT 102.2) asserted that:

The people are well enlightened in many aspects. In any sort of discussion agenda we have many participants who can deeply explain it. I think doing journalism with the participation of such people is a great opportunity for me as well as my colleagues. It [the participation of the public] really supports my activity as a journalist and my personal life too. Sometimes, even, the feeling of being less competent creep into my being since the participants enlighten me with concepts I have never and ever heard on a given issue I raised for discussion (in a focus group discussion, December 5, 2010).

Certainly this perception by itself can and is leading them to practice some principles of public journalism like the issue of empowering the public to point out what is wrong/right. However, public journalism that stemmed from the participation of citizens for they are given the opportunity only because journalists believe those participants know a lot than they do, jeopardizes the development of effective public sphere germinated from deliberation of ideas about solutions in the long run. This belief, because, in these stations is leading journalists to

consider some active participants as elite sources so that to provide them with special treatment. Rather than considering them as citizens that deserve place in the media equally with other ordinary people. This in turn, as the reality reveals in these radio stations, triggers journalists to create narrowly defined interest groups and to surrender their power and [especially] the majority of the public to decide on public issues to those cliques of the community. As Friedland, et al (1998) too argue, if public participation redeemed in this way the community will be divided into “problem groups,” (those needing help), and “problem solvers, [or] those professional groups and institutions oriented toward social problems.” Hence, according to these authors, this can result in the unintended consequence of marginalizing the general public whose cooperation is necessary to rebuild community life. This is because as many studies in public journalism show people do care and want to participate in public issues only when they feel they can make a difference in their participation.

In the two FM radio stations (i.e. 104.4 FM Mekelle and FM Dimtsi Weyane Tigray (DWT) 102.2) I have observed, for example, that journalist prepared callers, briefing them what to say on the issue under discussion, and to call them immediately their ‘Live’ program started pretending as if the participants were doing it themselves. A journalist, who prefers to remain anonymous, told me that they do this because it helps them to trigger the public to participate. Of course, such the journalists’ effort to initiate public participation is appreciable. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, public deliberation formed this way could be at shaky foundation because it is indirectly making the journalists and those group of people exclusive agenda setters on the behalf of the public. To the contrary public journalism requires journalists to seek solutions for the community problems together with the community without considering themselves as the ultimate agenda setters as well as decision makers along with some ‘elite’ sources (Charity, 1995).

Thus it is possible to say that the practice of public deliberation in these news media is at its infancy and requires a lot of effort to incur than ever to bring effective public sphere. This is because, on top of that, still most journalists are practicing participatory journalism for the reason that the custom of practicing journalism in their respective stations by itself forced them to do so. Most journalists are conformist, complying with organizational customs just only to minimize

conflict than considering them as their working philosophy. For instance a member of focus group one (104.4 FM Mekelle) states that;

As long as I joined the station willingly I have to admit the duties assigned to me. For this reason I have many programs that have to be done instigating the public to participate. To tell you frankly, however, I am doing that not because I imagined the public as the ultimate decision maker in the issue I raise. Rather I know journalists in this station should work in this way thereby I have to abide by that custom to survive. Unless it is easy for me to imagine what will follow if I am not doing my job according to the principles or 'house style' of the station (in a focus group discussion, December 8, 2010).

On top of that the manager of the station, Yikum Haile, similarly in a personal interview notes that he cannot guarantee that the journalists are working the way participatory journalism requires. He says;

We can say our journalists' confidence to question public officials for the public need and to work with the community is boosting through time. But since most of them do not have the experience in the practical arena of journalism, I can't assure you that they are at the required position to practice participatory journalism effectively. I feel and it is easy for me to observe that the journalists lack some basic qualities necessary for effective application of participatory journalism (Translation own, December 15, 2010).

Hence, this indicates that, to bring effective public participation in a media, primarily, journalism practitioners should clearly know the role of citizens in journalism and should believe that they deserve a bigger place in the media. To the flip-side it is what most journalists are missing in these news media.

4.2.3. Beacon of light in the murky situation

Though, most journalists are not at the requisite mental make-up in practicing participatory journalism, when the researcher weigh up them based on the principles of participatory journalism, but he found, it does not definitely imply there are no public deliberations these days at all. For instance, since most of their programs are open for 'Live' public discussions, people,

at least, are free to speak their minds, though, as some informants note, some do not phone with a strong commitment to contribute for developing solutions for the problem under discussion.

Such phone-in programs also, at least, do have the advantage to connect people who do not know each other but share an interest, and provide for more community dialogue, more interpersonal communication too, and thereby strengthen the ties of communities of interest. As vice program coordinator of FM DWT 102.2, Yemane Beyene, states it is also becoming the usual happening in their station. He says,

To tell you from my experience, ‘Live’ discussions are crucial mechanisms to connect the people together. I observe participants with different views trying to convince one another sympathetically. I also observe participants who share an interest reach on consensus in a settled spirit. Therefore, they are playing pivotal role in creating friendly relationships between and/or among participants. I know, for example, two participants, who did never know each other, become best friends since they met repeatedly in our ‘Live’ discussions (Translation own; from personal interview, December 10, 2010).

However, again the basic issue is, unless journalists committed to support the community with the feeling that they do have a stake to do so, it is very difficult to realize democratically networked form of communication sustainably. According to Merrill, et al, “it is not enough to be free of interferences by others or to be free from external control or coercion.” To be freedom effective, people should use it to do positive, socially responsible things (2001: 40). Thus, public journalism argues journalists should strive to urge the public to be beneficiary of it by assuming stake in the public issues rather than choosing detachment only for the mere concept of keeping objectivity. In public journalism the primary goal is to develop conversation or discussion than objectivity and “facticity.” To accomplish this task quickly, since most of the journalists are not at the right spirit for the moment, therefore, these news media required to engage in the activities of empowering their stakeholders in different ways for the long run. Of which building the capacities of the community members to use media technologies and developing the workforce through skills training and content production are the basic ones.

