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SURVEY OF THE PRIVATE PRESS IN ETHIOPIA: 1991-1999

SHIMELIS BONSA

FORUM FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
Addis Ababa

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FORUM FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
P. O. Box 3089
Addis Ababa

Tel.: (251-1) 12-95-79/55-61-21
Email: fss@telecom.net.et

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Shimelis Bonsa

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Addis Ababa

ABBREVIATIONS

AAU	Addis Ababa University
BSPE	Birhanena Selam Printing Enterprise
EEA	Ethiopian Economic Association
EFPJA	Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association
EJA	Ethiopian Journalists' Association
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FSS	Forum For Social Studies
HSIU	Haile Selassie I University
MOI	Ministry of Information
ODA	Overseas Development Association
PDRE	People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights

INTRODUCTION

Journalism is often referred to as the Fourth Estate. This is a label given to the profession in recognition of its considerable power and influence as well as its fundamental role as a public watchdog, a fighter against tyranny and unjust laws, and for assertion of the people's rights. In a similar vein the journalist is considered a trumpeter of freedom, a shaper of society, a molder of opinions and a purveyor of wisdom.

The responsibilities of the journalist assume greater significance in areas where there is only, official, source or line of news and information. Under such circumstances the journalist is expected to serve independently as one providing a forum for exchange of opinions, an alternative source of information and, in the process, struggle in the defense of fundamental human aspirations.

The evolution of the private press in Ethiopia has been a saga of valor in defense of these aspirations as well as in the very creation of democracy, in spite of the many daunting challenges, and even in those instances in which journalistic standards and ethics may have been debased.

'Non-governmental' press in Ethiopia has, conventionally, been known by three different names, each having its own 'fluid and unrefined' connotations: private, independent and free. An attempt is here made to provide some form of conceptual definition or semantic distinction and, accordingly, make distinctions between publications that are genuinely free or independent and those that pass under the deceptive adjectives of 'private' and 'independent'.

The term 'private' often denotes the nature of ownership of specific publications as opposed to those that are owned and controlled by the government. On the other hand, the terms 'free' and 'independent' refer

to the nature of the opinions reflected in a given publication. The three denominations have been used interchangeably - and increasingly at present - in a preferential way. A sizable number of those newspapers and magazines, which are labeled as 'opposition publications', prefer to call themselves 'free and independent'. This claim is, however, rejected, and the term 'private' is used, instead, as a reference to such periodicals by other, self- declared 'independent' papers, such as *Ifoyta*, which could safely be characterized as pro-government publications.

Be that as it may, the label 'private', for instance, does not necessarily imply that a paper with such a name is independent as far as the editorial line it pursues or the opinions it airs are concerned; neither does it mean that its news coverage is not slanted in favor of one or another of the positions currently in vogue. It could, however, be said that a genuinely private publication has greater chance of being free or independent than a state-owned or party-owned paper. Partly in consideration of these divergent outlooks among non-government papers regarding the nomenclature they attach to themselves, I have preferred to use the labels interchangeably, without, however, intending to promote any one particular connotation or outlook.

Most of the time, I have refrained from characterizing the papers making up the subject of this study in order to avoid unnecessary complications, and as per the requests of informants to remain anonymous.

The research undertaking involved, to a large extent, collecting information through interviews with people working in the private press as well as those in the distributive business. Individuals who are knowledgeable about, and have experience in, journalism were also contacted. The use of written materials, though considerably limited, was in fact, essential in providing general as well as specific information about journalism and the private press.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CONTEXT AND THE RATIONALE

1. THE INITIATION OF THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS

1.1. The International Context

The end of the Cold War and the subsequent worldwide shift towards democracy and freedom of information and expression constitute a major step forward in the fulfillment of human aspirations. The progress towards more representative forms of government and participatory political and economic systems underline the importance of the existence of an independent and pluralistic press. Beside the proliferation of political and economic liberalization, the unprecedented advances in global technology for the acquisition and dissemination of information make the need for a democratic press all the more imperative (Ansah, 1991:13). In Africa, the spread of social and political change has led to a re-examination and re-assertion of the roles and functions of such vital institutions as the media.

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

There is now a general understanding concerning the vitality of communication media in the development process, as the following quotation from Boafo (1992:5) illustrates:

> If we accept that the direct participation of people is essential to their own development, then we must also recognize that such participation will not be possible if people are denied the means to express themselves, to share experience and ideas. If they cannot learn what is going on in their own country, in their region, or in the rest of the world, if they cannot openly and freely discuss and formulate strategies to strengthen their economies and improve their lives, then change will be slow with limited participation and with benefits for only a few.

1.2. The Ethiopian Situation

The winds of change that blew over the African continent and other parts of the world in the late 1980s did finally reach Ethiopia. A microcosm, to a certain extent, of the great upheaval in the world for democratic change was the dismantling of the dictatorial military regime in Ethiopia. This was a historic moment ripe with many challenges and opportunities.

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

2. ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE PRIVATE PRESS

It has been demonstrated that the relative freedom of the media, which transpired concomitantly with, or more as a consequence of, political and economic liberalization, has enhanced the process of democratization. It is also a universally accepted fact that the right to

seek and obtain information as well as to engage in free expression on issues of concern without fear of harassment and punishment is a cornerstone for the exercise of democracy.

Such a democratic undertaking assumes greater significance in countries like Ethiopia, where the democratic experiment is but novel and, consequently, the government holds monopolistic power over all sectors of the media. Under such circumstances, the public, suffocated as it is by monopolistic and, in most cases, monotonous media, would inevitably incline toward alternative sources of information. In countries where the private press exists and is protected by law, it is one of the principal providers of a different and, in some ways, rival information (*Ethiopia*, 1991:127-128).

The press, notwithstanding its limitations, is capable of doing an incomparably more complete job of covering news or entertaining independent discussions than any other media in a developing country have ever been able to do. This justifiably superior quality of the press has to do with the fact that ". . . it stands still to be read: it can be read again, or handed along, or referred back to . . ." (Sommerlad, 1966:vi), and thus stimulates the discussion of issues of interest. Of particular note in this respect is that the press, among all the media (which are in most cases under total government control), has unequaled capacity to be the people's medium, their voice (*Loc.Cit.*)

CHAPTER TWO

AN OUTLINE OF THE PRINT MEDIUM UP TO 1999

2.1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE PRINT MEDIUM

2.1.1. Historical Background

Ethiopia is one of the few countries in Africa with an early lead in developing its own script written literature. In spite of this, however, the number of publications of both a religious and secular nature was incomparably low. When it comes to the production of magazines, newspapers and other periodicals, the country was a late comer (Deneke, 1991:53).

The beginning of the print medium in Ethiopia, sporadic and foreign-inspired for the most part, and catering predominantly to religious subject matter, has been traced by some to the mid-nineteenth century, when the first printing press was set up in 1863 at Massawa by a Lazarist missionary known as Father Lorenzo Biancheri. Later on, the Swedish Evangelical Mission established a small press at Mänkullo, near Massawa, in 1885. In the 1890s a Franciscan missionary called Father Bernard was able to secure Emperor Menelik's acknowledgment, if not actual support, and expand his operations into commercial printing. In 1896 he started publishing, using a duplicating machine (Roneograph), a weekly French–Amharic newspaper entitled '*Le Semaine d' Ethiopie*'. It was intended mainly for campaigns against leprosy (Pankhurst,

1962:248; Deneke, 1991:52-54; Ministry of Information [hereinafter, MOI], 1966:5).

The reign of Emperor Menelik could, indeed, be said to have represented a crucial stage in the initiation of an Ethiopian journalism in terms, for instance, of press ownership and issues covered. The rise of a 'modernized' empire-state with all its attendant consequences contributed a great deal to the expansion of the printing enterprise.

The question of which was the first periodical is a matter of disagreement revolving around three different papers: Father Bernard's weekly *Le Semaine d' Ethiopie,* which appeared in Harar in 1905 (Kaplan *et al.*, 1971:324); *Blatta* Gebre Egziabher's handwritten sheets produced every week in the capital before 1900 (Pankhurst, 1962:260); and the state-owned *A'emro,* which made its first appearance contemporaneously with the above two papers (Pankhurst, 1962:260).

It will be difficult with the arguments regarding the first two papers, or the question of their ownership, for lack of sufficiently conclusive evidence. This leaves us with *A'emro,* which appears to have been universally accepted as Ethiopia's first periodical.[1] The earliest issue of the publication appeared around 1901,[2] written by hand and with a circulation first of 24 copies and, then, 200 following the importation of a copying machine. *A'emro* passed through periods of temporary suspension and revival, owing to financial difficulties, shortage of newsprint and the Italian aggression (Deneke, 1991:55-56; Moges,1963 E.C.:38; Pankhurst, 1962:260).

In the decades following this early period, the number of periodicals increased with the major changes and developments that took place in the country (See Appendix I). The foundation in 1923 of what was called Berhanena Selam Printing Press and, in 1925, of a weekly, government-owned newspaper named *Berhanena Selam,* by the then

regent, *Ras* Teferi (later, Haile Selassie I) represented a landmark in the history of the Ethiopian press. The significance of the two developments lay not just in the physical expansion of the press,[3] but also in the fact that *Berhanena Selam* became a forum for airing progressive ideas and views by some of the young intellectuals of the country at that time. This was in spite of the fact that many of the articles were poorly written, and that the papers were themselves less appealing in appearance, restricted in the subject matters they treated and limited in circulation in terms both of size and areas covered (Deneke, 1991:57-58; Moges, 1963 E.C.:38; Kaplan,1971:324).

The progress of the Ethiopian press was interrupted for about five years (1935-1941) as a result of the country's occupation by Mussolini's forces. Printing presses were demolished, as happened in Harar and Jimma, or were into centers for the production and dissemination of Fascist propaganda, as happened to those in Addis Ababa.[4] However, some type of a bi-weekly field paper of the liberation forces, *Bandirachin* (later re-named *Sendeq Alamachin* – 'Our Flag') was issued. There were also the many publications produced in foreign countries to promote the Ethiopian cause (MOI, 1966:8; Pankhurst, 1962:283).

In the post–liberation period the publication 'industry' witnessed a comparatively significant expansion in terms of the number of periodicals produced and the size of their circulation. Such influential and long-lasting weekly papers as *Addis Zemen* and *The Ethiopian Herald* came onto the scene in 1941 and 1943, respectively. Both became dailies after December 1958. In 1952 *Yezareyitu Etyopia* was added to the list of newspapers (MOI, 1966:9,11).

The expansion of the capacity of the Berhanena Selam Printing Press in 1965 and the increase in the number of new printers installed were but important additions to the development of the print medium. However,

the real turn for the newspaper enterprise came in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the establishment of the Economic Commission for Africa (1958) and the Organization of African Unity (1963). Of particular significance in this post-war expansion of the Ethiopian press, especially in its early phase, was Wolde Giyorgis Wolde-Yohannes (not to be confused with *Tsehafe Ti'zaz* Wolde Giyorgis Wolde Yohannes, the Emperor's Private Secretary at the time), a man who was given the epithet "Father of Ethiopian journalism." His name was linked, originally, with *Berhanena Selam,* and later on and more closely, with *Addis Zemen* (Deneke, 1991:73; MOI, 1966:13].

There was, in this period, a larger number of both daily and weekly newspapers and other press products, all, with the exception of a few, being government-owned and catering to a limited circle of an elite readership – mostly top bureaucrats and members of the urban-based intelligentsia[5] (see Appendix II A & B).

The period of military dictatorship from 1974 to 1991 was one of total government control of the media and the flow of information (see Appendix III). This was in line, for instance, with proclamation No 26/1967 E.C., which was issued to regulate the operation of the media (though it failed to specifically stipulate the possibility of establishing a private press); neither did the government's control of the media ease despite a provision for freedom of expression in the 1987 constitution (see Chapter 7, Article 47) (Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.:20-21; Wuletaw, 1990 E.C.:36).

The assumption of power in 1991 by the EPRDF ushered in a period of fundamental transformation in the political economy of the country. As part of the democratization process, the EPRDF–led government conceded freedom of the press. This concession was granted concomitantly with the new government's acceptance of the 1948

Universal Declaration of the United Nations (217 A/111), especially Article 19, which states:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Following the government's concession, an incredibly large number of newspapers and other periodicals burgeoned, with ownership ranging from party/government through public and professional associations to the private sector. Of this the share of independently-owned papers and magazines reached 287 by 1997 (1989 E.C.) (Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.: 32).

2.1.2. Distinctive Features of the Print Medium

One of the paradoxes facing Ethiopia is that, despite a longer and richer literary tradition, it has significantly lagged behind many African countries in terms of publication output. Besides, those moments in which the people had fully or partially exercised their freedom of expression on matters of national concern were little more than transitory (Mairegu, 1996:6).

Mass media in Ethiopia - the print medium included - have always served as instruments of government propaganda. Before the modernization of the Ethiopian media, the scribes used to chronicle, as their express responsibility, stories of glorification, image-building and personal power consolidation struggles waged among the powers that be, all in the name of posterity.

The twentieth century also witnessed this same pattern of functional continuity, though in a more refined and elaborate way. Newspapers and

other periodicals were used for the same purpose, despite periodic profession of impartiality. In this last respect, a case in point is *A'emro* of *Megabit* [March] 11, 1907 E.C., in which the editor wrote about what may be taken as the 'editorial policy' of the newspaper in the following way:

> . . . አስቀድሞ የዚህን የመጀመሪያ ጋዜጣ ቁጥር ሲጀምር የጠራ ፖለቲካ ነው የያዘው። ለዚያ ለዚህ ጥቀም ሲል አይደለም። በነጣነት ነው እንጂ እንደመሰለኝና እንደታየኝ ለማሳተም አይደለም።
>
> <u>አእምሮ</u> መጋቢት 11፥ 1907 ዓ. ም.

> (. . . [S]ince its very origin, the paper has maintained a non-partisan stand and does not promote the interest of any one group. This freedom is used to serve the country and not to publish anything I like.)*

In reality, however, *A'emro* was never free from government control and, in actual fact, it did serve as the mouthpiece of its creator, Menelik and of his regime.

This pattern was never altered during the Haile Selassie's imperial and Mengistu's military regimes, either. Both inscribed lofty provisions in their respective constitutions with respect to the people's fundamental right to freedom of expression, but they also used - and successfully so - every means in their respective arsenal to frustrate the realization of this inalienable right. Consequently, freedom of expression had remained a mirage for the Ethiopian populace during the said regimes [Mairegu, 1996:6].

