

## **The Parallel Between Press and Political History of Ethiopia: A Survey up till 2013**

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**Abstract:** This study examines the parallel in the political and media history of Ethiopia. It begins with the assumption that political events influence the emergence, shape and character of media in Ethiopia. The chronology of political events reflects the chronology of developments in the media sphere. The nature and character of political leaders and regimes impact on the happenings in the media sphere as well as the nature and character of the media that emanate from such. Significantly, the study traces the political history of Ethiopia from the Axumite civilisation up till the current regime of the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Certain landmarks in Ethiopian media history are mirrored against the various political developments and regimes in the country.

**Key words:** Ethiopia, press, political history, social history, cultural history

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The political process and events have a lot of influence on what happens in other sectors of a society. In other words, political happenings determine to a large extent the shapes and characters of happenings in other sectors. A political happening or temper could bring the emergence or collapse of a phenomenon. It could also determine the direction and dimension of the phenomenon. This perhaps could be likened to the postulation by Kunczik (1988) that the basic assumption of normative media theories is that the press always takes on the “form and coloration” of the social and political structures within which it operates. Siebert *et al.* (1956) have theorised on this, categorising press systems into four theories. Following in these footsteps, Hallin and Mancini (2004) also compare the relationship between the media and the political systems of 18 countries.

This study, however is not so much about the normative character of the media in Ethiopia. It has to do more with the concurrent happenings both in the political and media spheres. However, we could say that the happenings in the media sphere are dictated by the happenings in the political sphere, the characters of the political actors and the nature of the particular regimes.

Thus, as we tell the political history of Ethiopia, we see the parallels between the political landmarks or milestones and the development in their media sphere. This in essence, points to some kind of interconnect between political history and the socio-cultural history of Ethiopia.

### **POLITICAL HISTORY, SOCIAL HISTORY AND CULTURAL HISTORY: A WEB OF FOCI**

Political history is the narrative and analysis of political events, ideas, movements, leaders and entities. Kenneth Morgan says, it is concerned with groups, patterns, collective harmonies and conflicts, continuities and disjunctures (Burk, 1985). Morgan further says, it means the re-interpreting of any given unit or society a town, a region, a people, a state or an international community in terms of how power is sought, exercised, challenged, abused or denied (Burk, 1985). Hegel, describing political history as an idea of the state with a moral and spiritual force beyond the material interests of its subjects, says it follows that the state is the main agent of historical change (Tosh, 2010). Thus, it can be said that political events influence happenings in the society just as we can say that there is interconnectedness between political history and other subfields of history. For instance, political history is interconnected with social, economic and cultural histories.

Social history concentrates upon the social, economic and cultural institutions of a people. It can therefore be safely said that cultural history could be easily assimilated within the ‘totalising vision’ of social history (Evans, 2008). Evans recalls that the social history society (of Britain) attempted such assimilation while also seeking to move the discipline beyond the limits of both social and cultural history as traditionally approached by emphasising the ways in which the ‘social’ and the ‘cultural’ are mutually informing. Similarly, Rubin (2008) notes that cross-disciplinary practice is indeed the hallmark of much cultural history.

Cultural history combines the approaches of anthropology and history to look at popular cultural traditions and cultural interpretations of historical experience. It records and interprets past events involving human beings through the social, cultural and political milieu of or relating to the arts and manners that a group favours. The focus of cultural history is on phenomenon shared by non-elite groups in a society such as carnival, festival and public rituals, performance traditions of tale, epic and other verbal forms as well as cultural evolutions in human relations (ideas, sciences, arts, techniques) (Schlereth, 1990; Arcangeli, 2011; Burke, 2004). The traditional culture has been adapted to mass media and, more recently to the internet. Thus, media history can be situated within cultural history.

To further stress that politics impacts on the shapes and characters of other sectors of the society, Ronald Hutton says political history is the exhilarating business of observing men and women engaged in what has proved to be the most complex and difficult of human activities, upon which turned not only their own future but the destinies of nations, economies, societies, cultures and faiths (Burk, 1985). In the same collection of Burk, G.R. Elton notes that political history studies the history of man (and woman) in public action. It does not however confine itself to describing that action, it wishes to understand it. Thus, it involves the analysis of law, constitution and administration as well as (usually at second hand) a grasp of social and economic phenomena. Elton, thus remarks that this may make the study of politics sound like a portmanteau affair, a vacuum cleaner sucking in the products of other forms of historical study (Burk, 1985).

Emphasising the inevitable alignment of political developments to developments in other spheres of a society, Conrad Russell, also in Burk (1985), points out that there is a sense in which political history, history of ideas and the rest represent no more than a choice of angle from which to view a common body of evidence. They all happened to the same people at the same times and the same places and therefore any attempt to divide them must be in part artificial: they represent subjective distinctions in the direction of the historian's interest rather than any objective division in the material. Russell further notes that both political historian and social historian are of value to each other. He remarks that, it is difficult to do history without a chronological map and since political history provides the firmest chronology, it is perhaps the best branch of history to provide our basic chronology. Without chronology, he says, we are in no position to consider causation.

Ronald Hutton observes that during the recent past decades, it has become more usual to concentrate upon the relationship between political and other forms of activity in a given society. Movements in population, prices and rents, local topography and the nature of court or of popular cultures have all become areas of concern to political historians. According to him, the modern study of political history hinges upon this dynamic interaction (Burk, 1985). Kenneth Morgan concurs to this when he says that, it is in the interaction of a huge variety of political, socio-economic, cultural and psychological forces that the nature of political change can be assessed (Burk, 1985).