To this respect, there are some promising activities that will help to create active participant citizens in public issues. With regards to the task of building the capacity of community

members to use media technologies, there are some encouraging plans started by 104.4 FM Mekelle. According to the manager of the station, Yikum Haile, in their five year strategic plan they do have the plan to change their radio frequency from 104.4 to 96.4. This is because, according to him, for FM radios, if the frequency is in between 88 to 90s it makes easy for listeners to adjust the frequency using any kinds of radio sets. For example, 104.4 is around the end of the frequency plate thus it is relatively difficult to tune into it in small size radio sets. Moreover, they do have the plan to develop their transmitter power from 2 kilo watts to 3 kilo watts in order to cover large areas thereby to reach the “voiceless” at the outskirts of the city (Mekelle). Most importantly after doing that, according to him, they planned to distribute radio sets for free for people in rural areas, where their coverage reaches, and/or for those who cannot afford to buy.

In public journalism the basic goal of empowering the public basically aimed at enabling citizens to make and understand media as a tool for personal and community issues expression and deliberation especially working with those considered as the voiceless. In such a way that, this plan, too, is an encouraging starting point to reach those outside the mainstream media and to provide voice for the voiceless thus to inspire audiences to take action leading to socio-economic and political deliberation transformation.

Besides, according to public journalism proponents, outreaching is the other mechanism which can be taken as way of successfully engaging the community. Outreaching is the activity of asking people what they need and inviting them to come together to meet those needs. As community radio experts note, the key to creating relevant outreach is researching what the community needs and determining how to reach it most effectively. Too, regarding this concept there are some promising activities especially in the two FM radio stations (i.e. Fana FM 94.8, Mekelle and FM DWT 102.2). As Fana FM 94.8 (Mekelle) program coordinator and ‘Hello Fana’ ‘Live’ discussion program producer, Meseret Tadese notes that, his or other participatory programs in their station get on air after, in his own words, “in-depth” assessment of the public’s needs. According to him, they may have enough information about a given issue from official sources. But since that may not guarantee it is the public need too, they always confirm whether

the issue is up to the public need talking to the community through various mechanisms like observation and phoning to individuals or groups ‘close’ to the issue. He, moreover, asserts;

We need our community to listen our radio over others with convincing reasons to do so. Not just because the listener finds our frequency suddenly while tuning his/her radio set. For our aim is to move the relationship between our community and our station beyond consumption to a sphere for community issue deliberation, the community is not expected to be only a good listener but also expected to be effective participant. Thus, how can we do this unless we ask people what they need (personal interview, 15/12/2010, translation own)?

Similarly, in order to work based on the preferences of the community, vice program coordinator of FM DWT 102.2, Yemane Beyene, noted that they are conducting audience research. According to him the aim of the research is to assess the satisfaction of the audience on existing programs and to identify the level of the public need for additional participatory program(s). For these reasons if these media stations strengthen these practices along with the awareness of their journalists towards public deliberation, they can create an informed citizen in the near future. As we can understand from the history of American (the origin of public journalism) public journalism practices, because, it was in such identical ways that the practice of public journalism was crept into the day-to-day routine of the news media.

Generally speaking, as we can understand from the history of public journalism (see chapter two), it invented through a series of practical experiments in different media houses (Rosen, 1999; 36-39). For this reason, Friedland has divided the development of public journalism into three phases: 1) experimentation and innovation; 2) a movement identity formation and; 3) routinization (Friedland, 2003: 129-130 cited in Laura Ruusunoksa, 2006: 4). The first phase refers to the diffusion of some journalism practices which take place from the perspective of citizens. At this stage of public journalism practice news media organizations attempt to develop their daily and weekly routine with some interactive approaches with ordinary citizens. Along with this they may try to develop a regular contact with the public through, like, audience research to expand the scope of their public issue coverage.

Hence, based on this concept and with reference to the activities of these news media discussed so far, it is possible to say the diffusion of some public journalism ideas and practices has by now taken place to some degree. That means based on their contemporary participatory methods of journalism practices these news stations are struggling to secure the first phase of public journalism.

4.3. Critical Analysis of Prospects Whether these Media Will Pertain to the Pursuits of Public Journalism in their Daily Routine: The Perspective of Journalists and the Management Group

4.3.1. Introduction

To see the prospects whether these FM radio stations will strengthen their participatory journalism practice and will practice public journalism in its truest sense in the near future is mainly dependent on the journalists' reaction and the willingness of media houses to rethink their house styles from the perspective of the community.

This is because media institutions can play the role of facilitators in their communities, demystifying the process of production, providing people with access to the processes they need, building on the history and goals of public journalism. This role, however, requires media institutions to rethink traditional journalism and may entail the rebalancing of editorial policies – committing to diversity, embracing egalitarian values, reassessing the value of editorial neutrality, and inviting community members to help with story coverage more reflective of the community (<http://www.benton.org>, retrieved on 20/7/2010).

4.3.2. The realm of detached independence or engaged independence: deciding the place of journalists

Public journalism proponents asserted that, to practice effective public journalism, primarily, it is better to ensure whether journalists are receptive to and/or internalize the idea of public participation. That means before they plan to do journalism with the cooperation of the public, media organizations, should understand journalists' outlook whether they view the public as the partner of their journalism practices. Moreover, it requires editors to rethink how they can negotiate the professional challenges posed by public journalism - like the gatekeeping control over the content and their willingness to shoulder additional tasks other than decision making.