Beginning with *Berhanena Selam* and culminating with *Addis Zemen*, the press during the imperial and military regimes, which were fundamentally authoritarian in character, devoutly acted, for over half a century, as an instrument of inflated and monotonously similar

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* *All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated (S. B.).*

propaganda of self-ingratiation and aggrandizement.[6] The following statement that appeared on the *Ghinbot* [May] 30, 1933 E.C. (1-2) issue of *Addis Zemen* could serve as a microcosmic representation of the operation of the press, for example, under the imperial regime:

> . . . ሕዝቡ ለሃገሩ፤ ለመሪው ለንጉሠ ነገስቱና ለንጉሠ ነገስቱ መንግስት ማድረግ የሚገባውን እየገለፀ የበጎውን ሥራ መንገድ የሚመራ እንዲሆን ይህ ጋዜጣ [አዲስ ዘመን] በግርማዊ ንጉሠ ነገስት ፈቃድ ተመሠረተ:: ሥራው በሶስት ቃሎች ይጠቃለላል:: እውነት፥ አገልግሎት፥ ነፃነት. . . አገልግሎት ስንል የኢትዮጵያን ነፃነት ለማስመለስ ራሳቸውን መስዋእት አድርገው የራሳቸውን ጥቅም ሁሉ አስወግደው ለሕዝባቸውና ለሃገራቸው ሲሉ የሰው አቅም ሊሸከመው የማይችል ድካም ተቀብለው ማናቸውም ሰው ሊያደርግ ያልቻለውን በኢትዮጵያ ህይወት ውስጥ እስከዛሬ ያልታየውን ከፍየሜ ላደረሱ ለተወደዱ ንጉሠ ነገስታችን ላቆሙት መንግስት የሚያገለግል እንዲሆን ነው::
>
> (This newspaper [*'Addis Zemen'*] was established with the permission of His Imperial Majesty to explain to the people about what they should do for their country, for their king and for His government. Its duties are defined in three terms: truth, service and freedom. . . . Service refers to the paper's responsibility to serve the government of the beloved king of kings who has sacrificed and suffered so much for his country and his people in a way no man had done before.)

Exceptions to this general pattern came first following the 1960 *coup d'état,* which was subsequently followed by an increasing radicalization of the opposition to the regime. The press became responsive to such developments by presenting issues cautiously sympathetic to the forces of change. The government reciprocated by taking measures ranging from the firing and demoting of editors to establishing a censorship organ with the responsibility of distilling every information before and after publication (*Proclamation Order No. 46/1966*, Article 20).

The second breach with tradition came during the last hours of the regime, which, weak and pressed as it was, failed to stop the upsurge of anti-government opposition and the use of the press as a forum for airing

out such popular feelings. As such, the right to free speech and expression, which had so far been denied in practice, was realized, at least for a short time, through popular action. Though the tottering regime began taking some positive measures in this direction, the initiative was too little too late (Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.:19-20).

This euphoric exercise in free expression continued during the early days of the military regime. Such national issues of vital importance as democracy, form of government, and land tenure were subjects of open discussion between various opposing forces in the public media, but the press in particular (Markakis and Nega, 1978:95).

> Due to the sudden lifting of censorship from the state-controlled media of communication . . . the press began to report fairly accurate[ly] . . . the events that were shaking the regime. For the first time in their history, Ethiopians were able to read something other than soporific propaganda in their newspapers.

Unfortunately, that period which has generally been referred to as "the golden days of Ethiopian journalism" did not last long. The *Derg* eventually assumed total control of the media, initially using it to denounce and humiliate the *ancien régime* and, subsequently, to consolidate the power of the military government. Such periodicals as '*Democracia*', '*Labader*', '*Struggle*' and '*Ye Sefiw Hizb Dimts*', which held views incongruent with those of the regime, were eventually declared counter-revolutionary and forced to go clandestine. (These papers, in addition to being clandestine, the first two of which had, in fact, been underground all along, were limited in their distribution to members and sympathizers. There were, however, other magazines such as *Goh*, which were commercial and consequently accessible to a wider public.) Eventually, the government eliminated most such papers and, in doing so, dashed all hopes of democracy and free expression. In the process, the media ended up being highly partisan and totalitarian

socialist propaganda machine (Deneke, 1991:52-53; *Ethiopia*, 1991:126), "the worst form of Marxist mouthpiece on the continent."[7]

Concomitantly with the confiscation of privately-owned papers and the prohibition of establishing new ones, the government proceeded to eliminate any trace of independent exercise in the government-owned print medium. The method frequently and successfully employed was censorship. A censorship organ, which had been working under the Ministry of Information and National Guidance since 1972, was given, in 1977, special powers of 'refining' all kinds of information (MOI, 1976 E.C.:124; *Proclamation No. 127/1977*, Article 7; *Proclamation No. 174/1979*, Chapter 1, Article 6).

EPRDF's takeover of power in May 1991 and its subsequent proclamations related to the press (Proclamations No. 1/1991 and No. 6/1991, Article 4[1]) were considered by many as marking the beginning of a new period of openness and democratization in Ethiopia.

However, the government failed to live up to its promise of freeing the press. Its democratic overtures, unrealized as they were, were rather seen by many as little more than a political ploy designed for external consumption (*Ethiopia*, 1991:128).

Journalists in the state-owned print medium were then let loose to pursue their traditional function, which they did with great vigor and dedication: praising and glorifying the government, at times beyond reasonable proportions, and condemning and castigating actions of previous governments as well as those of current political opponents of the regime in power. This unprofessional and unethical campaign of vilification, smearing and name-calling could not be said to have been carried out without official blessing. Such a downward slide was as much a disaster

for Ethiopian journalism as it was unbeneficial, in the long-run, to the political leadership itself (*Ethiopia*, 1991:128-129).

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

2.2. THE PRIVATE PRESS: 1991-1999

2.2.1. An Overview of the Private Press to 1991

Various publications of varied orientation were produced during the pre-1935 period. Ownership of such papers seems to have included the government, missionary societies as well as some foreigners with religious background. The appearance of such publications preceded the promulgation of any regulation by the government, and their operation was not, therefore, dictated by any such law (Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.:13).

On 15 February, 1934 (*Yekatit* 7, 1927 E.C.) Emperor Haile Selassie granted the right to establish a private press for the publication of books and newspapers ("A Proclamation to Publish Newspapers and Books"). The proclamation provided for the procedures to be followed when applying for permission to publish, and a list of penalties in the event of infringement. The Italian invasion of 1935, however, eliminated (at least for some time) any possibility of testing the sincerity of Haile Selassie's important initiative. It could also be argued that, even if there were a possibility, the chances of having a private press were miserably slim, given the objective conditions of the country at the time (Mahteme Selassie, 1962 E.C.:701,781; Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.:21).

In the five years of Italian occupation (1936-1941), publication of newspapers and other periodicals became the exclusive preserve of the colonial regime in Ethiopia. This exclusive hold on the press, however, did not apply to papers published on Ethiopia by individual Ethiopians as well as friends of Ethiopia residing outside. Dr. Melaku Beyan's (editor) *Voice of Ethiopia* and Sylvia Pankhurst's *Ethiopia and New Times* belong to this category. Be that as it may, the period of occupation was to have had a positive influence on the development of the Ethiopian press in later years, particularly in such areas as newspaper layout and use of pictures (Afework, 1983:28).

In the post-Liberation period (1941-1974), a number of decrees were passed recognizing freedom of speech and expression and allowing the existence of a private press.[8] These included the decrees of 1942 (1934 E.C.) and 1944 (1936 E.C.), the *Revised Constitution of 1955* (1948 E.C.), the *Penal Code of 1957* (1949 E.C.), the draft constitution which was presented to the country's highest constitutional assembly in July 1974 (*Hamle* 30, 1966 E.C.) and a decree which was published in *Addis Zemen* in March 1975 (*Megabit* 18, 1967 E.C.). A number of private newspapers and other periodicals dealing with political, economic, social and religious issues came to life. The problem is, however, to correctly identify which of these periodicals were privately-owned and independent in their operation. The Ministry of Information and Kaplan employed 'ownership' as a criterion to categorize quite a few of the newspapers and magazines into private or government publications (Kaplan, 1971:326-327).

However, if we take operational freedom as a criterion of categorization, then the distinction between the government press and its private 'counterpart' could be said to have been very tenuous. True, the situation did show some change in times of political upheaval, as in the immediate aftermath of the 1960 coup, or on the eve of the 1974 revolution, but it remained to be a perennial feature of Ethiopian

journalism throughout the second, post-Liberation phase of Haile Selassie's reign.

Speaking of the legal basis of a private press, the *Derg* regime (1974-1991) was unwilling to include in most of its decrees any explicit indication of the granting of a right to own a private press,[9] with the sole exception of the 1987 constitution which conceded the long-awaited freedom of the press (*Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1987*, Article 49). Nevertheless, this fundamental right, recognized as it was belatedly and reluctantly by an unrelenting regime, was denied the light of day.

On 28 May, 1991 EPRDF forces captured Addis Ababa. This triumphant entry was to be followed in subsequent months and years by developments of profound importance, one of which was the 'freeing' of the freedom of expression. The following sections deal with the evolution of a free press enterprise in Ethiopia and the constraints involved in the process.

2.2.2. The Private Press, 1991-1999

The Context

Ethiopia's is one of the world's poorest countries, with an estimated real per capita income of $100 as of the 1998 estimates. The average figure for low-income countries for the same year was $520, while the average for sub-Saharan Africa was $480. This and other standard social and economic indicators ranked Ethiopia as 172nd out of a total of 174 countries (Befekadu and Berhanu, 1999/2000:1).

The EPRDF-led government inherited an economy that was in shambles, a very volatile political climate and a society beaten down with a ruthless dictatorship and a pervasive bureaucracy.

Following the assumption of power, the EPRDF reluctantly accepted the 'free market' system as a viable option for Ethiopia's economic transformation. This was subsequently attended by liberalization of the economy (as part of the Structural Adjustment Program) through such methods as retrenchment and privatization of state-owned enterprises. In the process, between 1991 and 1998, the Ethiopian economy could be said to have performed reasonably well by most standard criteria (Befekadu and Berhanu, 1999/2000:12-14).

In spite of this, however, a number of structural impediments have continued to frustrate the drive for a significant take–off out of the vicious cycle of poverty. To begin with, the changes in the structure of the Ethiopian economy since 1991 have been very limited. Agriculture continued to be the dominant sector with over 51.2 per cent contribution to the country's GDP. The share of industry in GDP has remained static over the seven-year period (1991-98), averaging 10.6 per cent. The distributive sector remained stagnant, at about 13.6 per cent of GDP, while the service sector registered a steady increase, contributing about 24.5 per cent (Befekadu and Berhanu, 1999/2000:16).

This bleak picture was further compounded by high population growth (3 per cent per annum), which put an enormous strain on the economy. This was, further, reflected graphically in the low-standard of living of the population, as can be seen from the following tables on poverty and income (Befekadu and Berhanu, 1999/2000:101-105).

Incidence of Poverty in 1992/1993 (millions)

Source	Year	Area	Population	Poverty Index	Number of Poor
World Bank	1992	Rural	42.9	53.6	23.0
		Urban	6.9	58.0	4.0
Government		Rural	42.9	51.7	22.2
		Urban	7.6	63.0	4.8

Source: Getahun, 1988:4

Per Capita income/Expenditure by Area of Residence 1995/96

Area	In Birr	In US $
Urban	1,411	217
Rural	1,035	159
National	1,088	167

Source: MEDaC, *Poverty Situation in Ethiopia*. February, 1999, Table 2.

In conclusion, in view of the daunting problems facing the country, the government was expected to devise a long-term strategy to address such key elements as bringing a fundamental transformation in the agricultural sector, while significantly increasing the growth in other sectors, particularly industry. Of particular note is the need to develop a tolerant political atmosphere as a prerequisite for the sustainable economic development of the country (Befekadu and Berhanu, 1999/2000:17,29-30).

Politically, the context in which the media evolved has been complex. Along with the adoption of free–market policies, the government has restructured the media sector, leading, among other things, towards the development of private press enterprises. The step thus taken accorded with the regime's declaration of its intention to liberalize the political system as a condition for building a democratic society (Overseas Development Administration [ODA], 1996:18).

This move, though belated, was perceived by many as a chance to put an end to the vicious cycle of political repression and totalitarianism. The realization, in full or in part, of this historic initiative was, however, to be seen in subsequent years.

The Legal Framework

A. Phase One

The Transitional Government of Ethiopia agreed to respect individual human rights, including freedom of expression, fully and without any limitations whatsoever. This was done in accordance with its ratification of the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Taking advantage of the government's declaration of intent, a sizable number of newspapers and magazines appeared in Addis Ababa. The proliferation of periodicals was taken as an acute demonstration of the people's long-harbored dissatisfaction with the government-controlled media, while at the same time it served as an indication of their hunger for an alternative source of information (The Ethiopian Human Rights Council [EHRCO], 1995:67).

Magazines were first in the line of the periodicals to appear in the market: *Tsedey* (*Tahisas* 1984 E.C.), *Hibir* (*T'ir* 1984 E.C.) *Ifoyta* (*Yekatit* 1984 E.C.), *Tobiya* and *Ruh* (*Miyazia* 1984 E.C.) (EHRCO, 1995:67; Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.:24).

Then followed the publication of private newspapers, the first of which is said to be *Iyita* (*Ghinbot* 10, 1984 E.C.). It was a weekly paper published by Paulos Publishing House, and owned and run by Getachew Paulos. The paper had a comparatively high circulation (50,000 per week by *Hamle* 1984 E.C.) for quite sometime, but it showed a steady

decline (5,000 by *T'iqimt* 1986 E.C.) since 1985 E.C., until its demise in *T'iqimt* 1986 E.C. (Untitled, separate documents from the Berhanena Selam Printing Enterprise 1992-1994).

Next came two private newspapers: *Addis Dimts* and *Addis Tribune,* both Amharic and English weeklies. Both started operation on the 11th of *Hamle* 1984 E.C., each with a circulation of 30,000 and 2000, respectively. The late Tamrat Bekele was the sole proprietor and editor-in-chief of both.

Proliferation of private newspapers, published on the basis of the TGE Charter and working without any license and censorship, continued unabated even after the promulgation of the *Freedom of the Press Act* in 1992. This enactment could justifiably be referred to as a landmark in the development of an Ethiopian private press.

B. Phase Two

Freedom of the Press is recognised and respected in Ethiopia.

Press Law 34/1992, Article 3(1)

The legislation (*A Proclamation to Provide for the Freedom of the Press No. 34/1992*), proclaimed on the 21st of October 1992, was a remarkable step forward indeed. Unlike the previous two regimes, which had guaranteed but never implemented freedom of speech and of the press in their respective constitutions (Article 41 of the *Revised Constitution of 1955* and Article 47 of the *1987 Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*), the Press Law of the TGE could be said to have demonstrated the government's commitment to implement this fundamental and inalienable right, though in a

progressively mutilated way. At any rate, the existence of a private press was now considered a legitimate undertaking (*Ethiopia*, 1991:36).

The legislation has freed the incipient independent press from the long-standing captivity of pre-print censorship (Article 3[2]). Any Ethiopian national is allowed to conduct a press business (Article 5[1]) after fulfilling a number of requirements (Article 7[1]). The legislation also sets out the right of access to and dissemination of information for the press (Article 8[1-2]). In addition, the Press Law establishes a right of reply (Article 9), the responsibilities of the press (Part Four Articles 10-14), the taking of lawful measures (Part Five), and penalty (Part Six), in the event of an illegal press product or a breach of the regulations, ranging from one to three years of imprisonment and from Birr 10,000 to Birr 50,000 in fines.

Subsequently, an incredibly large number of licenses were issued to private publishers of newspapers and magazines. About 200 private newspapers and 87 magazines came to life in a matter of 5 years (1992-1997).[10]

An important part of the private press is the publication of Islamic magazines and newspapers since 1991. The periodicals included *Bilál, Da'wa, Baraka, Hikma, Hayat, Hilal, Ikhlás, Ihsán, al-Hijab,al-Kawthar, al-Manár,* and *al-Risala*. Currently, however, more than half of them have ceased publication altogether. Nevertheless, the various Islamic periodicals raised and discussed a number of issues of interest to the Muslim community in Ethiopia and the wider Islamic world (Hussein, 1998:30-31).