Just as a reminder with regards to the first point, one thing here one should understand is that when the researcher says journalists view of participatory journalism [in the context of this study] it does not imply a mere total shift in their reporting activities or practices, but rather a shift of awareness of the need to create public sphere for civic life. Based on this, the general view among journalists across the three FM radio stations seems widely accepted the citizen-oriented approach as the way of doing good journalism. A participant from Focus Group two states;

As a journalist I may not always expected to inform the public at a face value. There has to be a sort of analysis in my report based on the public feeling towards the issue I supposed to cover. But the analysis may not always be done only by me; I need somebody from the community with the expertise who can do it well because I know that should not be me who is supposed to set the last resort on issues of discussions. And I think that is the right way to do good journalism; to cooperate with the public with concern (in a focus group discussion, December 5, 2010).

Moreover, a group of journalists' view with regards to their relation with the public interviewed in the three FM radio stations can be summarized as; largely, they feel that they have got closer to the people through time for many reasons; people have become more enlightened, and become curious to contact them through e-mail or phone to appreciate for their good deeds as well as to comment on their weaknesses. To borrow words of an informant:

The public proves that it maintains due concern to our activities by appreciating when we perform well and commenting when we slipped away, in some cases, from our objectives; through mail, e-mail and phone (personal interview, December 20, 2010; translation own).

Moreover, journalists do believe that the audience has become more enlightened and demanding stories that impact public life thereby poses challenges for public service orientation. Based on these evidences the researcher can conclude that the journalists place citizens input, at least in principle, at the center of their journalistic concerns. In such a way that this trend is also crucial to strengthen the practice of participatory journalism for it urges to connect journalists with the community within which they operate. Hence, to this respect these FM radio stations, knowingly or unknowingly, are serving or practicing an aspect of participatory journalism from the realm of media-public connection. Nevertheless, the question is; is getting closer to the public, without the intention of working in a close-knit relationship, by itself is enough or a guarantee for the news media to engage their citizens in a true deliberation that leads to problem solving?

The mere concept of creating connections with the public without considering challenges in the practice of public journalism that those who wish to embrace this form of journalism must reckon may build public participation on shaky foundation. In the practice of public journalism, maintaining independence and trustworthiness while following open door policy is the main challenge for news media. This is because, as discussed in the literature review, participatory journalism is an essential trend of journalism for the public. However, disruptive it may be for those whose roles are changing - i.e. journalists and editors. The rationale is that this trend urges the public to raise new questions of trust and credibility, and verification.

The most obvious difference between participatory journalism and traditional journalism is the different structure and organization that produce them. The tenets of traditional journalism give due concern to the concepts of “impartiality” and “objectivity” in reporting than active involvement of the public. To the contrary in public journalism the concern of citizens tend to become the primary concern of journalists. For this reason it is challenging to practice good participatory journalism or to advance into public journalism quickly because most journalists do

not have clear idea in what ways the public may raise the question of trust and credibility against their media.

As the results of the three focus group discussions indicate most journalists assume that they can secure the trust and willingness of the public to participate in their media for they merely provide the public the opportunity to speak. However, to practice participatory journalism effectively, in addition to giving the opportunity to speak, journalists should be good catalysts or leaders of discussions, good investigators to identify ills of the public that can fit to intense public deliberation and should develop curiosity to gather perspectives from various public spaces. In such involvement, therefore, public journalists should seek to provide solutions to community problems as much as possible. Thus, according to Russell (1998), public journalists become more ends-oriented journalists, where journalists were previously means-oriented. In other words, public journalists expected to guide their audience how to find solutions for the problems rather than merely presenting solutions gathered from only experts. Herbert Gans (1998) cited in Merrill, et al (2001), too, advised that journalists need to get away from the idea that only supplying information to the public will lead to democracy.

Of course, in these media, there are some ‘Live’ discussion programs like, “Agebe’e” (አገብኦ) by FM DWT 102.2, “Hello Fana” by Fana FM 94.8, Mekelle and “Ewanawi Zete” (እዋናዊ ዘተ) by 104.4 FM Mekelle that issues sometimes continue for series of weeks as long as possible solutions developed for the issue(s) under discussion. This is a typical example for public journalism and/or ends-oriented journalism practice. For these activities meet one of the basic tenets of public journalism, as identified by Merritt (1996), that they move beyond the limited mission of “telling the news” to a broader mission of helping public life go forward by letting them to speak their minds. However, in developing solutions, though ordinary citizens would be welcomed to forward their own solutions, the journalists do not accept them as part of the final solution unless an expert says so whether the issue needs the approval of that expert or not. In doing so, on the other hand, they are defying the basic tenet of public journalism or participatory journalism which argues that people should be considered as potential actors in arriving at democratic solutions to public issues.

The journalists do that, as the researcher understands from the focus group discussions and interviews, because they believe in inviting experts for the conclusions of every issue strengthens the public's trust on their media. In the words of a participant from focus group three;

I understand that practicing participatory journalism implies working on behalf of the community thereby to bring issues and news that will be important to decide. But when I lead discussions I prefer to detach myself from commenting or proposing solutions for the issue. I rather prefer to invite experts or professionals in the area to propose solutions for I think the public trusts them than me (in a focus group discussion, December 25, 2010).

That means the participatory journalism they are doing now does not have substantial impact on their behavior. For these reasons journalists' clear understanding of the difficulties and challenges in the practice of public journalism is at the forefront of the basic requirements to practice public journalism effectively. The more journalists understand how to maintain the issues of "trust" and "impartiality" in the context of ends-oriented journalism, the more they internalize the essence of public participation in the decision making process. Even, it can urge journalists to provide the priority to ordinary citizens than to the so-called insiders or/and gatekeepers to decide.

Moreover, the concept of objectivity is the other issue that is hindering journalists from practicing public journalism in its truest form. According to Russell (1998: 20), "regardless of whether it is a debate about public journalism or any other aspect of profession, objectivity is continually debated because there are many ways to define objectivity." According to Merrill and others, conventional or traditional journalists take objectivity as a detached and unbiased objective approach to reporting. Thereby, it prohibits the journalist from any involvement in community issues or in an event that the journalist covers though he/she leads discussions. Similarly working journalists in the three FM radio stations are in this realm of objectivity. All participants of the focus groups do believe that they build the credibility of their media while they cover discussions with detachment and neutrality rather than thinking of themselves as active and fair-minded participants in public life. Thus, though journalists wish that the issue they raise would have an impact on the public agenda, however, they are hesitant about starting to promote certain solutions as active citizens.

According to Merritt (1998), covering issues with active participation of the public or practicing public journalism is more than just changes in techniques of reporting of how media cover stories. It requires the media to understand the purpose of involving the public actively at first place. Taking this assumption into account, the researcher dares to say these FM radios' journalists are at the infant stage of participatory journalism practices to justify 'why' they are working for the active involvement of the public in their reporting. And they are still in the vein of practicing journalism in detachment. But according to Rosen (1999: 75), public journalism tries to place the journalist within the political community as a responsible member with a full stake in the public life and requires them to acknowledge their immense role in the political process. To achieve this goal, journalists must clearly understand why they are doing participatory journalism beyond asserting merely, as one informant says; because that is the policy of the news station he is working in.

4.3.3. Are editors receptive to the idea of the 'civic turn'?

The other issue that should be articulated under this part is the editors'/managers'/program coordinators' willingness to relinquish or to compromise some rights for the purpose of maintaining public debate. For this purpose managers and program coordinators of the three FM radio stations were interviewed. With regarding to this concept the responses are almost similar. Almost all of them do believe that in order to practice participatory journalism they required to participate in the day-to-day routine of news coverage with their journalists in addition to their primary task of decision making.

They note that most of their journalists are novice for the practical arena of journalism in general and participatory journalism in particular. They have to be always with them to show how to work in hassled situations posed by participatory journalism. And as managers they do have managerial tasks. But they asserted that they enjoy when they found themselves in different tasks because they strongly believed that is the way they should do as long as their goal is to help the public to express itself through their media. As Merritt, et al (2001: 112) state, cooperation and mutual respect in the newsroom is a tenet of public journalism. "In fact it may well be," according to them, "the starting point of the public journalist's concern." This is for the reason

that, according to Christians, et al (1993) quoted in Merrill, et al (2001); the editor in dialogue with trusted colleagues can build a news team united on goals of judgment, empowerment and care for the voiceless.

Furthermore, in practicing participatory journalism, the informants (the editors) know they should compromise some professional issues like the gatekeeping control over content. The informants noted that 60-75 per cent of their programs are covered with 'Live' discussions. In these programs anyone is free to speak his/her feelings. No one can thwart their opinions from being on air whether those are decent or not. However, the informants stated that they are committed to strengthen the practice of participatory journalism regardless of its professional challenges on them.

Thus, than the journalists, the editors/program coordinators across the three news media recognize the challenges and benefits of participatory journalism/or public journalism well. They know well what kinds of professional challenges they face. They know well too, what they and their audience will benefit from surrendering some of their exclusive powers and then audience participation scale up. That, too, is the maximum price they are expected to pay at this stage of participatory journalism. Hence, from those stakeholders perspective there is encouraging and/or optimistic mental shift that surely help to destine in the sphere of the truest form of public journalism practices. Their commitment regarding trying to get more people to participate in their respective radio stations is in line with the basic tenet of public journalism, which promotes the need for the media to help the public re-engage in public life (Rosen, 1999; Merritt, 1998; Merrill, et al, 2001; Charity, 1995).

4.4. Envisioning the Future of Democratic Communication Process: the Perspective of Tenets of Public Journalism

4.4.1. Introduction

Proponents of public journalism like Merritt and Rosen indicate that media reporting should include more of the voices of everyday activities of the people since their topic of discussion can affect their community in many aspects for media effect is ubiquitous. According to this view, one of the media's roles in a society is to defend minority views or to be willing to take unpopular stands. To mean that if the media reduce the number of voices it gathers with respect to a given issue, obviously, there will be fewer diverse views hence less active dialogue. As a result of which it can create a breathing space for public officials to be less answerable to public preferences since the public lacks the opportunity to access and/or ask them.

4.4.2. The participant as a prime mover to bring democratic public sphere

Viewing the discussion under this part from the essence of the aforementioned concept, there are some journalistic approaches resemble to principles of public journalism in the three FM radio stations. Of course, these days, the practices are not integrated into the general day-to-day news coverage of the stations. Yet, there are some programs across these stations that hint they are moving into incorporating some of the principles of public journalism into their journalism practices.