The number of active private newspapers has inevitably gone down due to such factors as market stabilization and government pressure. At present sales have stabilized around 40 active private titles per week.[11]

CHAPTER THREE

OPERATION OF THE PRIVATE PRESS

3.1. ORIGIN

3.1.1. The Legal Framework

Any person who is an Ethiopian national may, singly or jointly with other person having Ethiopian nationality, carry on any press activity.

Press Law 34/1992, Article 5, Sub-Title 1

. . . The application for license shall contain the following particulars:

a) *the name of the proprietor of the press; the editor-in-chief and the deputy editor-in-chief of the press;*
b) *the type of the press activity;*
c) *the address of the head office of the press;*
d) *the name of the press;*
e) *the name and address of the publisher.*

Press Law 34/1991, Article 7, Sub-Title 1

The above articles of the legislation allowed for the establishment of a private press by any Ethiopian national or nationals on fulfillment of the above six requirements.[12] The fact that the legislation did not explicitly establish a ceiling on such issues as financial standing and professional competence eased entry into the profession for almost anyone, and contributed, in the process, to the rise and multiplicity of all kinds of papers.[13]

The Rationale

There are multiple motivations for becoming a journalist or starting a newspaper. In many cases papers are published for profit. At times they are used as prestige symbols. It used to be believed that the motives of would-be publishers, at least initially, were less the making of profits than the influence they sought to exercise, or the prestige they gained by owning a newspaper (Sommerlad, 1966:70).

In the Ethiopian case, too, a variety of motives for starting newspaper publication have been forwarded. The following excerpt, taken from the first issue of *Iyita* (apparently the first private newspaper), provides a list of the objectives which were shared by most such papers in Ethiopia:

> . . . to make profit, to educate and disseminate information relating to current political, economic and social issues for the benefit of the people, to help the people improve their reading culture and promote publishing and journalistic experience among the wider public. . . .
>
> *Iyita, Ghinbot* 10, 1984

Interviews with some journalists and publishers on why they decided to join the profession reinforced the validity of the above assertion. About half the responses in general tended to be indicative of the primacy of "attraction to the profession." Considering, however, the retraction later made on the part of some journalists, the declaration appears to be more alleged than real.

The next justification for joining the journalistic profession is "love for the country," a claim which could, and did in fact, imply opposition to the government in power. This claim was particularly presented in the most direct terms possible in the Editorials of several of the newspapers. The following is a case in point (Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.:62,65):

> . . . it will oppose some of the policies of the political establishment;
>
> . . . it will work for the preservation of the country's unity and foundation of a democratic system;
>
> . . . it will not publish any news or article favoring or promoting the policies of the government.

All these show that political motivations rivaled, and in some cases surpassed, professional and economic interests as a rationale for establishing a newspaper.

Such economic considerations as using journalism as a livelihood came third on the list of motivations, while the 'making of profit', as in the case of some publishers, and circumstantial factors, as in the case of journalists, were at the bottom of the list.[14] Caution in this respect is imperative, in view of possibilities of hiding real motives on the part of some journalists for joining the profession, particularly in the face of the increasing role economic factors have come to play.

Capital Investment

Of particular note in this respect is the incredible disparity in capital investment in the newspaper business. With few exceptions, most of the publishers went into the business with very little initial capital[15] and an insignificant investment in the form of equipment like computer with accessories, camera, tape-recorder, offices and furnishings, necessities which, in most cases, were post-service acquisitions. As against this 'poverty' of resources, however, there were some newspapers like *Addis Tribune*, *Monitor*, *Reporter*, and *Tobiya* that entered the press enterprise with a comparatively substantial professional, financial, and technical foundation.[16]

The following table provides a list of selected newspapers, together with their registered capital in Ethiopian *birr* at the time of their establishment. However, one should note that the amount of *birr* indicated below may not necessarily reflect the actual financial standing of the respective proprietors, then or at present.

Table 1: Registered Capital of Some Newspapers

No	Name of Newspaper	Year of Foundation	Registered Capital in Birr
1	*Tobiya*	Oct. 1986 E.C.	90,000
2	*Reporter (Amharic)*	Aug. 1987 E.C.	50,000
3	*Beza*	Oct. 1986 E.C.	15,000
4	*Ma'ebel*	Dec. 1987 E.C.	8,000
5	*Mebruk*	Sep. 1988 E.C.	7,000
6	*Seyfe Nebelbal*	Aug. 1986 E.C.	5,000
7	*T'omar*	Feb. 1985 E.C.	5,000
8	*Et'op*	Oct. 1986 E.C.	5,000
9	*Genanaw*	Nov. & Apr. 1987 E.C.	5,000
10	*Tarik*	Mar. 1986 E.C.	3,000

Source: Mass Media License Registration and Control Department, 1998.

Ownership

The Ethiopian experience with regard to ownership was somewhat different from the established practice in other countries, where ownership and control of newspapers were in the hands of professionals and businessmen for whom the paper was, initially and largely, a sideline undertaking. In Ethiopia, newspapers were, in most cases, owned, run and controlled by people for whom the paper was a source of livelihood, a profit-generating venture and/or a political instrument. In variance with many other countries, where ownership was flexible, ranging from individual to corporate, in Ethiopia ownership was, by and large, exclusive and individual. This tended to limit the possibility of a merger and, consequently, of a much better chance of survival and growth.[17]

However, joint newspaper ownership, dictated as much by reasons of efficiency as by the realization of limitations, was also fairly represented in the Ethiopian private newspaper enterprise. This was carried out through amalgamation of finance, capital and professional and technical expertise. The truth of the matter is that, in more cases than one, the comparatively more efficient and more successful papers happen to be those with common ownership.[18]

3.2. MANAGEMENT AND EDITORIAL STAFF

Organizational Structure

In a modestly developed press, duties are not only defined and shared out (despite possible overlappings) but they are also highly specialized. Regarding organization, there are usually two distinct bodies with distinct (and guarded) areas of operation: the management staff and its editorial counterpart. The management staff is composed of individuals responsible for sales, marketing and promotion, finance, circulation and advertisement. This area of operation is headed by a manager who, though generally without control over the editorial contents of a newspaper, is in charge of the whole newspaper staff (Barton, 1966:60-61).

An editorial staff of a fairly established newspaper will consist of an editor-in-chief (who is, editorially speaking, the boss), a news editor, who is also assistant editor, reporters (with a possibility of specialization in particular subjects), a feature writer, a chief sub-editor and deputy sub-editors (Barton, 1966:41-42).

The number of journalists and management workers and the types of function they take care of differ on the basis of the standing of the newspaper. The distinction between the two organs should not also be understood as sharp and inflexible. There could, indeed, be cases of

functional mobility between the two, as in those cases where an editor may have some financial interest in the newspaper, or is responsible for non-editorial roles, such as advertisement (Barton, 1966:41-42).

Recent experience in the private press in Ethiopia provides a rather different picture of organizational arrangement in the running of a newspaper. A preponderant portion of the newspapers (with the exception of two out of the eleven papers surveyed) did not have such a well-structured system of operating a newspaper establishment. They were rather run by a comparatively small staff of between three (apparently the lowest)[19] and eight (the highest). [See Appendix IV.] This would mean that a person was expected to handle different responsibilities at one and the same time. More often than not, a person, usually male,[20] would act as proprietor, publisher, editor-in-chief, senior reporter, advertisement- and circulation-manager. This situation of overlapping of duties was also applicable to chief editors, deputy editors, managing editors and reporters. The following table is illustrative of this duplication of functions.[21]

Table 2: Duplication of Duties among Employees of Eight Private Papers

No.	Job Title	PUBLISHER							
		NP1	NP2	NP3	NP4	NP5	NP6	NP7	NP8
1	Manager	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
2	Editor-in-Chief	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
3	Deputy Editor-in-Chief		✔						
4	Editor		✔						
5	Reporter	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
6	Advertising agent	✔			✔	✔		✔	✔
7	Feature writer	✔	✔		✔			✔	
8	Managing editor		✔						

Source: Information gathered by the author from interviews with thirty-one journalists.
NP = Newspaper

The small number of staff and the consequent pattern of functional duplication were indicative of the financial and administrative limitations

of most private papers. On the other hand, such a structure was found to be realistic, considering the level that independent press enterprise in Ethiopia has managed to achieve at present.[22]

There are, however, exceptions. At least two broad layers could be sorted out in the degree of sophistication of the organization of the country's newspaper enterprise. The first category is composed of the majority of the newspapers, where the boundary between management and editorial staff is rather extremely diffuse, or does not exist at all. The second category of 'quality' papers, on the contrary, might, for the sake of convenience, be divided in to two groups: on the one hand, there are those papers where the distinction between the management and editorial staff is clearly made, but where there is the handling, by one person, of one or more functions simultaneously;[23] on the other hand, there are those papers where (ownership is collective and) division of labor between the management and the editorial staff was defined in such a way that operating reciprocally between the two bodies was not permissible. *Tobiya* would fall under this category.[24]

Qualification

Though there is disagreement on the order of importance of qualification, most journalists agree that there are a number of attributes that are paramount and of particular importance in the makeup of a good journalist: a deep, genuine and non-partisan interest in every type of people everywhere, qualities of sympathy to (or tolerance of) opposing ideas), open-mindedness (or not rushing to make hasty and ill-informed judgment), and an inquiring mind (so as to get to the bottom of an issue) (Barton, 1966:14-15).

It is difficult to say exactly what the best qualifications for a career in journalism are. They would definitely vary enormously from individual

to individual. Be that as it may, a good background and education, proficiency in the languages one works in, good manners and appearance, and mental alertness are cited as qualities to be had by a would-be reporter. The ability to write in a fairly clear, simple and direct way, preferably using shorter words, are indispensable (Barton, 1966:25-17). Such qualities could be acquired and/or developed further through training in the profession of journalism. This could be done by means of pre-service training in a school of journalism and/or providing an in-service or on-the-job training.

In Ethiopia, there was no media-training center until the establishment of the Ethiopian Mass Media Training Institute in 1995. This, however, was meant for training members of the government press and has, therefore, not been very helpful as a source of training and expertise to the private press. The number of Ethiopians who were able to get training outside was limited. There was a privately-owned center called '*Mahider*: Centre for Creative Arts and Vocation', aimed at training young and interested individuals in the basics of journalism. It was, however, short lived (1986-1988 E.C.).[25]

This did inevitably have its own repercussions in the development of the private press in Ethiopia. Two phases could be outlined in the progress of the independent press with regard to the professional background of its members. The first phase refers to the earlier period, that is, the first three or four years after the change of government in 1991, when the foundations of the private press were being laid. The papers and magazines belonging to this period were founded, in most cases, by people who had worked as journalists in the previous two regimes but who left their jobs under the current government.[26] These people injected their experiences into the periodicals (to wit: the magazines with their telling cartoons) which were, consequently, demonstrative of the comparatively better professional standings of the producers.[27]

To sum up, the first phase of the evolution of the private press was characterized by the primacy of the professional over the amateur in terms of the individuals involved and the publications they produced.

The second phase witnessed a significant proliferation in the number of papers as well as differentiation in the quality of the productions. This second phase could, in fact, be seen as a reverse of what happened in the first phase. An exposition of the pre-service professional and educational profile of some journalists is illustrative of this evolving trend. Thirty-one editors and reporters were interviewed for the purpose, out of which 43.5. per cent declared that they had no previous experience whatsoever in journalism.[28]

The educational background of most is also a telling indicator of the status of the profession in Ethiopia. Of the twenty-five editors and reporters interviewed, 58.6 per cent were 12th grade graduates, 7.2. per cent were holders of a college diploma, 5.2 per cent had a first degree (and one with a master's degree), and 2.5 per cent had pursued a two- to three-year education in one or another of the vocational schools, institutes or colleges around the country. The rest (4 per cent) were not willing to specify their educational qualifications.[29]

The condition of in-service or on-the-job training, as opposed to pre-service training, which was almost nil for the majority of private press journalists, was not significantly different from the above trend.

In view of the generally poor standard of the journalists, a short term 'crash' training program assumed considerable importance. The training covered such issues as basic journalism, news gathering and reporting, feature writing, editorial writing, newspaper management, and handling of technical and commercial issues.

Training in these key areas was given on–site by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung of Germany, the British Council, the United States Information Service (in its program of 'USIS Media Training Project'), and Thomson Foundation of Britain. The training was delivered on an irregular basis, ranging from a few weeks to several months. Attendance was not regular, as can be seen from the following data. Of the twenty five editors and reporters,

36.3% had not attended any of these workshops
27.5% had attended once
19.7% had attended twice
12.5% had attended thrice
5.0% had attended four times

Despite its limitations, the training exercise could be said to have contributed positively to the raising of awareness in the discipline and profession of journalism.[30]

On the basis primarily of issues of qualification, the private press in the second phase of its development could broadly be divided into two categories. On the one hand, a larger proportion of the journalists, in contradistinction to those in the first phase, did not have any sound prior experience and/or training in journalism that would have enabled them to venture into the independent press enterprise. (One trend in this connection is the rise of a new "generation" of journalists who have developed, among other things, quite an experience through working in a number of newly established private papers.)[31] On the other hand, there was a vocal and influential group of journalists (the 'old core') who had accumulated journalistic experience through working in the Ministry of Information and other government organs in different capacities related to journalism (that is, as editors, reporters and public relations officers). However, they have become a minority, which could partly be attributed to the emigration of their trained and experienced compatriots. Such

characterization of the old group of journalists should, however, be qualified; their emigration, in particular, should be seen in light of not just their longer professional experience but also in terms of the lack of operational freedom within the country. This group was particularly identified by the highly pro-government stance reflected in their news reporting, editorial writing and public relations exercises in their previous jobs.

3.3. PROCESSES OF NEWSPAPER PRODUCTION

> Any press and its agents shall, without prejudice to rights conformed by other laws, have the right to seek, obtain and report news and information from any government source of news and information.
>
> *Press Law: 34/1992*, Article 8, Sub-Title 1

The exercise of seeking, obtaining and disseminating news and information is one of the basic functions of a purposeful press. It is a response to a fundamental human desire and right to know. The provision of access to knowledge and events far beyond the boundaries of an individual's own observation and experience could rightly be seen as the initial step in creating an informed public, which, in its turn, is the beginning of a democratic society (Sommerlad, 1966: 55,57).

The situation in Ethiopia is somewhat different, owing to the infancy of the private press and the peculiar circumstances in which it evolved. Despite some disparity between the private papers, due to such factors as degree of access to information (which in turn may be a factor of political orientation, financial standing, etc.), there is generally speaking a uniform way of information seeking, if not in the manner of its acquisition and dissemination. Or, to put it in another way, there is as much uniformity between newspapers with regard to searching for

information as there is difference concerning its collection and publication.

News and information are obtained from a myriad of sources of local, national and international character. Locally, interviewing is one major way of gathering news and information. However, there is the general problem of paranoia towards the press among those with the needed information. This is a situation that would inevitably put any interviewer to labor between two competing factors: on the one hand, the journalist so engaged has the responsibility of satisfying the public's right to know; on the other hand, no one is legally bound to entertain the journalist's inquiries. In such circumstances a reporter, for instance, has to be imaginative and might be expected to play certain games (Teel and Taylor, 1992:119).