“Hello Fana” (a program from Fana FM 94.8, Mekelle) for instance, is a program which bids for the people to point out wrong doings or commendable activities of any aspect they know or observe in the city that fit for good public deliberation. Before they get into the discussion, the journalists first gather the opinions of the people through phone and letters to identify which angle of the issue to discuss and the concerned body/bodies to be consulted on the issue. Then the journalists inform the concerned bodies in advance that they will have discussion(s) on issue(s) related to their activities so that to follow the program. According to the chief producer of the program and program coordinator of the station, Meseret Tadesse, they do that because it

helps them to develop trust among the public, public officials and with them (the program producers). And to assure the public officials that the opinions or questions are directly from the public. After the discussion held between the journalists and the public, then concerned bodies will be invited to the studio to have their say concerning the questions of the public and to discuss on the issue directly with the audience.

To be precise, let's see an instance how the program takes place. In the program which was on air on 12/12/2010, the researcher was in the studio as a participant observant. At that time the issue under discussion was about construction problems of Mekelle city - like design problems of buildings, qualities of the raw materials used and causes of conflicts between some owners and architects/contractors. The first two weeks (two programs) were open for the opinions, comments and questions of the public. And at the third week (third program concerning the issue) professionals in the area and concerned bodies (from construction and transport authority) were invited to the studio to discuss on the issues raised by the public.

In that specific program there were diverse speakers and viewpoints. But the professionals and authorities in some aspects were not trying to discuss the issue deeply the way the public inquires. Since the program was 'Live', however, some participants were asking some probing questions and ignite them to get delve into the issue. Fortunately, this program (Hello Fana) was part of the sample programs for content analysis for this thesis. In most issues it raises, more or less, the program treats the audience as active participants. Among others most of the discussing issues in the sample broadcasts were chosen on the basis of participants priorities. Moreover, in this program one can easily observe the audience's opportunity for the exercise of freedom of expression and the right to participate. Anyone who wants to say something with regards to the issue under discussion is free to do so, whatsoever his/her opinion is. Participants were free to use their community-derived potential to contribute positively to the progress and harmony of the group in the discussion. And "active participation for the good of the community: that is the objective, and the basis of freedom" (Merrill, et al, 2001: 40). Thus, because of these and other related reasons with regards to this specific program, the researcher can conclude that it is at the verge of practicing public journalism. The rationale is that, as discussed in the literature review, public journalism, chiefly, is instigated from the value and power of participatory journalism

which derives from the active participation of many people like this one. And by networked communities that value conversations and collaboration for valuable ideas.

Likewise, “Agebe’e” (አገብኛ) which means “dialogue” is a ‘Live’ program presented by Dimtsi Weyane Tigray (DWT) FM 102.2 that aimed at facilitating open discussions about socio-political and economic issues among the people. This program does have identical way of presentation with the aforementioned one. According to the journalists who are handling the program, in any kind of discussion issue there is high public participation and they noted that it seems the participants are beginning to conceptualize that their participation is vital to the socio-political and economic life of their communities.

“Mequleb”(መቼለብ) is the other participatory program in this radio station (DWT FM 102.2), which is also part of my sample broadcasts for content analysis. In this program the point of discussion mostly set by the journalist based on his observation. Thus in this program the journalist, almost always, supposed to cover off-diary stories. Off-diary stories are stories that are not going to be notified to the news desk. Therefore, they are more difficult to come by. Such kinds of stories requires the journalist to be more creative and to keep his/her eyes and ears to open for happenings that are to the best interest of the public and/or tempting for intense public deliberation.

This nature of the program, the chief producer Kiros Gebreyesus believes, helps him to develop the habit of talking to ordinary people to get perspectives from them in his walk of life. According to the philosophy of public journalism too, citizens act as public when they deal with matters of general interest without marginalizing their voices. This objective will also be achieved when journalists work with ordinary people, like this one, considering them as the real sources of community issues of discussion than merely talking only to public officials instead. Furthermore, in this program, discussion(s) about a certain issue will carry on for series of programs until consensus takes place among the majority of participants or encouraging reactions observed from concerned bodies if the discussion was about weak sides of a given entity.

As Merritt states, public journalism is a kind of journalism that does have a purpose beyond telling the news. According to him, “if journalism to serve the public well, the problem should be solved [hence] journalists expected to have a lasting stake in the society” (1998, 121-123). Likewise, the producer of the program noted that he did not remember any issue that wrapped-up without developing solution(s) based on the suggestions from participants and experts. According to him such practice is also urging the community to engage in public life. He added that these days, just to elaborate the issue under discussion well, most participants are free even to tell their personal secrets enthusiastically. Correspondingly, moving from a private to public voice in this way, proponents of public journalism state, can help the public to develop their self-expression into a form of public participation which considers the altruistic essence of sharing others problems. This activity, too, is a situational cue that people are beginning to look beyond their individual missions to the common social and political values they have in common.

“Zete ab Ewanawi Guday” (.....) which means “discussion on current issues,” from 104.4 FM Mekelle, is also a comparable program to the aforementioned programs. The primary aim of the program is to diagnose the reactions of the public on a given current issue. According to the coordinator of the program, the discussion agenda can be any kind of issue- whether it is political, economic or social as long as it is a talking point in the community. It is a ‘Live’ program so that anyone can forward his/her comments and/or opinions. The program was part of the sample broadcasts for the content analysis. While analyzing it, the researcher found that participants were free to comment, exchange advises to each other about their responsibilities in the community too. In this specific program the researcher came across some situational cues that signify those who deliberate in the program were acting for or representing the community. Above all the program provides the public the opportunity to inform and express itself.

On top of that, in most issues of the discussions in this program, relatively, the public was free to comment deeply on the issues than the journalists and invited experts/or guests do. Whether it is because of self-censorship, or may be because of the reasons discussed in part one of this section or any other reason(s), journalists did not immerse themselves in the issue alike the public. Even sometimes journalists, knowingly or unknowingly, marginalize some of the important points of

the issues under discussion but the participants press them to delve into the points by asking some probing questions.

This, hence, indicates the participation of the public proves for the journalists that it is not only what experts want to tell the public is necessary for good decision making: what ordinary people want to tell the experts and the journalists, too, is indispensable element (Charity, 1995: 7). Additionally, the participation of the public proves the basic essence of public journalism, which asserts, borrowing the words of Rosen, “it is not what the ‘eternal’ principles of journalism basically guide what to do. But the people tell what they need from the profession too” (Rosen, 283-93). To be more precise, as Merrill, et al (2001) assert, the situation confirms, the public can determine good journalism (more reflective of community values) just as well, if not better, than journalists.

For these reasons, the practices in these programs show situational cues that these media are heading to the duty of developing democratic communication process [since democracy can be defined as the process of deciding things together] thereby are cementing the foundation for public journalism practices in some parts of their programs. Public journalism is about telling citizens how to make their voices heard and portraying democracy in the fullest sense thus it chiefly requires an engaged public (Rosen, 1999: 178). To achieve this tenet in the long run, news media should permit citizens to use their communication media; because access and participation of citizens are the two central concepts for the democratization of communication. The same implies here. Since access and participation of citizens are strengthening through time, citizens are also building their knowledge base needed for active and productive engagement in public affairs. This is because the public in these programs was participating in a manner of conscious engagement in the issues rather than acting as passive participants. And that is what public journalism wants: more social discipline, cooperation and order (Merrill, et al, 2001: xviii).

This situation basically is triggering to anticipate that it could possibly urge the media to be overwhelmed with the task of bringing transparency between the public and public officials. For the public voice of individuals, aggregated and in dialogue with the voices of other individuals,

is a fundamental practice of developing influential public opinion. When public opinion develops from open, rational and critical debate among the public it has the power to influence policy makers. It can also be an essential instrument of democratic self-governance. The researcher, too, is optimistic that it is in such ways the formation of democratic process from the grass root level will come true in our country. For conversation is the key to democratic progress. When the media create breathing space for series of serious dialogues between citizens and leaders, that means, they are practicing democracy that builds on, in Rosen's (1995) terminology, "public politics." That is, a politics based on citizen engagement that aimed at the exchange of comments and criticisms in the society to one another (Russell, 1998). Too, though, it is not in an integrated manner, as indicated in the aforementioned discussions, there are some encouraging media practices in these FM radio stations that can help to support democratic dialogue among the public as well as between the public and public officials.

4.4.3. The nature of communication in the newsrooms

The basic tenet and/or aim of public journalism is to let citizens and journalists work together in search for solutions to the issues/problems facing the communities. To do so, therefore, it is critical for news media to restructure their news rooms in a way that help to create connection with their alienated communities. "None hierarchical news rooms are almost mandatory for good public journalism," said Gil Thelen, executive editor of the *State* newspaper in Columbia in 1990s (as quoted in Johnson, 1998: 124).

As result of which issues coverage desired to refocus away from beats based "faceless institutions to issues about which citizens cared deeply" (Ibid). Likewise, in most of their issues coverage these FM radio stations are not reliant on the coverage of only the agendas of bureaucrats and government insiders. Even in covering meetings and conferences, program coordinator of Mekelle Fana FM 94.8 Meseret Tadesse states, they emphasize on angles or issues that seek common ground and values from the community in decision-making rather than only merely describing or informing the situation in "a she said, he said," traditional formula of reporting. In the words of Meseret:

We do not stand to advocate government official's reports reported in a certain meeting to the public. Or only informing what is reported. Our objective is to enlighten our audiences with the substance(s) of the reports in the meeting in their day-to-day activities thereby to seek opinions and comments for further discussions (personal interview, December 20, 2010; translation own).

Covering issues considering their effect on the public life, the informants noted, does have tremendous benefits in urging them to cover the concerns of citizens in their everyday activities.

The command-and-control system of management is not usually observed in these FM radio stations. As Meseret asserted, editorial meetings are open for all journalists working in the station and inputs are expected from them on everything raised concerning the station. According to him in doing so they believe the journalists can share experiences to each other and help to create deliberative news room. This activity is crucial for media that prefer to work with close collaboration with the community. For, according to Johnson (1998), developing willingness to collaborate internally on what they do is necessary to understand collaboration within the broader community they serve.

Moreover, public journalism proponents highlight that developing democratic behavior within the newsroom helps journalists to discuss issues they have observed in their walk of life with their colleagues freely and then to develop issues that invite active public deliberation. Similarly Kiros Gebreyesus "Mequleb" (.....) program producer in FM DWT 102.2 confirmed that as a program producer he has his own priorities and agendas to handle. But the freedom to discuss any issue with his colleagues and the management and the managers' curiosity to work with the journalists helps him to be nosy for any situation in the community because the discussion with his colleagues empowered him to find 'noble' ideas out of issue which seems 'trash' and usual. He moreover states;

I do have the freedom and opportunity to discuss what I feel regarding my program with program managers as well as other reporters/journalists. Hence, that helps me to grasp new insights how to handle my program in different situations (personal interview, December 23, 2010; translation own).

This is because, according to Kiros, ideas are not limited by the management team rather the lion's share to set the agenda left for him and the audience.