Accordingly, reporters go out to various areas in Addis Ababa (and, occasionally, outside of the city) conducting interviews with people in various walks of life on important issues. They employ several ways to gather information from individuals and/or groups, with or without affiliation to religious or political groupings. The methods they use include friendship networks, other useful connections, and even bribes. Although most of the information-gathering activities of most papers concentrated in Addis Ababa, some papers, especially those with a relatively stronger financial basis, send their reporters to the regions when opportunities arise, and they also employ the services of associate reporters and freelance contributors. Payment to the latter two, temporary employees as they are, is contingent upon the size, relevance and sensitivity of the information as well as the frequency of dispatch.[32]

The possibility of getting information from government officials is dependent, among other things, on the degree of one's proximity to the officials in power. This access, in turn, seems to be affected by such

factors as friendship (created and/or cemented by political or other motivations) and the attitude of the officials. Distinctions could, accordingly, be made in the private press on the basis of these access variations:

- those with a smoother relationship with, and a comparatively easier access to, the government;
- those with an 'attitude' of head-on collision with the government and are, consequently, remote from its sources of information;
- those with a history of 'love-hate' relationship with, and an average degree of access to, the government.

Individuals as well as groups also take initiatives to provide information, at times vital ones, to the private press, freely or on payment, out of public or private interest, and orally as well as with documents, including photographs. This they do by personal appearance, or using letters, telephone and fax. Political groupings in and outside of the country frequently use the private press to air their ideas and promote their platforms, which are categorically opposed to the government. Armed groups such as 'The Ethiopian Patriots' Front' used to send information about their actual or alleged military operations. Publication of such news and information, which in many cases were unverifiable, have in fact landed the private press in a series of troubles with the government, including harassment and imprisonment of their staff.[33]

Instances of a somewhat circuitous way of not only news presentation but also fabrication do exist and were, in fact, rampant in the early days of the private press. The first refers to a situation where politically sensitive information would be leaked to 'exiled' opposition groups for reportage. Subsequently, the same information would appear on the private papers in Ethiopia quoting the 'exiled' sources, thereby avoiding the danger of being implicated for violating any one of the press

regulations. In the case of the latter, news about sensitive and, therefore, captivating issues are fabricated by those working in, or attached to, the private press, for purely commercial reasons. It is even said that false news are fed to some of the irresponsible papers, with the intention of discrediting the private press once the inauthenticity of the news has eventually been discovered.

Another source of news and information are the state-owned electronic and print media. Selected news and information reported on the radio, television or newspapers would reappear in some of the private papers, with certain modifications and alterations. The 'rationale' often forwarded, in private discussions, by the private press is that the government media's news reporting is so dull that it is only proper to rewrite such news and information so as to make them more sensational ('*Maschoh*' - magnify) and, therefore, readable and saleable.[34]

There are also cases where several journalists working in the government media, but having a dubious relationship with the private press, 'sell' news and information for a certain payment.[35]

Press releases from local and international bodies, such as embassies and non-governmental organizations, play a not insignificant, though limited, part in the process of news and information acquisition.[36]

With regard to external sources of news and information, the use of associate reporters, freelance contributors, including 'well-wishers' or 'friends of the private press', foreign newspapers and magazines, fax, e-mail, internet-browsing, monitoring of radio and foreign television channels have become a tradition in the private press. Most of the private newspapers (with few exceptions, including *Addis Tribune*, *The Monitor*, *Reporter*, and *Tobiya*) do not possess some of the above Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and are, therefore.

obliged to use them only in return for a certain fee. For instance, they pay five *birr* when receiving fax and forty-two when sending one.[37]

In this connection a national news agency, in view of its capacity as a comprehensive national institution for gathering and disseminating news and information at national and international levels, could contribute to the growth and efficiency of the press. In Ethiopia this is not the case, as the private press could not subscribe to news from the national news agency (ENA) or party news agencies, such as WALTA, due, in part, to the prevailing mutual antipathy between the government and the private press and the resultant reluctance to sell or buy news respectively. The poor financial standing of most private newspapers is also a frustrating handicap.[38]

With regard to newspaper output there is a relatively clear-cut demarcation between the government-owned and the private press; the former presented a picture of homogeneity, with very little evidence of "investigative, critical, or even mildly original journalistic activity" (ODA, 1996: 36), while the latter acted as a host of highly variable quality.

Two broad categories could be discerned within the private press regarding the existing variability of output. On the one hand, there was a core of newspapers (a few in number, though, such as *Addis Tribune*) which tended to concentrate on what might be referred to as 'safe' topics, such as domestic economic policy, culture and foreign news, with occasional cautious discussion of current political affairs of the country. Such an emphasis, which might be a reflection of self-imposed censorship, tended to make the better quality newspapers under-report Ethiopian affairs. In addition to this core of papers tending to cover 'apolitical' titles, there are other papers (like *Reporter*) with a generally more favorable attitude towards the government and its policies (ODA, 1996:36).

On the other hand, there is a group consisting of the vast majority of the private newspapers (for instance, *Genanaw, Meyisaw, Tarik*) which dominate the local readership in Ethiopia. Many of them are sensational political papers, "short on facts, . . . very poor with unsourced stories and rumors. . ." (ODA, 1996:37), at times with serious security implications. As against this practice of sensationality and irresponsibility, there are some private newspapers (such as *Tobiya*) which present a strong and substantiated critique of government policies and actions.[39] Finally, one could discover several down-market tabloid titles and religious as well as sports papers claiming a substantial size of the local readership.

The above picture of differentiation is also a reflection of the polarization of the print medium in Ethiopia - not just the conventional division between the government and the private but also within the independent press itself: between those which are opposed and those which are friendly to (some would prefer to say 'critically supportive of") the government in power.

3.4 ECONOMICS OF NEWSPAPER PRODUCTION

We have so far seen the journalistic side of newspaper production which requires skilled work, qualities of character and educational qualifications. But there is more to newspapers than journalism. As a commercial undertaking, newspapers have to struggle to make profit in order to survive and grow. The end product of a journalist's toil, the printed newspaper, is the result of a manufacturing process as well as of a creative mind. The very production of a single paper and its eventual success in an increasingly competitive market is premised upon a wide range of variables: newsprint and printing cost, office rent, size and salaries of newspaper staff, expense incurred on the use of computer, fax, telephone, internet, e-mail, subscription,

advertisement, circulation, and so on. The number and intensity of the challenges tended to make the running of a newspaper enterprise an arduous struggle.

With the exception, perhaps, of printing and newsprint cost, which were universally determined, the amount of money spent to cover other expenses differed from newspaper to newspaper, and was partly a factor, among other things, of the financial position of each title. This cost differentiation was readily reflected in the quality of the output.

A sizable number of the private papers as well as all the state papers were printed at the largest of the state-owned printing presses, the Berhanena Selam Printing Enterprise (BSPE). It has most of the necessary facilities, including computerized full-page makeup which is indispensable for large scale operations and for quick production in a vibrant and competitive newspaper market. There is, however, at present a new trend of using comparatively cheaper alternatives by some private papers, such as the Bole Printing Press (BPP), which is the largest destination node among the private printing presses. The decision to shift should, however, be seen more as a pragmatic and, therefore, temporary move, depending on the fluctuation of the printing cost between the government and private printing presses, than as something leading to a permanent attachment to the one or the other. Consequently, there were cases where a newspaper alternated between the BSPE and the BPP in search of a relatively cheaper printing as well as newsprint cost. In fact, printing cost decreased correspondingly with an increase in the number of issues printed. This inducement for increased newspaper publication was, however, counterbalanced by the small size of readership with a stable purchasing power and established reading habits.[40]

The printing cost was covered in two major ways. Financially strong newspapers, such as *Reporter* and *Tobiya*, did themselves provide the

money needed for the publication. Nevertheless, most of the private titles, based as they were on an unstable financial foundation, were dependent on wholesale distributors for their publication, losing, in the process, a significant cut on their cover price.[41]

Newsprint was an acutely scarce commodity in a large number of countries who could afford to purchase only a fraction of their needs. It was an expensive item in foreign trade balance of payments, and poor countries like Ethiopia would not have the currency for imports that would enable them to bridge the gap between demand and local output.

In Ethiopia the proliferation of private newspapers has inevitably increased the demand for domestic newsprint production as well as imports. The enormous increase in printing and newsprint cost in the BSPE in just a matter of four years, i.e. between 1993 and 1997, could be seen as demonstrative of the current situation and as a harbinger of what is to come.[42] The table below illustrates this evolving trend.

Table 3: Printing and Newsprint Cost Increase at BSPE Between 1993-1997

No.	Date of Price Rise In E.C	Weekly Issue	No. of Pages	Printing and News Print Cost (in Birr)	Difference In Birr	Price Increase in %	Difference from Previous Price in %
1	21-04-85	10,000	8	2085.76			
2	02-05-85	"	"	4174.80	2089.04	100.16	
3	30-06-85	"	"	4635.72	2549.96	122	21.84
4	28-08-85	"	"	4715.72	2629.96	126.1	4.1
5	15-10-85	"	"	2946.10	860.34	41	-85.1
6	06-11-85	"	"	3547.49	1461.73	70.1	-15
7	28-12-85	"	"	3325.77	1240.01	59.5	44.5
8	05-13-85	30,000	"	9250,69	2802.89	43.5	-16
9	02-01-86	10,000	"	4750.00	2664.24	127.7	84.2
10	25-05-86	15,000	"	6193.42	605.17	10.8	-116.9
11	07-08-86	10,000	"	4305.22	2219.46	106.4	95.6
12	19-09-86	"	"	3662.05	1576.29	76.6	-30.8
13	26-08-87	5,000	"	2557.38	1514.5	145.2	68.6
14	22-08-87	10,000	"	4675.23	2589.47	124.1	-21
15	29-11-87	5,000	"	2037.10	994.22	95.3	-28
16	13-06-88	"	"	3006.80	1963.92	188.3	93
17	27-09-89	"	"	1925.60	882.72	84.6	-103.6
18	26-10-89	"	"	1964.65	921.77	88.4	3.8

Source: BSPE Finance Department, 1990 E.C.

With regard to place of work, a large majority of the newspapers in general (including nine out of the ten interviewed) work in rented offices, whereas a small group of the papers use their own houses. Some (such as *Reporter, The Sun* and *Tobiya*) have rented a whole compound for a fairly large sum of money (for instance, Birr 1,500 per month in the case of *The Sun*). Reflective as it is of the papers' good financial standing, this is also used as a status symbol, intended at times for foreign consumption, as in the case of some English newspapers. The rest, predominantly Amharic titles, rent offices on a collective basis, most of the time in groups of two or more. The following table is based on information obtained from ten newspapers working in rented offices:[43]

Table 4 Condition of Place of Work of Ten Newspapers

No.	Type of Renting	Size of Rented Office	Rent in Birr	Per cent
1	Alone	One room	250-300	20
2	Alone/two to three	Two to three rooms	450 and above	50
3	Alone/four and above	Five rooms and above	1500 and above	30

Source: Information gathered from interviews with publishers.

The quality of the houses owned or rented differ from newspaper to newspaper. The range is from the least furnished ones, lacking even the basic equipment needed in such a commercial undertaking, to the much better equipped ones, with such Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as computers, fax machines, telephones, e-mail and internet facilities, and mobile phones, not to mention the essential office furniture. The former group, therefore, has to depend on and pay for the services of others. For instance, those who do not have computers of their own (two out of the ten interviewed) would have to hire services paying *birr* 10.65 for typing per A4 size paper and *birr* fifty for pasting (page-layout) per issue. The cost would inevitably increase as they incur additional expenses for telephone, fax and, very rarely, e-mail or internet services.[44]

Commercial advertising, a major factor in the survival and growth of most papers in other countries, is used as a safety valve by the unsubsidized, under-staffed and under-equipped incipient private newspapers in Ethiopia. Success or failure to attract advertising would have an impact on a newspaper's capacity, for instance, to maintain a large staff with a reasonable salary, or to subscribe to and/or buy news from individuals. It would affect the paper's quality, its sale price, and eventually its financial success or failure.

The status of advertising varies from paper to paper. There is a small group of financially stable and influential newspapers commanding mass circulation (such as *Addis Tribune*, *Reporter* and *Tobiya*), where the proportion of the advertisement space accounts, on average, for 40 per cent (though fluctuating) of the newspapers' size and where advertisement revenue provides something between one-third and two-thirds of their total income.[45]

A slightly larger number of papers (for instance, *The Sun*) claim a news-advertising ratio of 80:20. At the bottom of the advertising scale is found a large category of newspapers (such as *Goh, Genanaw*, *Meyisaw*), which, with a news-advertising ratio of 90:10, or none at all, have, to a large extent, failed to attract advertisement.

The absence of a permanent employee responsible for handling advertising is a further demonstration of the latter's 'marginalization' in many newspapers. The whole exercise of a hunt for advertising is reluctantly left to freelancers, who would roam the city in search of advertising and would eventually be rewarded with a substantial share (between twenty and fifty percent on each advertisement they manage to secure) of the newspaper's advertisement revenue.[46]

One point that should be mentioned here, but which has not so far figured out prominently in the private press, is the interrelationship

between advertising, number of pages and resale value of used newspapers. The greater the advertising revenue, the larger the number of pages and the higher the sale price of used copies. A few successful papers like *Reporter* and *Tobiya* have a large advertising volume and are thus able to devote a larger number of pages to each issue than other newspapers do. The wastepaper value of used copies would thus increase. Accordingly, a reader usually has in mind the consideration of wastepaper value while choosing his/her paper. This inevitably results in unequal competition and consequent slow growth of newspapers. In fact, some people tend to justify their purchase of *Addis Zemen* by the larger number of pages and bigger size of the paper.[47]

The following table shows the income and expenditure of a private newspaper entitled *Et'op'* in the month of *Miazia* 1990 E.C. It is a paper with a weekly circulation of 5000 issues.[48]

Table 5: Financial Performance of 'Et'op' in *Miyazia* 1990 E.C.

INCOME			EXPENDITURE		
NO	Title	Amount (in Birr)	NO	TITLE	Amount in Birr
1	Sale Price	13,200	1	Newsprint and printing cost	7848.0
	Total	13,200	2	Office rent	200.0
			3	Pasting	200.0
			4	Salary, Editor-in-Chief	600.0
			5	Salary, Deputy Editor-in-Chief	500.0
			6	Salary, Reporter (1)	400.0
			7	Freelancers (4x155)	620.0
			8	News purchased (4x75)	300.0
			9	Telephone service	150.0
			10	Fax service	150.0
			11	Entertainment (guests)	150.0
			12	Transport	300.0
			13	Computer service	680.0
			14	Commission (wholesalers)	800.0
			15	Subscription (periodicals)	160.0
			16	Purchase of office items	150.0
				Total	13,208

Total Income	13,200
Total Expense	13,208
Difference	-8

The survival of such papers under these conditions has been made possible through reducing costs incurred in such areas as salary and payments for services, seeking financial assistance (as well as credit) from families, relatives, wholesalers, 'sources' based in foreign countries, working in low-cost areas and maintaining a comparatively small staff. Some papers, on the other hand, have found a solution in practicing sensational or irresponsible journalism.

3.5. PROCESSES OF NEWSPAPER DISTRIBUTION

> Any press and its agents shall have the right to disseminate news, information and other products of press in their possession.
>
> *Press Law 34/1992*, Article 8, Sub-Title 2,

It is no use having a first class output with bright and appealing stories and features only to find out that it is late reaching, or at times, even never delivered to, many potential readers. Newspaper circulation in Ethiopia has been an uphill struggle, considering, particularly, the absence of a good network of transport and communication facilities. The problem is more accentuated with regard to newspaper distribution in the regions.