Moreover, according to Yikum Haile the manager of 104.4 FM Mekelle, journalists are free to cover any issue they think that is up to the public need. He noted that honesty is the central element in their journalistic activity in the station. Journalists in the station likewise stated that their manager respects open discussion of ideas so that it encourages them to cover the needs of the community. This norm of the stations helps the journalists to develop journalism practice driven primarily by ideas rather than production deadlines. As long as consensus is not derived and/or solutions fetched with the discussion of the audience, discussion on a given issue may not come to an end only in one or two periods of programs. Such practice, hence, is self-explanatory that these FM radio stations are heading to the practice of ends-oriented journalism which is the central philosophy of public journalism.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion and Scope for Further Study

5.1. Conclusion

This study has been conducted with the aim of assessing the prospects of public journalism practices in the FM radio stations and/or practices in creating public sphere at a local context through the application of public journalism practices. The process of forecasting and/or assessing whether these FM radios will pertain to the pursuit of public journalism has been assessed based on the existing practices of participatory program production.

Thereby, since the study requires description and analysis of situations and activities of the media along with the tenets of public journalism, qualitative data collection and analysis method was employed. In the researcher's attempt to meet the objectives of the study he employed participant observations, focus group discussions, individual in-depth interviews and content analysis of sample programs/broadcasts. Participant observations the researcher conducted in the newsrooms, while journalists conduct 'Live' programs, and outside the newsroom while they do 'vox-pops,' were helpful for they enabled him to gather first hand information concerning the journalists' day-to-day activities in practicing participatory journalism. The role of the individual in-depth interviews to gather the necessary data for the study was immense. Managers/program coordinators, of the news media under the study, are the prime movers in many activities of their media, thus, the interviews were of great value to the study for they enabled the researcher to understand their perceptions and experiences regarding participatory journalism. The focus group discussions, moreover, helped him to look at the ways in which journalists interpret the 'civic turn' in their participatory program production. The content analysis, too, was crucial to get concrete instances regarding the current status of participatory journalism in the media and to elucidate features of the programs based on the tenets of public journalism.

Based on the analysis so far, the researcher found that there are some activities that signify these FM radio stations are integrating the first phase of public journalism practices.

In the first phase of public journalism practices it is not customary to observe news media practicing journalism based on all major tenets of public journalism in their short and long term practices in an integrated manner. But in this phase it is possible to scrutinize some activities that do have the potential to narrow the increasing gap between journalism /or the media and the public. Likewise, in these news media there are optimistic practices that are triggering towards practicing public journalism in its truest form. And the researcher was at ease of observing some activities that do have the potential to prepare fertile grounds to plant the culture of democratic public deliberation in the community.

Since most of their air time covered with phone-in programs, these news media are playing pivotal role in maintaining the right to free speech through their 'Live' discussions. These 'Live' and open discussions, as the researcher could understand from the sample programs for content analysis and from his observation, are enabling the society to hold public officials accountable. The rationale is that, in most of the 'Live' discussions the public does have the opportunity to confront them. Moreover, these deliberative natured programs are with tremendous help to ignite the empathetic value of sharing community problems [which public journalism basically stands for] in the public. As long as they are given the opportunity, most participants share information, knowledge and values in a heightened state of concern. Thus, some of the participatory programs of these news media demonstrated that it is possible to organize communications in a much more democratic manner through such interactive nature of programs. Moreover, their newsroom communication deserves appreciation.

The editors'/program coordinators' good intent to practice participatory journalism in an extended manner and willingness to shoulder the challenges it may pose on their activities is the other concern that signifies optimistic future of public journalism in these media stations. The editors/managers and program coordinators regard participatory journalism as a necessary advancement the way journalism should be done for they believe in the active participation of citizens, if journalism to help the public to decide on its issues. They consider participatory journalism as a breathing space to provide voice for the voiceless thereby to create effective public sphere based on diversified views of the community. And they are making considerable

efforts to harvest citizen participation in a variety of ways that indicate a keen attempt at participatory program production.

Primarily, regardless of the professional challenges it poses; like surrendering the gatekeeping control over the contents, they are dedicated for the active participation of citizens. In most cases they are at ease in welcoming the audience's comments. This is because they believed the public will bring unique angles of coverage crucial for the community if provided unlimited access to the media without any coercion. They, moreover, noted that active participation of citizens helps to penetrate more into the community happenings. On top of that they help their journalists in many aspects. They share the burdens of journalists in the process of idea gathering and handling discussions. And, in doing so, they are sharing their experiences to the journalists how to defy the challenges they may face while practicing participatory journalism. The effort to plan more deliberative programs and the struggle to equip themselves materially and with the know-how of participatory journalism to work with the public more closely is the other considerable issue. In promoting civic engagement in the community they facilitate and conduct audience researches.

But these FM radio stations are missing some things essential for the practice of public journalism on their journalists' clear understanding of the essence of participatory journalism. Although, journalists do have positive attitude towards participatory journalism, their know-how of public participation and the effort to apply the ideas is not at the right form. Of course journalists believed that people have become more enlightened thus that paves a way for active participation. And they noted that the peoples' active participation supports their practices for it creates an easier route towards accessing news sources. Nevertheless they do not have active role in proposing and leading their audiences towards solutions regarding the issue under discussion. They are passive participants. They noted they do not have a stake in the process of leading their participants to deliberation about solutions for they believed that can threat their impartiality and objectivity in reporting.

To the contrary, according to the leading public journalism proponents like Rosen (1999), Charity (1995) and Merritt (1998), it is difficult for public journalists or participatory journalists truly understand their role as citizens and journalism practitioners who seek solutions for the

community problems together with the community without some form of involvement in the process of developing solution(s). Thus these scholars note it is no longer enough to gather, report, and explain the news. In the context of participatory journalism or public journalism journalists expected to “convene” their communities in public discussions of troublesome issues. But, alike, traditional journalists, journalists in these news media try to separate their personal relationships from what they cover for they believed their reporting can be more independent and their journalism performs best when it sticks to it.