A system of newspaper distribution has evolved in the course of the eight years or so during which the private press enterprise accumulated experience. In the early years of free press, publication of newspapers, which were few in number (three in 1992 and twenty nine in 1993), was undertaken by the proprietors themselves. Then came a system in which wholesale and retail distributors and vendors acquired newspapers for circulation from the publishers on prior payment in cash. However, with a significant increase in the number of publishers as well as the appearance of new titles as of 1994 (sixty-four in total), the importance of distributors doubled correspondingly. In the process a new pattern of

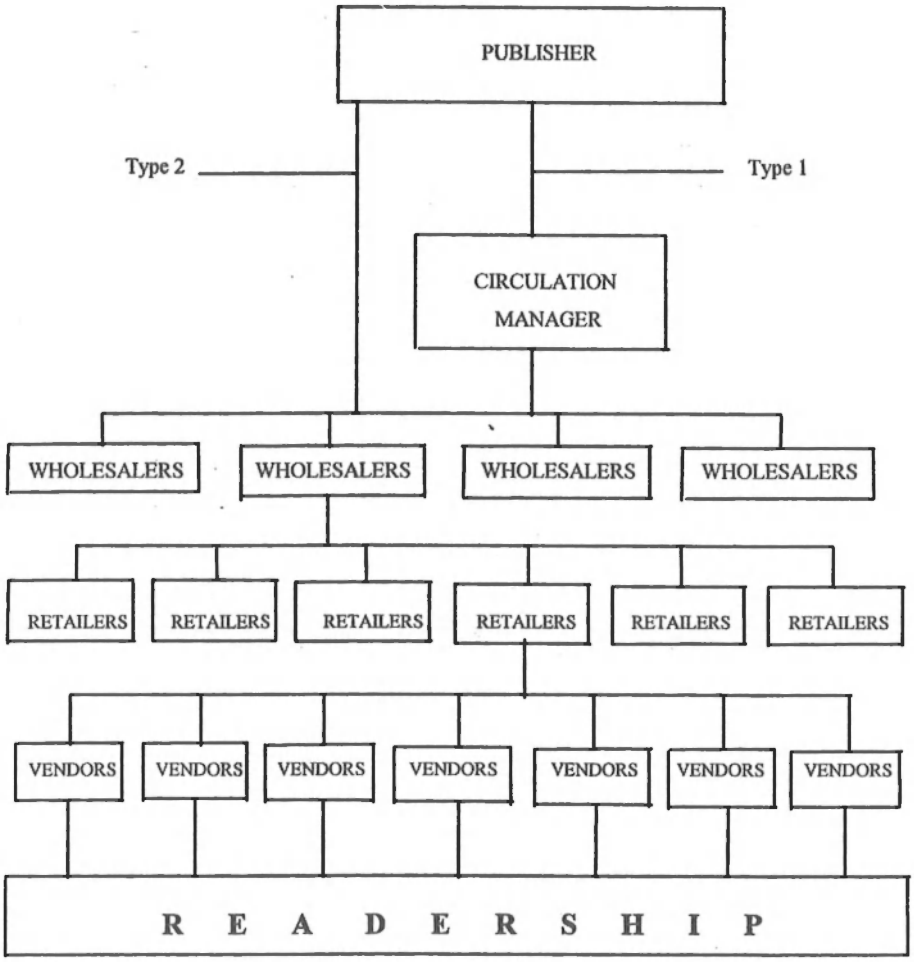
newspaper distribution came onto the scene. This network consisted of two different groups of newspapers and a channel of distribution made up of wholesale distributors, retail distributors and vendors.[49]

The first network is that of the select few (or category one) newspapers (such as *Reporter* and *Tobiya*), which have a wider circulation and readership and are, therefore, influential and financially stable. (In some cases, the papers appear in English and are thus intended for a specific readership.) The proprietors themselves handle the publication of the newspapers, and the circulation of the newspapers in the capital, the regions and foreign countries is carried out, first, through full-time employees, the circulation managers, and, then, through a chain of distributors.[50]

The second network includes a considerable number of newspapers (or category two) whose circulation (which, in the case of some successful papers like *Beza*, *Menelik* and *Tomar,* is extensive) concentrated, to a large extent, around the economically average (or below average) sector of the population. In most cases, and for a number of reasons, such papers are financially unstable. With the exception of a few isolated cases like *Beza*, the publication of such newspapers is directly entrusted to a few established individuals or a group of individuals who, in the process, would exercise a strong influence on the content of the paper, size of its circulation and, ultimately, its financial success or failure.[51]

Next, there is an evolving channel of newspaper distribution, which to a certain extent reflected the categorization described above. The following diagram provides an exposition of the pattern of circulation currently existing in Ethiopia.

DIAGRAM I


PUBLISHER
Type 2
Type 1
CIRCULATION MANAGER
WHOLESALERS
WHOLESALERS
WHOLESALERS
WHOLESALERS
RETAILERS
RETAILERS
RETAILERS
RETAILERS
RETAILERS
RETAILERS
VENDORS
VENDORS
VENDORS
VENDORS
VENDORS
VENDORS
VENDORS
R E A D E R S H I P

As can be seen from the diagram, Type 1 in the circulation system relates to category-one papers, where distribution is directly controlled by the publisher through the circulation manager. The latter is responsible for preparing labels in advance and arranging them in accordance with the number of wholesalers who are attached to the paper on a regular basis. Type 2 tells about the process of circulation that is common among category-two papers. Here the distribution process is carried out through wholesale distributors working individually or in groups of two or three.[52]

In this context a clarification of the roles of individuals involved in the circulation process is essential.

The office of the circulation manager is almost an exclusive preserve of a few established and financially secure papers. The post is perceived by many weaker papers as a luxury in a private press enterprise which is just evolving and, consequently, it is considered as being full of trials and tribulations. The history of Ethiopia's incipient private press has been affected to a significant degree by a somewhat different category of distribution workers: wholesalers, retail distributors, and newspaper vendors.[53]

Of these three operatives, the most influential and indispensable are the first and the last. Let's begin with the vendors. A preponderant portion of the vendors are male, young, and with a poor social and educational background (only a few of them being high school graduates). The 'Gurage' newspaper vendors, in particular, are heavily represented in *Arat Kilo, Ledeta, Mercato, Piazza* and other quarters in the western and southern sections of the city, and they use a pre-existing traditional ethnic trading network and experience in the small-scale business to emerge as an outstanding phenomenon in the private press enterprise. A few of them have accumulated a not insignificant profit, and one of them

has even promoted himself to the position of a newspaper proprietor-publisher.[54]

The rise of the second group, the wholesale distributors, is inextricably linked with that of the independent press enterprise. A look at the profile of these influential operators indicates that they come from varied social and economic backgrounds: some were book sellers and newspaper vendors, while others were unemployed youth; educationally, they are elementary and high school graduates or dropouts. Their initial capital was obtained partly through their own occupational skills and endeavors and partly, by the skillful manipulation of a variety of networks, such as partnerships and patronages. In the course of a few years the more successful ones have created a distribution infrastructure which they dominate, both to the benefit and detriment of the private press.[55]

Many of the wholesalers work independently - sometimes in groups of two or three - with offices which they use alone, in groups, or in partnership with publishers. In the case of the financially sound papers (category one), the role of the distributors is limited to wholesale acquisition of papers on credit, or on payment in full or in part, and their distribution in return for a commission of 40 per cent per 1000 copies. The number of wholesale distributors attached to each newspaper differs, depending, partly, on the size of the issue and its catchment area. For instance, *Tobiya's* circulation is handled by fifteen wholesale distributors and *Reporter*'s by twenty.[56]

With regard to the financially weak papers, some wholesale distributors control not just the circulation but the publication as well of a significant number of the newspapers. This position, which has been acquired over a number of years, is a reflection as much of wholesalers' indispensability as it is of the vulnerability of such newspapers to manipulations. A sizable number of titles joined the private press enterprise with an insignificant initial capital, ranging from the hundreds

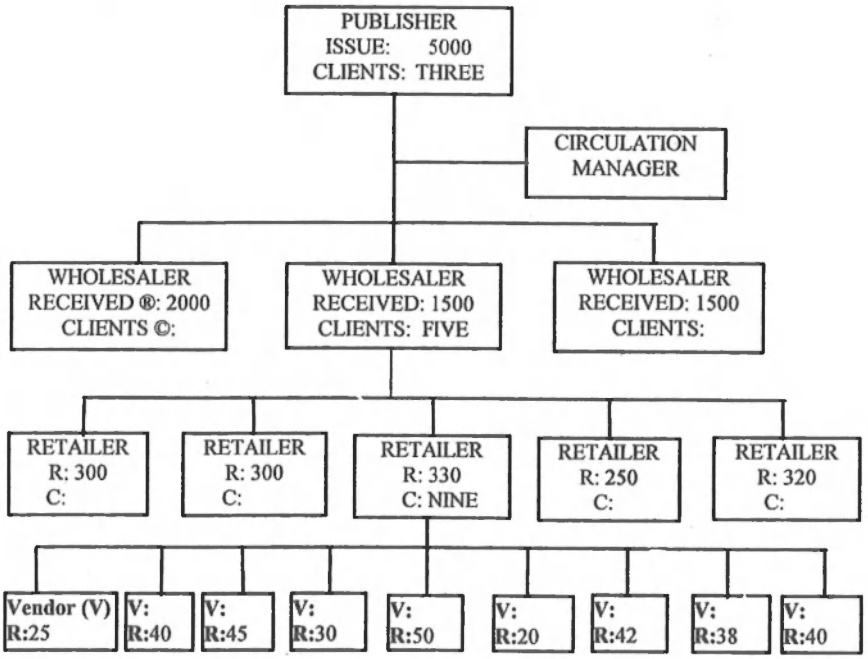
(the minimum requirement being *birr* 250) to a few thousands, and with little or no form of capital investment. Their poverty has been made even worse and more glaring by the increasing cost of printing and paper as well as the price of other relevant accessories. Besides, quite a few publishers and proprietors lacked professional integrity, so much so that they were willing (by agreement and/or through bribes) to sacrifice their papers to wholesale distributors as a way of survival.[57]

The money which wholesale distributors need for newspaper publication is acquired in at least two ways: money coming from their personal accounts and that which is collected retrospectively from retail distributors and newspaper vendors. The latter is a common practice, whereby retailers and vendors who receive newspapers from wholesalers-publishers on credit (a system introduced through friendship networks as well as in recognition of the tenuous financial standing of most papers) are expected to pay back their dues after the sale of the papers has been completed and a day or two before the publication of another issue is to begin.[58]

Once the money has been collected, the paper is sent to the printing press for publication a day before it appears on the market for circulation. For instance, in the case of a Saturday paper, the editorial side of the work, including pasting, is completed by Thursday, and money for publication will be ready between Thursday and Friday. By Friday (afternoon) the paper is sent to the printing press and publication completed by Friday night, sometime between 8:00 and 10:00 p.m. If, in the meantime, a first-class story was sent in, the camera-ready copy is taken out from the line of papers ready for publication, redesigned and the news then added. The printed newspaper is finally taken to the office (of the proprietor, or the wholesaler-publisher) for distribution beginning sometime between 5:30 to 7:00 a.m.[59]

Newspaper distribution follows a network that evolved in the course of the development of the private press. The wholesale distributor-publisher, who is located at the top of the distributive system, is entrusted with the task of apportioning the newspapers, the amount of which differed, depending on the financial strength of the receiver and the size of readership in the area he is coming from. This, he knows from the requests for newspaper acquisition tabled prior to publication and issuance of the paper by his trading partners, retail distributors and newspaper vendors.[60] The following diagram with hypothetical figures is intended to illustrate the process outlined above.

DIAGRAM II



The size of newspaper acquisition decreases as one proceeds from wholesalers to retailers and, eventually, to vendors. In the case of the first, higher category the amount was usually in the range of a thousand or less by a few hundred copies. Wholesale distributors representing different areas of the capital (such *as Arat Kilo, Mercato, Mexico, Piazza*, and the Stadium) and important regional towns (like Bahir Dar, Dire Dawa, Jimma, Nazareth and Shashemene) would receive their share from the wholesale distributor-publisher with whom they had business partnership. (Non-publishing wholesalers did also obtain their share of newspapers from other publisher-wholesale distributors). Areas like Mercato received the largest number of newspapers, partly due to the greater size of readership there and, partly, due to the fact that there were regional newspaper wholesalers who obtained their share directly from the Mercato-based wholesale distributors.[61]

Transaction was conducted in two major ways: through prior payment by those whose clientage was not yet firmly established; and on credit, which was the dominant form of transaction. Business operation on credit applied only to those who lived in Addis Ababa and were well known. The extension of such a system to distributors from the regions was a rarity, in view of the experiences of absconding. Those who enjoyed such a privilege were, in most cases, people who worked through established agents residing in the capital. Transaction on credit went down to the level of a newspaper vendor who, after having received the newspaper on its day of issuance, was expected to pay back the following day (often between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., and from the sale of the paper itself or previous sale of other papers), following an established chain: credit guarantee coming in a top-bottom fashion (publisher-wholesale distributor → retail distributor → vendor), or back pay, with each group taking its share of profit, proceeding in a reverse direction.

The unit price of a newspaper progressively increased, depending on the levels of acquisition.[62] For instance, a wholesale distributor-publisher would sell a single copy of a weekly (5000 copies) paper - eight pages, single color, one *birr* - for a unit price of 0.66 cents (with the cost of producing it varying, depending on the size of publication, between forty to fifty cents) - to the retail distributor with four cents profit (.4 x 5000 = 200). A retail distributor would, in turn, sell the paper to the newspaper vendor for 0.75 cents, with a profit of nine cents (.9 x 5000 = 450). The vendor eventually disposes of the paper to the readers for one *birr* earning a profit of 0.25 cents (.25 x 5000 = 1250).[63]

Accordingly, the weekly income of the proprietor would be *birr* 1,138, which is obtained by deducting the printing and newsprint cost (1962), and the profits of the wholesaler-publisher (200), retail distributor (450) and vendor (1250). In view of the high weekly cost of production, the proprietor could be said to have profited little or, at times, nothing (see Table 5). Of all the operatives outlined above, the greatest beneficiary is the wholesale distributor-publisher, who would earn *birr* 200 as a 40 per cent commission on every 5000-copy weekly paper. If he was publishing four such papers a week, his weekly income would be *birr* 800, or a monthly earning of 3200. The earnings of the retail distributor (450) and vendor (1250) is shared out among a large number of individuals. The margin of profit decreases as one proceeds from wholesaler-publisher through retailers to vendors. This is in response to a corresponding increase in the number of functionaries involved in each category.[64]

There is now a pattern evolving as a reaction to this diminishing profit margin. This is a network of circulation that establishes a direct, and more financially manageable, chain between the proprietor-publisher → wholesaler (or proprietor → wholesaler-publisher) and the vendor. This is achieved through removing the retail distributors who are sacrificed for survival and profit reasons.[65]

The catchment area of the private newspapers is confined, to a large extent, to the capital and some regional towns. Newspaper delivery to the reader follows a pattern which may be defined as stepped-distribution, as could be exemplified by the following chain: publisher's office → Mercato → Shashemene → smaller satellite towns.

In Addis Ababa, a number of quarters are selected as major stations for the distribution of newspapers. These include *Mercato* (for mostly poor quality, sensational, and, at times, pornographic papers), *Arat Kilo. Fil Wuha, Legehar*, Mexico Square, and *Piazza.* It should be noted here that newspaper sale in such quarters is not a strictly compartmentalized exercise. Newspapers are circulated from areas of excess to those of scarcity, and vendors with unsold papers would leave their newsstands and move to other quarters where the market is vibrant and newspapers are in short supply.

Such stations as those cited above would consecutively serve as distributive centers for smaller areas located nearby. A typical example in this respect is Mercato, the largest receiver of private newspapers and the biggest distributive center (with the longest hours of distribution) in the capital for areas in and outside of the vicinity of the Great Market area and most regional centers. The important regional destination nodes, which in turn act as further distributive centers for private papers, include Awassa, Ambo, Bahir Dar, Bonga, Bure, Debre Birhan, Debre Zeit, Dire Dawa, Dessie, Harar, Kombolcha, Jijiga, Jima, Metehara, Nazareth, Shashemene, Woldia and Zuway. Newspapers distributed in such regional towns are obtained directly from the proprietor's office or that of the wholesaler-publisher, or from that of wholesale distributors working mostly in Mercato, and on credit (paying back a day or two later), or through payment in full or in part.[66]

Most newspapers are delivered to the readership by vendors selling in newsstands located at important meeting points (major taxi and bus stations, public squares, and other areas with heavy human traffic). English language papers are either directly sold in big supermarkets, restaurants, and areas frequented by the rich and the educated - Ethiopians and foreigners alike, or through subscriptions.[67]

Circulation of a newspaper is a whole-day undertaking. Newspapers are delivered to vendors between 6:00 a.m. (at times, 5:30 a.m.) and 7:00 a.m. Heavy circulation begins from the time of acquisition to 10:00 a.m. in the morning and 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. in the afternoon, which is after the end of the working day for most people. Limited human movement, lowest newspaper circulation and discounted sale price all belong to the period between 6:00 and 9:00 p.m. There are areas where nightly circulation at a reduced price is centered. *Arat Kilo* is a case in point. Newspapers which were unsold in other quarters are brought to Arat Kilo for sale at a significantly reduced price. There are, in fact, groups of individuals who usually come to such areas around 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. to buy unsold papers in bulk for about 0.35 cents each, which they then dispose of later for 0.50 cents. On the surface, a vendor who sells a newspaper at a discount price for resale may appear to lose and go bankrupt. This is, however, a possibility successfully avoided by letting papers out for temporary reading for a certain fee.[68]

As opposed to the early years in the history of the independent press enterprise, letting out papers and the consequent communal or multiple readership has now become a dominant practice. At present private newspapers might change hands ten or a dozen times in the market place, passing through the hands of many readers on a single day. This is done as hawkers let them out by the hour at a charge to each client of about one-tenth of the full price; that is a minimum of ten cents for a one-*birr* paper and twenty cents for a one-*birr*-and-fifty-cent paper.[69]

Under such circumstances the newspaper vendors would prefer to engage in letting papers out to readers for a certain, flexible fee during most of the day and, then, disposing them towards 5:00 p.m., at times for fifty cents directly to readers, but ,in most cases, for about thirty five cents to 'discount' resellers. This would save them from a potential bankruptcy due to failure in disposing of all papers; it would even give them a rare opportunity of making good profit. For instance, if a vendor acquired a one-*birr* paper for seventy-five cents and let it out to, say, ten readers from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., charging each reader ten cents, he would get a profit of one *birr*, a higher profit margin than he would get from directly selling the paper. The difference between the two is something between twenty five cents and one *birr*, with a net profit of seventy-five cents. The vendor would increase his profit from letting out copies of a paper by eventually disposing of the unsold copies for fifty or thirty-five cents each for further resale.

CHAPTER FOUR
PROBLEMS OF ESTABLISHMENT, SURVIVAL AND GROWTH

4.1. CONSTRAINTS

The existence of some kind of understanding between the private press and the government is fundamental to the status of the press. In countries like Ethiopia, where the forms of democracy are experimental and the concept of professional communication novel, the journalist is suspect. The private press itself is suspicious of the government. The private press is, in fact, like an acrobat continually walking a tightrope, and it is considered as predisposed to offending the authorities, in spite of being careful and tactful. In addition to this mutual suspicion between the two, the growth of the independent press is retarded by such practical problems as limited literacy rate, lack of qualified personnel, high poverty level, and financial difficulties. In the following section some of the outstanding problems of the private press will be outlined.

4.2. The Press Law: *Proclamation No.34/1992*

> All eyes are on, all hopes are in the press;
> Let that be free - and who can doubt success
> The genius of the press shall yet prevail
> And conquer where the boldest armies fail;
> For despotes, though united, fell in distress
> And tremble when the thunder of the press
> Rolls through their kingdoms in the civil storm
> Proclaiming justice, freedom and reform.[70]

The press law of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (Proc. No. 34/1992) could be taken as an achievement of great significance in the process of political liberalization. A typical gesture in this direction are the measures taken to free the press from the captivity of pre-print censorship. In practice, however, rather than regulating the activities of the exploding private press, the law has been increasingly stifling its growth through an array of punitive and prohibitive articles. Many people were, in fact, led to believe that this contradictory legal document was promulgated less by the desire to promote press freedom than by political expediency (*Ethiopia*, 1991:136).

To begin with, the press law was drafted on the basis of articles enshrined in the *Penal Code* of 1957 (1949 E.C., see p.9) and the *Civil Code* of 1959 (1952 E.C., see p. 46). This being the case, articles in both codes, included in connection with the press, have the same binding force as those of the press law, and work in conjunction with them. The result has been multiplication as well as duplication of legislations, which, complex and confusing as they are, could be - and often are - invoked against journalists critical of the government. Consequently, they have contributed heavily to hampering the growth of the private press.

The press law itself is full of restrictive provisions, and tends to impose the "most undemocratic" (*Ethiopia*, 1991:136) and heavy-handed penalties for offenses or breaches that are considered petty even by the laws of the country. Article 8, sub-title 3 of the press law introduced a distinction between news and information when it declared that the press had no right to seek, obtain and impart information designated secret by other laws and organs of the government. In contradistinction to Article 8, sub-title 1, this "odious and inexcusable tax upon political knowledge" (Harrison, 1974:75) denies the press an important source of hard news. Article 10, sub-title 2 (a-d) enacted restrictions against circulation of

issues which, it declares, contain a criminal offense against national security, defamation of public figures, incitement of ethnic conflicts and agitation for war. These prohibitions (the challenge of which caused the plight of many journalists) were so vaguely and broadly stated that they were always open to abuse, and many journalists found them difficult to understand clearly and act accordingly. This was exploited by the police and prosecutors to harass, detain and charge independent journalists and publishers time and again.[71]

In addition to the inherent problems within the law itself - restrictiveness broadness, and vagueness - legislations enshrined in it are unheeded by officials of the government. Cases in point include: forced disclosure by journalists of sources of information, in violation of Article 8, sub-title 4, (a) and (b); and uncooperativeness of government officials in furtherance of the principle of transparency and accountability, contrary to the provision in Article 19.[72]

The penalties for violation, say, of any of the duties in Article 10 are both multiple and exorbitant, ranging from one to three years in imprisonment or from *birr* ten thousand to fifty thousand in fines, or both. This provision for inordinate penalty is destined to increase as the government uses its powers to charge and punish journalists and publishers for a variety of contraventions, and through the application of stipulations of the *Penal Code*.

The inherent limitations of the press law, compounded with multiplication of repressive legislations and the absence of a genuinely independent and experienced judiciary, are all impediments to the rise of a journalism of high professional standards. The importance of the press law as a legal guarantee of freedom of expression is thus seriously compromised by the erection of a considerable legal machinery. This has led some observers to characterize the press law as one designed to

penalize journalists, or as a gesture of giving something with one hand and taking it back with the other (Nigatu, 1986 E.C.:19).
For instance, pre-censorship, the abolition of which was a great achievement of the press law, has been gradually replaced by self-censorship (possibly resulting in an unenterprising and timid press), for fear of official repercussions in the form of heavy penalties. The punishment includes heavy fines and imprisonment for spreading, say, tendentious news, sedition, defamation and so on. A large number of journalists and publishers working in the private press were, at one time or another, harassed, intimidated, detained, charged, imprisoned and/or fined. Besides, harassment and beating of newspaper vendors continued, causing a significant reduction in the sale of newspapers in the early days of the private press.[73]

There are numerous cases of actions taken by the police, security forces and other organs of the government in violation of the laws of the country, including the Constitution. Journalists were arrested, but not formally charged or prosecuted, and then released on police bond. There were arbitrary (with no formal warrant by the court) and extended (beyond 48 hours and stretching up to several months) detentions, in violation of Article 17, sub-title 2 and Article 19, sub-title 3 of the FDRE Constitution. The situation has been further complicated by the practice of collective charges and detention as well as imposing exorbitant bail money. In more than one case, a publisher, editor and reporter had been charged and detained, in violation of Article 20, sub-titles 2 and 3 of the Press Law. With regard to bail money, the lowest demanded of a journalist in a single charge (until 1990 E.C.) was *birr* 2000 and the highest *birr* 50,000. In multiple charges the range is said to be between *birr* 5000 and *birr* 280,000. In addition to money, residential houses, cars and trade licenses were used to bail journalists out. This situation attracted the attention of such international bodies as Amnesty International, Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Sans

Frontiers, and was partially responsible for the closure of several newspapers and magazines and the subsequent flight of a good number of the more professional and qualified members of the private press.[74]

This, however, does not mean that government actions are all legally unjustifiable. Many members of the private press have been prosecuted and penalized for committing crimes such as publishing false news, and/or for inaccurate and irresponsible reporting.[75]

The government was subsequently accused of making an error of extending unlimited freedom of the press before the erection of regulatory institutions. It was argued that this had left the press bereft of its civic responsibilities and demonstrated its incapacity to handle the liberty it won with a "modicum of balance and judiciousness". As a result, some quarters have argued that all these flaws of the private press would go to justify the importance and relevance of a "guided democracy" and, consequently, of a "guided press" (The International Transparency Commission on Africa [ITCO- Africa], 1995:183 - 184).

4.3. Economic Restrictions

In developing countries such as Ethiopia newspaper publishing is not an attractive business venture, given the multiplicity of problems such as shortage of capital for investment, ever-increasing printing and newsprint cost under conditions of scarcity and foreign exchange control, the paucity of advertising and sales, and absence of trained and experienced staff for technical and editorial production and in management. Newspaper circulation is hindered by low literacy rate, high poverty level, lack of motivation and established channels of distribution. Many people are thus turning to businesses which are safer, more profitable and free from political complications as well as the considerable risks of running a newspaper. In Ethiopia, the incipient

private press has been struggling to survive and be profitable in the face of such formidable problems. With the exception of a few, most of the private papers operate with a slight margin of profit, and, at times, at a loss.

The high tariff on newsprint and the sharp increase in newsprint prices in the world market, coupled with high printing cost, represent a sizable share of a newspaper's total production cost. This has left a number of private papers financially weak and unstable. And papers which are not economically viable are inherently unstable and less likely to survive once they have outlived their usefulness to the proprietor. The tremendous increase in printing and newsprint cost (89.4 per cent between 1993 and 1997) and sale price of a newspaper (314 per cent, from 0.35 cents in 1992 to 1.10 cents in 1997 for an eight page, single color paper) is illustrative of the difficulties facing the emerging independent press enterprise in Ethiopia (ODA, 1996:35; Sommerlad, 1966:46, 47; Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.:49-50).

The procurement of equipment is seriously hampered by the poor financial standing of most newspapers. Poor conditions of work (working in low-quality, heavily congested - three to seven people to a single room - and meagerly provided premises) are indicators of the scarcity of resources prevalent in the private press. This is partly owing to the insignificant initial capital, which is what most publishers had when starting a newspaper enterprise.[76]

The situation has been made even worse by the underdevelopment of advertising in Ethiopia. One of the peculiar characteristics of a newspaper business is that the cost of production is almost invariably higher than sale price. Discrepancy between revenue and expenditure (due to reduced total sales) usually exists even in those times when a newspaper is properly costed and sold at a profitable price.

The gap has to be bridged, for the paper to survive, by other means, ranging from the most common to the least and unethical one: commercial advertising; subsidy by government, organizations and individuals; and blackmail and payments for publication or suppression of news reports or articles.[77]

While subsidy and unethical practices are less common (though the latter tend to be prevalent in some cases) commercial advertising, a fundamental factor behind the success or failure of a newspaper business, is very limited.

Consequently, newspapers benefiting from positive changes in advertising are only a few. This negative turn is as much an outcome of the newspapers' limited circulation as it is of the type of their readership which, in most cases, is not economically strong. The perception that these papers are of low quality, antagonistic to the government in power, and full of political scandal as well as "prurient or salacious stories" (*Ethiopia*, 1994:138), and the subsequent fear of being associated with such 'libelous' newspapers have also discouraged the flow of advertising from private or government companies.

Even more significantly, failure to attract advertising could well be ascribed to a comparatively low level of business and commercial activities and the novelty or, even more, the unfavorable attitude towards, and limited capacity for, sales promotion (despite noticeable improvements of late). Under such circumstances, the financial capacity for or the inclination toward advertising would be confined to a few manufacturers or traders. These hard, inescapable economic facts are the principal reason for the low circulation and poor quality of many papers and for the bankruptcy and closure of others.

Building up circulation to produce revenue from sales, which would serve as the basis on which advertising rates could be established and space sold, is a problem as much formidable as that of venturing into a newspaper enterprise in the first place. In addition to low literacy rate, poverty[79] (which has been responsible for multiple readership of papers), and poor reading culture (or motivation), the system of newspaper distribution in the capital and the regions is underdeveloped. In the regions, in fact, the problem of distribution has increased progressively as horizons widened. In relatively remote areas, for instance, papers are never seen, and when they do, they are frequently several days old on arrival, and may even be sold for twice their original price.[79]

Newspaper distribution operations are also seriously restrained by government attempts to stop or limit newspaper accessibility for areas outside the capital. This act, which is in tune with the official characterization of most private newspapers as anti-government, was diligently pursued, particularly in 1994 and 1995, by the relevant organs of the government, in flagrant violation of the rule of law (see, for instance, article 8, sub-title 2 of the Press Law). There were cases where newspapers which were sent to the regions for circulation were confiscated[80] and burnt.[81] Newspaper distributors, such as those based in regional towns, were also detained (like the one in Neqemte, who was detained for three months in 1996). Harassment and beating was used against newspaper vendors in the capital and other major regional towns (Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.: 50-51).

In this connection, mention should be made of the fact that there is a distinction, though a more conventional one, with regard to the catchment area (or destination nodes) in private newspaper distribution. There are areas which are denied access to most private newspapers, like those in the north, and where the possibility of distributing newspapers passes through different gradations in a concentric circle; for instance,

areas closer to the capital tend, in more cases than one, to enjoy a higher degree of access to newspapers. This is not, however, always necessarily the case, for there are a complex set of variables (such as extent of urbanization and level of literacy) affecting regional newspaper circulation.

With the rare exception of occasional explosion in newspaper production and circulation, such as in the early days of the Ethio-Eritrean conflict, the general trend nowadays is for the size of distribution to decrease. This is due, among other things, to what may be referred to as 'communal reading' and 'newspaper-letting', practices which, resulting from a comparatively higher sale price and the failing captivating power of several newspapers, are becoming increasingly appealing to both the readers and vendors. Both tend to discourage readers from buying papers, or vendors from acquiring a large number of copies to sell; for a single paper could be shared among many readers, or, in the case of vendors, there is more chance of making profit by letting out papers than by selling them to individual readers.[82] These practices, though advantageous to the toiling vendors, could be and, indeed are, detrimental to the growth of an independent press enterprise.