5.2. Scope for Further Research

The result of the analysis has indicated that there are some good practices which are conducive for public journalism practice. Nevertheless, the journalists are not at the right mental make-up to apply the essence of participatory journalism as effectively as possible, though they do have positive attitude towards the active participation of the public. What will be the factors? Is that because they accustomed to the traditional journalism principles like the concepts of objectivity, neutrality and impartiality thus challenging for them to adapt these principles in the context of participatory journalism philosophy?

This study mostly deals with the description and critical analysis of participatory program production with reference to the tenets of public journalism for the purpose of forecasting prospects to practice public journalism in its truest form. However, the impact of participatory journalism on the established (existing) journalism industry and its role in the future news media mix in our country needs further investigation. Regarding this concept, if we delve into the media philosophy, it can also be a study area in the aspect of rationalizing what kind of media theory is appropriate to our country. Which one will be the appropriate; the traditional journalism practice which derived chiefly from the principles of libertarian theory of the press or participatory journalism and/or public journalism which resembles in most of its basic tenets, to the theoretical underpinnings of the social responsibility theory of the press?

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Appendix I

Graduate School of Journalism and Communications Addis Ababa University

Interview Questions for the Chief-Editors and Program Editors

1. Can you tell me some instances that your station did to boost the journalists' confidence to question those who exercise power in the society?
2. Do you initiate journalists to bring officials and the public together to discuss on issues of public matter? If so, how? If not, why?
3. How do you make sure whether your station speaks in a way that is meaningful to the community?
4. What are some of your future plans in terms of tying your relation with your audience?
5. How do you initiate the audience to contribute articles or just to point out some newsworthy events or situations?
6. What are the unique characteristics that distinguish your station from the national radio in terms of your program production?
7. Have you ever faced with challenges of sharing available air time fairly between the audience and authorities to 'have their own respective say' on a given common controversial issue? If so, how did you solve it?
8. Do you allow audiences to play active roles (i.e. acting as journalists) in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information? Why?
9. Have you ever sponsored panel discussions or invited a group of experts to your studio to discuss on certain public issues?
10. Have you ever given training for your journalists on techniques that can help them in bringing public concerns into the reporting process?

11. How do you describe media freedom?
12. What are the requirements a contributor should fulfill to get his/her article on air through your radio?
13. Do you think participatory journalism affects the credibility of the news media positively or negatively (or in both ways)? Why?
14. How do you define credibility?
15. Did you use different reporting techniques from the usual to cover the last Ethiopian national election?
16. What do you want to achieve by practicing participatory journalism?
17. Do you think that participation of the public helps your journalism practice? How?
18. How often do you provide opportunities to ordinary citizens to ‘freely’ discuss and develop solutions to problems regarding their issues?

Appendix II

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Questions for Journalists (Focus Group Discussions)

1. What do you think your roles are as a journalist?
2. Do you think you are practicing journalism in the way that remembers the public well enough?
3. How the media can promote the ordinary public need/issue well?
4. What do you think the tenets of responsible media are?
5. Do you think that providing information in a balanced and ‘objective’ manner is enough in journalism [to serve the public need]? Why?
6. Who mostly selects topics of discussion, you or the public? Why?
7. What are the ways of fulfilling the needs of the public in journalism?
8. Does participatory journalism affect the credibility of the news media?
9. Where do you think the journalist’s power arises from?
10. What do you feel about the active participation of the public in the news/program production?
11. Do you have a habit of talking to ordinary people before you produce the news or other programs, although you have enough information from official sources?

12. Do you bring perspectives from the community (you may get the perspectives from various public spaces like cafeterias or when you travel by taxi...) to the newsroom for further discussion with your colleagues?
13. How do you manage the air-time when there are pressured conditions like covering conflicting ideas between the public and authorities?
14. How intimate with the public are you?
15. Who takes the lead in developing solutions to problems – you, the public or public officials? Why?

Appendix III

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Parameters for the Content Analysis of Sample Broadcasts

1. Are the speakers and viewpoints diverse?
2. Are voices heard from every corner of society?
3. Are professional communicators unrepresentative of the public in important ways? If so, does the program show that the public does have any recourse to break through in order to inform and express itself?
4. Are those who deliberate in or through the program acting for (or representing) ordinary citizens?
5. Does the program sound there is good interaction among its producers, the audience and source of information?
6. Does the program present pertinent and diverse ideas regarding the issues it raises?
7. Does the program consider participants as active citizens or as mere spectators on the issue under discussion?
8. Who takes the lead in developing solutions to problems?

Note: some of the points and ideas [of the parameters] are adapted from the book by Page, I.B. (1996). *WHO DELIBERATES? Mass Media in Modern Democracy*. London: The University of Chicago Press.

Appendix IV

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Guidelines for Participant Observations

- Journalists' aspiration and commitment for the continuity and progress of participatory programs
- Efforts editors/managers made to change the command-and-control system of management (for instance; how they hold editorial meetings, the relationships between journalists and editors/program editors in the newsrooms)
- General impressions journalists hold on the current status of public participation (here the researcher sometimes used informal interviews too)
- Relationships between journalists and their audiences and/or their information sources (especially while conducting vox-pops, phone-in programs, interviews, etc)
- Communications among journalists (democratic behavior within the newsrooms can cement base of sustainable conversational sphere)