The proliferation of newspapers which are financially and organizationally weak or professionally under- or ill-qualified, as well as the presence in the business of irresponsible publishers and editors correspondingly have increased the importance of a select few wholesale distributors. Such wholesalers emerged as sole financial providers to (and in isolated cases, proprietors of) a number of papers, in addition to the additional role they played in newspaper distribution. This has inevitably enabled them, for instance, to know the content of a newspaper prior to publication and, consequently, to demand significant changes in its structure, ranging from layout to substance. There are, in fact, numerous reports where wholesale distributors-publishers force

fabrication of news and[83] the inclusion, in the front pages, of news and photographs which they thought would be of absorbing interest to readers.

Such an unethical practice was used in response to the volatile newspaper market and at the expense of quality, fairness, and professionalism. Hence, a serious debasing of many newspapers where sensationalism or libel was rampant and the boundary between objectivity and subjectivity, fact and hyperbole became tenuous.

4.4. Professional-Ethical Problems

Among the obstacles to newspaper development is the major problem of qualified staff, a key factor in the successful launching and operation of a new newspaper. In Ethiopia, there is, invariably, scarcity of qualified personnel with experience in newspaper editing and management. People with the knowledge and skills required to plan a newspaper, provide an attractive editorial content and deal with such vital issues as supplies, finance, advertising and circulation are in short supply. Pathetically poor conditions of work and rates of pay, combined with the low status of the profession, make it an uphill struggle for Ethiopian journalism to attract talent and compete with other (more rewarding) callings.

The problem is particularly acute with regard to the editorial staff. The number of qualified and experienced journalists available is incomparably lower than that needed by the private newspapers under circulation. Concentration of the few qualified journalists in a small number of newspapers (like *Reporter* and *Tobiya*) has limited the possibility of distribution of journalistic knowledge and experience. Accordingly, many newspapers are run by underqualified individuals

with little or no experience and, in exceptional circumstances, no training at all.[84]

An increasing number of journalists have attended training workshops and seminars organized in the capital by several foreign organizations, alone or in collaboration with local counterparts. Notwithstanding their contributions, the vitality of these workshops and seminars has been seriously limited by the fact that they were conducted, in most cases, in a language few understood, namely, English. Moreover, the courses offered were short and infrequent, and they were too technical to comprehend and to apply to current Ethiopian realities. Besides, most private newspapers are too understaffed to spare people for these workshops. Representation of the private press in the training programs and workshops of the Ethiopian Mass Media Training Institute has so far been negligible.[85]

All this is reflected in the deterioration of the standards and ethics of journalism in many papers. Hence, the rampancy of misquoting, misinterpreting, plagiarism, the focus on trivial issues, poor layout, subjectivity, sensationalism, fixation on most sordid and volatile issues, obscenity and lies (ODA, 1996:36; Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.:69, 72).

The use of what has come to be known as '*tapela*' is a typical index of this picture of downward slide evident in many papers. '*Tapela*' (a term originally used to denote the travel directions of taxis in Addis Ababa) is used in reference to unemployed or under-employed, literate or semi-literate individuals who are recruited for a small fee by newspaper publishers as editors. With this employment, the '*tapelas*' would theoretically assume all the duties and privileges due to the office. In practice the main object of their hiring is to represent a paper in court, be prosecuted and bear the consequences of its decisions.[86]

In most cases, such unqualified '*tapelas*' are used in low quality papers, where the guiding principle is not standard or ethics but profit. Thus, for instance, lies are fabricated and made into news. The person who would be penalized for publication of such news is, according to the Press Law (Article 10, sub-title 3(1)), and as witnessed in repeated cases, the editor (that is the '*tapela*' in this particular circumstance). Some of them know what they are paid for is a punishable undertaking, but they do carry on in order to survive. But there are several of '*tapelas*' who, illiterate as they are, are completely unaware of what is written in the papers. The status mobility of some '*tapelas*' is even more fascinating. Some have risen from scratch to become reporters, editors and, in one case, even a publisher.

There are, nevertheless, other forms of operation, in which use of editors as fronts and their constant reshuffling are common. Some newspapers with a long record of harassment and detention employ fairly qualified individuals as editors, but with considerable control of the whole exercise from behind the scenes. This is an adjustment necessitated by fear of loss of qualified editors and subsequent suspension or closure of newspapers. The problem with such arrangement is that the employee might not be as much committed to the paper, as was his/her predecessor. Others would reshuffle editors in response to detention or suspension of previous editors.[87]

CONCLUSION

The private press in Ethiopia, as in other developing countries under similar circumstances, could be said to be reminiscent of the press in more developed countries a century ago. This is with regard to newspaper multiplicity (with no single paper having achieved a large circulation or national distribution by outselling others), its urban concentration (which is as much a reflection of the pattern of Ethiopia's development as it is of government pressure and most papers' financial insolvency), economic insecurity, limited advertising, comparatively small circulation, relatively untrained staff, variable standards, and, frequently, modest equipment.

A point of particular significance in this respect is that, like the first-born of the modern media, the private press in Ethiopia began life not as an instrument of government but as a rebel. Accordingly, the story it presents interlocks at every point with the political and social changes in the country. A profile of these stories would indicate that they constitute a saga of valor in the defense and, to a large degree, in the fostering of the democratization process.

The independent press in Ethiopia has, despite its infancy, been revealing, daring and remarkably outspoken. Since its inception the private press has vigorously and audaciously reported on topics of national concern and absorbing interest to readers, such as political marginalization, power abuse, ethnic conflicts, corruption, economic mismanagement, and advocated political liberalization, press freedom, human rights and national unity.

At the same time, however, the independent press has been as much libellous, uninvestigative, gullible, irresponsible and highly sensational. There is a tendency among most titles to devote a large space to sensitive

issues which, though they are extremely consumable news items, are at times mere fabrications, or bordered on the grotesque. Many reports are unsubstantiated, and some of the reporters lack the professional skill, ability or experience to aggressively dig out facts. For some papers the boundary between news-reporting and news-making is, in fact, blurred (*Ethiopia*, 1991:132-134).

In its process of evolution and growth, full of trials and tribulation, the private press has blossomed out to be outspokenly partisan. Objective news-reporting is rendered difficult due to the political orientation of most private papers. Any sign of appreciation, even if limited, of government policy or action has thus been treated as being unpatriotic, a collusion with enemies of Ethiopia. This intense feeling, attributable as it is to the exclusionary policies and practices of the government and to the urban-cosmopolitan origin of most private journalists, has indeed become a mark of identification for the largest number of private newspapers. A further demonstration is the division between journalists in the government-controlled print medium and those in the private press, a division which has found its concrete expression in the founding of two rival associations (the Ethiopian Journalists' Association vis-à-vis the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association) waging a non-conventional war of words. Consequently, a univocal-partisan press has been left to reign at the expense of a pluralistic press representing a wide spectrum of opinions.

This is, in fact, little more than an acute manifestation of a tradition of political intolerance, as witnessed in the political infighting and consequent fratricide (sororicide, too) between various political groupings in recent history. The rise of advocacy or partisan journalism could also possibly be ascribed to the period and circumstances in which the private press evolved, a period of transition, of heightened nationalism, and of intolerantly divided politics.

Notwithstanding this, the term 'polarization of the press' should be qualified, for the simple reason that the private press has never had a monolithic stand vis-à-vis the government in power. There are, broadly speaking, three different, but occasionally diffuse categories: those - the great majority - which are vehemently critical of the government; those with a generally pro-government position (or 'critically-supportive papers', as some would prefer to be called); and those trying to strike a balance between the two (or in search of the 'golden mean').

Nonetheless, the private press in Ethiopia has a great potential to give voice to the interests of the 'grassroots'. The existence of a viable and vibrant press is imperative as a foundation of democracy. As Smith (1996:166); Desalegn (1991:1-22) point out, the experiences of many countries, such as those in Latin America, reveal the importance to democracy of a state balanced by "a pluralistic, autonomously organized civil society to check the power of the state and give expression to popular interests."

The private press, as an integral part of civil society, can thus be an important force, a 'fourth estate' geared to empowering the poor, listening to the 'voices from below', fostering a stable responsive and accountable government and contributing to the vitality of democracy in Ethiopia.

NOTES

[1] *A'emro* appeared differently as '*Aymero*' which, in fact was originally written on the paper itself. The name was given by Menelik himself.

[2] The date of publication of *A'emro*'s first issue was given differently as 1900 (MOI, 1966:6), 1901 (Moges Woldemedhin, 1963 E.C:1), 1902 (Pankhurst, 1962: 252), and 1907 (Kaplan, 1971: 324).

[3] There were seven printing presses and fifteen newspapers in Addis Ababa alone on the eve of the Italian invasion in 1935 (see Appendix I for the list of papers).

[4] To this category belong such papers as *Difesa della Razza* (imported from Italy), *Corrıer dell Impero, Corrier Eritrea* and *Somalia Fascista* (Published in Addis Ababa and Asmara) as well as *Ye Qesar Mengist Melikıagna* and *Ye Roma Birhan*, weekly and monthly Amharic newspapers respectively (See Tedbabe, 1990 E.C. 13; Afework Woldegaber, 1983: 1).

[5] Mairegu quoted in Deneke, 1991: 64. The situation was somewhat different in Eritrea during the Italian colonial period and subsequent British military administration, as Mytton (1983: 23) confirms in the following way:

> By contrast, Eritrea has had a lengthier history of newspaper development and somewhat livelier press. Under the Italian occupation and during the post-World War II British administration, a large daily and weekly press flourished in Eritrea's capital city of Asmara: in 1951, for example, there were two dailies, eight weeklies, two bi-weeklies and five monthlies. . . ."

[6] The operation of the government press under Haile Selassie is justifiably expressed by Frank Barton (1975:256) in the following manner:

> In any international travesties of the press, Ethiopia would come very near the top. In the era of the emperor, the whole country's media were no more than a massive public relations exercise for Haile Selassie.

[7] This was in fact in conformity with the professed responsibility of a socialist press which, in the words of Lenin (1972:30), was to be "... the collective agitator, propagandist and political organizer, the communist party's voice to the people."

[8] See decrees issued in October 1934 and 1936 E.C., the *Revised Constitution of 1955*, Article 41, No. 1; and the 1952 E.C. *Civil Code* (No.14); Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.: 15, 20.

[9] See, for instance, *Proclamation No. 26/67* E.C.

[10] ODA, 1996:33 claims that 336 licenses have been granted which may possibly have included periodicals owned by the government and/or public associations.

[11] ODA, 1996: 33. The number is subject to periodic fluctuation though the general trend at present is to decrease.

[12] Though it was not stipulated in the press law a would-be journalist was expected to pay *birr* 250 for registration.

[13]This situation of ease of entry has, since August 1990 E.C., come to an unfortunate conclusion. It was then decided by the Mass Media License Registration and Control Department in the Ministry of Culture and Information that newspapers could only apply for new licenses or renew old ones on showing a bank deposit of Eth. *Birr* 10,000. Failure to do this, and increase by a government decision of printing cost, has led to the closure of twelve newspapers as of December 1999: *Atlanta, Cantona, Fiqir, Genanaw, Hikma, Kiker, Madonna, Meyisaw, Qalkidan* and *Tarik*. Seven more newspapers stopped publication owing, it was claimed, to financial insolvency, onerous printing cost and highly competitive circulation. These were *Agere, Arbegnaw, Fetash, Gemena, Rayt, Ye Fiqir Mahider* and *Zegabi*. There was even a readiness on the part of the Ministry to introduce, in future, more strenuous conditions for entry including completion of 12th grade, training, even if short, in journalism and some amount of experience in the profession. This decision, severe and even more unexpected as it was, inevitably resulted in an outcry from journalists and the EFPJA. See the Amharic Weeklies, *Tobiya*, Year 6, No.36, December 6, 1992, E.C., p., 9; and *Reporter*, Vol. 5 No. 16/224 December 10, 1992, E.C., p. 1, 15.

[14] Interview, Biruck Kebede, Sisay.

[15] Interview, Tedbabe and Zegeye; Zegeye, publisher and proprietor of *Genanaw*, started his newspaper with an initial capital of only Eth. *Birr* 255.

[16] Interview, Abebe, Alemtsehay, Befekadu Moroda, Sisay, Yohannes, Wole Gurmu, Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.: 60-61

[17] Interview, Sisay, Eskindir Nega, Sisay.

[18] Interview, Ephrem Endale, Goshu Moges, Sisay, Wole.

[19] There was even a widespread but conclusively unverified rumor that attributed the ownership and running of a newspaper to a single individual.

[20] Female representation in the Ethiopian free press enterprise was very negligible, a situation which tended to make the private press a completely male dominated area.

[21] Interview, Alemtsehay, Befekadu, Biruck, Ephrem, Eskinder, Goshu, Tedbabe, Yohannes.

[22] Interview, Eskindir, Yonas.

[23] Interview, Alemtsehay, Tedbabe.

[24] Interview, Goshu, Wole.

[25] Interview, Netsanet Tesfaye, Tedbabe.

[26] Such experienced journalists included Goshu, Kefale Mamo, Mulugeta Lule and Metshafe Sirak.

[27] Interview, Goshu, Netsanet, Wole.

[28] Interview, Thirty one editors and reporters selected from ten newspapers.

[29] Interview, Befekadu, Biruck, Dawit Kebede, Ephrem, Goshu, Yohannes.

[30] Interview, Sisay, Teferi Wossen, Yohannes.

[31] Interview, Befekadu, Sisay, Tedbabe.

[32] Interview, Befekadu, Biruck, Dawit, Sisay.

[33] Interview, Alemtsehay, Befekadu, Biruck, Dawit, Ephrem, Goshu, Yohannis, Yonas.

[34] Interview, Abebe, Tedbabe, Yohannis.

[35] Interview, Yohannes, Yonas.

[36] Interview, Ephrem.

[37] Interview, Alemtsehay, Alemayehu Fanta, Befekadu, Dawit, Ephrem, Tedbabe.

[38] Interview, Yohannes, Yonas.

[39] Interview, Dawit, Tedbabe.

[40] Interview, Befekadu, Daniel, Sisay.

[41] Interview, Befekadu, Fekade Mahtemeworq, Sisay, Tedbabe, Zelalem Hailu.

[42] Interview, Befekadu, Dawit, Sisay, Tedbabe, Yohannis.

[43] Interview, Abebe, Alemtsehay, Befekadu, Biruck, Dawit, Ephrem, Eskinder, Sisay, Yohannis, Wole.

[44] Tedbabe has found out in his survey on 20 papers that 80 per cent of them did not own computers and were, therefore, forced to employ the services of others.

[45] Interview, Alemtsehay, Alemayehu, Goshu, Tedbabe, Wole.

[46] Interview, Befekadu, Sisay, Yohannis.

[47] Interview, Fekade, Hailu, Shafi.

[48] Interview, Sisay.

[49] Interview, Fekade, Sisay, Tedbabe, Zelalem.

[50] Interview, Alemtsehay, Alemayehu, Goshu, Wole.

[51] Interview, Biruck, Befekadu, Fekade, Tedbabe, Zelalem.

[52] Interview, Befekadu, Fekade, Sisay, Yohannes.

[53] Interview, Alemtsehay, Fekade, Tedbabe, Wole.

[54] Interview, Alemtsehay, Yonas.

[55] Interview, Fekade, Tedbabe, Zelalem.

[56] Interview, Alemayehu, Alemtsehay, Tedbabe, Goshu.

[57] Interview, Biruck, Fekadu, Mekonnen Desalegn, Sisay, Tedbabe, Zekarias Tesfa.

[58] Interview, Negash, Shafi.

[59] Interview, Netsanet, Qidist Belachew.

[60] Interview, Fekade, Mekonnen, Zekarias.

[61] Interview, Fekade, Mekonnen, Tedbabe, Zekarias, Zelalem.

[62] Disclosure of financial information was, for various reasons, a problem of considerable proportions. When such information was given, it was as much incomplete as it was embellished.

[63] In the case of *Reporter* (the English weekly), for instance, the picture was obviously different for it was a larger in size (more than 20 pages) and, consequently, higher sale price (*Birr* 1.50). The unit price of a single issue fluctuated from time to time depending upon the number of pages, cost of printing and newsprint and other factors:

1.063 cents (22 pages x 17,000 copies) on 11 Sept. 1999
0.949 cents (22 pages x 17,600 copies) on 19, Sept. 1999
0.8533 cents (20 pages x 16,000 copies) on 10, Oct. 1999

A single issue would be sold to wholesalers for *Birr* 1.00 and through them, to retail distributors and vendors for *Birr* 1.15 or 1.20 and 1.25 respectively. The paper was eventually delivered to the reader for *Birr* 1.50.

[64] Interview, Fekade, Mekonnen, Tedbabe, Zerihun.

[65] Interview, Fekade, Zelalem.

[66] Interview, Fekade, Mekonnen, Shafi, Zerihun.

[67] Interview, Abebe, Fekade, Shafi.

[68] Interview, Zerihun, Zelalem.

[69] Interview, Alemtsehay, Ephrem, Tedbabe.

[70] Verses taken from "The Freedom of the Press" by Ebenezer Elliot in the *Northern Star*, July 4, 1840. This was quoted by Stanley Harrison, 1974, p. 104.

[71] For it was said that the police and prosecutors would invoke Article 480 of the *Penal Code* in conjunction with Article 410 of the Press Law to detain and charge journalists. Article 480 says:

> Whosoever. . . (a) starts or spreads false rumours, suspicions, or false charges against the Government or the public authorities or their activities, thereby disturbing or inflaming public opinion or creating a danger of public disturbances; or (b) by whatever accusation or any other means foments dissension, arouses hatred, or stirs up acts of violence or political, racial or religious disturbances, is punishable with simple imprisonment [extending up to three years; see article 105 of the *Penal Code*] or fine.

[72] Interview, Befekadu, Dawit, Sisay.

[73] Paradoxically enough, the earliest (in February 1984 E.C., three months after the enactment of the press law) casualty of the press law were journalists working in the government owned *Addis Zemen*. They were imprisoned, charged in a court for spreading

malicious news (on the pros and cons of democracy in Ethiopia) and then set free (See Tedbabe, p.1990 E.C.: 42).

[74] The record of one of Ethiopia's leading private papers, *'Tobiya'*, tell the story eloquently. It was established in 1984 E.C. and in the course of the subsequent seven years its sale was prohibited, issues confiscated, it was suspended, was forced to close, and was a victim of arson attack, and reporters and other staff suffered penalties of various kinds on numerous occasions (See also Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.: 47-48).

[75] Interview, Biruck, Sisay, Yonas.

[76] Interview, Befekadu, Sisay, Zegeye.

[77] Interview, Befekadu, Sisay, Yohannis, Yonas.

[78] Average daily wage in Ethiopia was, according to a World Bank survey, less than two dollars and the price of a newspaper ranged between *Birr* 1.00 and 1.50 (See Befekadu and Berhanu, 1999/2000: 98).

[79] ODA, 1996: 39; Sommerlad, 1966: 74-75. A research on newspaper- reader ratio, which has not been done so far, would have been indicative of the purchasing power, literacy rate and pace of urbanization evident in the capital.

[80] This is a reference to the seizure of 8000 copies of a Tigrigna language newspaper called *Dehay* in the southern border of Tigray with Wollo in November 1985 E.C.

[81] A case in point is a magazine called *A'emro*, which was destroyed by the police in Debre Sina in early 1986, E.C.

[82] Publishers and EFPJA had tried hard, but in vain, to put an end to this chronic tendency towards undermining the progress of a free press enterprise.

[83] For instance, a story about fighting or preparations for a fight between *Derg* generals (with photographs of 56 of them) and the EPRDF forces appeared in succession in a newspaper called *Adwa* from February 1986 to August 1986 E.C. Mengistu Haile Mariam's photo had, indeed, become a regular feature in many private papers (See Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.:75 and Kakuna Kerina, 1996:19).

[84] Interview, Alemtsehay, Befekadu, Ephrem, Goshu, Yohannis, Yonas.

[85] Interview, Biruck, Dawit, Sisay, Qidist, Netsanet.

[86] Interview, Befekadu, Dawit, Sisay, Yohannis, Yonas.

[87] A case in point is *Tobiya*, which experienced frequent reshuffling of its editors over the last five years (Tedbabe, 1990 E.C.:70; Interview, Goshu, Wole):

No	Name	Position	Date of Reshuffle in E.C.
1	Mulugeta Lule	Editor-in-chief	5/3/85
	Emiru Worku	Deputy editor-in-chief	5/3/85
2	Goshu Moges	Editor-in-chief	26/9/86
3	Taye Belachew	Editor-in-chief	11/3/87
4	Goshu Moges	Editor-in-chief	4/11/87
5	Anteneh Merid	Editor-in-chief	15/1/87
6	Taye Belachew	Acting editor-in-chief	12/3/87
7	Goshu Moges	Editor-in-chief	24/3/87
8	Arega Wolde Qirqos	Editor-in-chief	1/4/89
9	Biru Tsegaye	Acting editor-in-chief	5/6/89
10	Arega Wolde Qirqos	Editor-in-chief	6/9/90

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

MAJOR PERIODICALS IN THE PRE-1935 PERIOD

No	Name	Year of Foundation (E.C.)	Language	Place of Publication	Date of Issuance	Remarks
1	Aemro	1901	Amharic	Addis Ababa	Weekly	Editor. Kavadias
2	Aethiopien-Korrespondenz or Correspondance d'Ethiopia	1926	French/English/German	A.A. Paris, Vienna, Germany		Pro-Ethiopian
3	Aithiopien Nea	?	Greek	"		A few issues only
4	Aithiopikos Kosmos	?	Greek	"	"	P.V. Vryennious
5	Atbiya Kokeb	1934	Amharic/Franch	"	*	Proprietor: Blatten Geta Hiruy Manager: Kavadian
6	Birhanena Selam	1923	"	"	"	G/Kirstos T/H
7	Goha Tsibah	1917	"	"	"	Hiruy W/S
8	Il Notiziaria	1933	Italian	"	"	Pro-Fascist Italians in A.A.
9	Kesate Birhan	1935	Amharic	"	Monthly	
10	Le Courier d' Ethiopie	1924	"	"	bi-Weekly	
11	Le Courier d' 'Ethiopie'	1913	French	A.A.		Leopold Polart
12	Le Ethiopie Commercial	?	French	"	"	Issued 4 times a Week
13	Le Semeur d'Ethiopie	1905	French/Amh	Harar		M.Bernard
14	Melekete Selam	1912	Tigrigna	Mitswa		Swedish Evan.
15	Ya Tor Wore	1916	Amharic	A.A.	Weekly	

Source: Tedbabe, p.12, Based on the Works of Pankhurst; Kaplan, MOI (1966) and those in IES.

APPENDIX II (A)

MAJOR NON-ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS PUBLISHED BETWEEN 1941-1974

No	Name	Approximate Year of Foundation (E.C.)	Language	Place of Publication	Date of Issuance	Remarks
1	Addis Ababa	1953	Amharic	Addis Ababa	Weekly	
2	Addis Zemen	1941	"	"	Weekly Daily since 1959	Publisher (MOI)
3	Ye Alem Wore Be Se'il	1953-1954	"	Asmara		"
4	Elete Senbet	1959	"	"		
5	Ya Eritra Dimts	1945	"	"		
6	Ethiopia	1972	"	"		MOI
7	Ethiopia	1947-1963	Amharic/ Arabic	"		Pub-Unionist Party of Eritrea
8	Hibret	1970	Tigrigna/ Arabic	"	Daily	"
9	Kesate Birhan	1959	Amharic	A.A.	Weekly	
10	Sendeq Alamachin	1941	Amharic	"	Weekly	MOI: Published in Amharic & Arabic until 1961 & in Amharic only since 1962
11	Wetaderina Alamaw	1958	"	"		
12	Ya Zareitu Ethiopia	1962	"	"	Weekly	MOI
13	Zemen	1954	Tigrigna/ Arabic	Asmara	Daily	
14	Zena Betekirstian	1948	Amharic/ Geez	A.A.		

APPENDIX II (B)

MAJOR ENGLISH AND OTHER LANGUAGES NEWSPAPERS PUBLISHED: 1941 –1974

No	Name	Approximate Year of Foundation (E.C.)	Language	Place of Publication	Date of Issuance	Remarks
1	Addis Reporter	1960-70	English	Addis Ababa	Weekly	Publisher: Ethiopian Patriots' Association
2	Addis Soir	1965-1975	French	"	Daily	MOI
3	Addisitu Ethiopia	1955	English/ Amharic/ Italian	Asmara		
4	The Daily News Bulletin	1941	English/ French	A.A	Daily	MOI
5	The Ethiopian Herald	1944	English	"	Weekly	"
6	The Ethiopian Star	1941	"	"		
7	Giornale Dell Eritrea	1950	Italian	Asmara	Daily	Italian Information Dept.
8	IL Matino	1954	"	"	Weekly	
9	IL Quotidiano Eritrea	1944	English/ Italian		Daily	Information Dept.
10	L. 'Ethiopie d' Aujourd Hui	1953	French	"		
11	Medio Oriente	1952	Italian/ French	A.A. Asmara	Monthly	
12	Progres Economique	1950	French	A.A	Weekly	
13	Voice of Ethiopia	1955/56	English/ Amharic	"		After 1961 it was published independently in Amharic

APPENDIX III

MAJOR PERIODICALS IN ETHIOPIA: 1974-1991

No	Title	Language	Place of Publication	Date of Issuance	Publisher
1	Addis Zemen	Amharic	Addis Ababa	Daily	MOI
2	Al Alem	Arabic	"	Weekly	"
3	Berissa	Oromifa	"	"	"
4	The Ethiopian Herald	English	"	Daily	"
5	Le Progres Socialiste	French	"	Irregular	"
6	Ye Zareyitu Ethiopia	Amharic	"	Weekly	"

APPENDIX IV
PERSONNEL IN SELECTED NEWSPAPERS

CAPITAL

No	Responsibility	Size
1	Editor-in-Chief	1
2	Deputy Editor-in-chief	1
3	Managing Editor	1
4	Reporter	4
5	Circulation Officer	3
6	Freelancer	2
7	Secretary	1
8	Messenger	1
9	Advertising Agent (By Commission)	2
	Total Permanent Temporary	16 12 4

ET'OP'

No.	Responsibility	Size
1	Publisher	1
2	Managing Editor Manager)	1
3	Editor-in-Chief	1
4	Deputy Editor-in-Chief	1
5	Columnist	3
6	Distributors/Circulation	2
7	Secretary	1
8	Guards	1
	Total	11

THE SUN

No.	Responsibility	Size
1	Editor-In-Chief	1
2	Administrator (Administration and Finance)	1
3	Sales & Advertising Manager - Advertising Agents (Temporary-Commission)	1
4	Circulation Manager	1
	Total	4

TOMAR

No.	Responsibility	Size
1	Editor in-Chief: Publisher /Proprietor	1
2	Deputy Editor-in-Chief	1
3	Reporter	2
4	Columnist Historical free lancer	1
5	Secretary	1
	Total	7

BEZA

No.	Responsibility	Size
1	General Manager Publisher/Proprietor	1
2	Managing –Coordinator Editor	1
3	Editor-in-Chief	1
4	Deputy Editor-in-Chief	1
5	Reporter	1
6	Columnist (permanent)	3
7	Sales/Circulation Head	
8	Advertisement Collector	3
	Freelancers 50%	1
9	Secretary	1
	Total	16

FIAMETA

No.	Responsibility	Size
1	Editor-in-Chief Publisher/Proprietor	1
2	Deputy Editor-in-Chief	1
3	Editor	1
4	Senior Reporter: Economic/ Political	1
5	Religions Affairs	2
6	Public Relations Officer	1
7	Circulation Manager Secretaries	1
8		4
9	Publication Affairs Coordinator	1
	Total	13

MORESH/GOH

No.	Responsibility	Size
1	Publisher /Proprietor	1
2	Editor-in-Chief	1
3	Deputy Editor-in-Chief	1
4	Managing Editor	1
5	Publication Affairs Head	1
6	Reporter	1
7	Editor (News Editor)	1
8	Translation Head Tigrigna-Amharic	1
9	Proof Readers/ Radio Monitoring	1
	Total	11

APPENDIX V

INFORMANTS
(Interviewed Between August - December, 1999)

NO.	NAME	PLACE	JOB DESCRIPTION
1	Abebe Tadesse	Addis Ababa	Editor-in-Chief ∩ *Capital*
2	Alemayehu Fanta	"	Reporter ∩ *Addis Tribune*
3	Alemtsehay Mengistu	"	Editor ∩ *Reporter*
4	Befekadu Moreda	"	Editor-in-Chief ∩ *Tomar* Proprietor
5	Biruk Kebede	"	Managing Editor ∩ *Beza*
6	Daniel	"	Finance Department ∩ *BSPE*
7	Dawit Kebede	"	Editor - in Chief ∩ *Fiameta* Proprietor
8	Ephrem Endale	"	Editor -in-Chief ∩ *The Sun*
9	Eskindir Nega	"	Editor-in-Chief ∩ *Menelik* Proprietor
10	Fekade Mahetemeworq	"	Wholesaler - Publisher
11	Goshu Moges	"	Senior Editor ∩ *Tobiya*
12	Hailu	"	Newspaper Vendor
13	Mekonnen Desalegn	"	Wholesaler - Publisher
14	Mekonnen Zerihun	"	Wholesaler - Publisher
15	Negash	"	Retail Distributor
16	Netsant Tesfaye	"	Ex-Editor-in-Chief ∩ *A'emro* and Director of *Mahider*
17	Qidist Belachew		Deputy Editor-in Chief ∩ *A'emro*
18	Shafi	"	Newspaper Vendor
19	Sisay Agena	"	Proprietor ∩ *Et'op'*
20	Tedbabe Tilahun	"	Reporter ∩ *Reporter*
21	Teferi Wosen	"	Veteran Journalist
22	Wole Gurmu	"	Manager ∩ *Tobiya*
23	Yohannis Abebe	"	Proprietor ∩ *Goh* and *Moresh*
24	Yonas Fikre	"	Has a lot of experience in the private press Editor-in-Chief ∩ *Genanaw*
25	Zegeye Haile	"	Proprietor
26	Zekarias Tesfa	"	Wholesaler - Publisher
27	Zelalem Hailu	"	Wholesaler -Publisher