### **ETHIOPIA: THE ORIGIN**

Ethiopia is said to be the origin of human kind, especially after the full skeleton (fossil) of Lucy (known in Amharic as 'Dinikinesh' meaning 'she is wonderful') was found in Hadar, a province in Afar region of Ethiopia in 1974. Lucy is 3.5 million years old, according to archeologists and classified under Australopithecus afarensis family and all human beings originated from her through the process of evolution. Homo sapiens are the closest species to the present human beings. Individuals of Homo sapiens species first show up in the Dire Dawa city administration about 60,000 years ago and shortly thereafter at Melka Kontoure in the Awash valley in Ethiopia (Marcus, 1994). From the surrounding savanna lowlands, Homo sapiens spread into the foothills of Ethiopia's central highlands, especially in the West and Northwest, to interact with peoples and cultures of the Nile valley (Marcus, 1994). Scientists who study ancient human life agree the origin of human being is perhaps, Ethiopia, around the Great Rift valley after the evidences found through archeological excavating sites (Gillespie, 2003). Due to this, therefore, Ethiopia is known as the cradle of humankind.

At present, Ethiopia is a land locked country which shares its borders with Sudan to the West, Eritrea to the North and North-East, Somalia to the South-East, Kenya to the South and Djibouti to the East. According to Zewde (2002), Ethiopia has long been known by the name of Abyssinia. "This appellation apparently derived from 'Habashat', one of the tribes that inhabited the Ethiopian region in the pre-Christian era" (Zewde, 2002). In fact, most Ethiopians call themselves "Habasha" informally but they prefer to be called Ethiopians officially (Zewde, 2002).

The term Ethiopia is of Greek origin (Zewde, 2002). In classical times, it was used as a generic and rather diffuse designation for the African landmass to the South of

Egypt. Adejumobi (2007) also discloses that the name Ethiopia had emerged as a near generic term for the whole universe of dark-skinned people in Western narratives including Shakespearean literature. Ezana, the ancient Axumite king in the 4th century who introduced Christianity to Ethiopia for the first time was the person to use his hegemony to sanction the name Ethiopia as inscriptions shows (Zewde, 2002). This adoption of the term continued in the conventional translations of the Bible into Ge'ez, the old literary language.

Still on this discussion of nomenclature, Pankhurst (1955), citing Budge (1970) wrote that "the name Ethiopia was definitely given to the country 'by those who translated the Bible from Greek to Ethiopic (Ge'ez)". Budge (1970) had argued that the region in which the then Axum was situated must have had an indigenous name by which it was known to the surrounding countries, noting that the name was Habesh from which the name Abyssinia was derived.

Ethiopia has held a profound cultural significance for the black Diaspora as one of the world's and to say the least, Africa's oldest independent republics which provided an (admittedly idealized) inspiration for the dream of black independence throughout the world (Adejumobi, 2007).

Because of Europeans' usage of the term Ethiopia to express black Africa, slaves in the new world adopted it as hallmark of religio-cultural identity. As history tells us, strong struggle was conducted under the philosophy of Ethiopianism. Such struggles resulted in the ousting of colonialism from Africa.

Ethiopian history can be traced back to antiquity with references to Ethiopia in the Bible and classical Greek literature (Adejumobi, 2007). Conventionally, according to several historians such as Zewde (2002), "Ethiopian history began with the visit of the Queen of Sheba, allegedly from Ethiopia to Solomon, King of Israel in the tenth century BC: hence, the reference to Ethiopia's 'three thousand years of history' that we hear and read so often".

She is an ancient country located in North-East Africa. Usually, Ethiopia is called the horn of Africa for its location of horn-shaped tip at the continent which separates Red Sea from Indian Ocean (Zewde, 2002; Adejumobi, 2007). Ethiopia is among few countries which are the origin of world civilization. This argument is substantiated by several studies that she is endowed with favourable geographical location and environment for human settlements in the ancient time (Selassie, 1972). As is known, the greatest base of human settlements in ancient time was the existence of rivers and seas. The region where Ethiopia now exists is a place of Red Sea and

Blue Nile River and Mediterranean Sea and Tigris and Euphrates rivers around. The people of these areas were the first who recorded history (Selassie, 1972). They also contributed a lot to world civilization. Therefore, Ethiopia contributed so much to world civilization through several aspects.

Pankhurst (1955) indicated that the Ethiopian people held the notion that their origin as migration from Arabia to their present home Africa accords with Biblical accounts of the Semitic peoples, as well as with the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. It coincides also with epigraphic inscriptions discovered and studied by European scholars (Pankhurst, 1955). As attested by several historians, Ethiopia had a strong relation with the southern Arabia even before the birth of Christ. Among the historians, Selassie (1972) showed clearly the relation Ethiopia had with the ancient kingdoms of South Arabia such as Ma'in, Saba, Kataban and Hadramawt. "For demographic and economic reasons, the people of South Arabia started to migrate to Ethiopia. It is hard to fix the date of these migrations, but it can be said the first immigration took place before 1,000 BC" (Selassie, 1972).

#### **ETHIOPIA: HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT**

The civilization of Axumite is of immense significance to Ethiopian history. Christian Axumite Empire of Ethiopia reached its zenith in the 4th century AD (Milkias and Metaferia, 2005). At the end of the first millennium, "an amalgamated Christian state of Zagwe" which was led by the Agews of North central region of Ethiopia came to power (Milkias and Metaferia, 2005). Again in the late 13th century, the Zagwe gave way for the dynasty which claimed descent from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, "a genealogy providing the legitimacy and continuity so honoured in Ethiopia's subsequent national saga" (Milkias and Metaferia, 2005). By the 15th century, the Solomonic dynasty started decaying. This was followed by a resistance from Muslim vassal, the Adal sultanate of the Harar region to pay tribute and a percentage of its trading profits to the then central government of Ethiopia. In 1527, the Adal leader, Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi, known in Ethiopian history as Ahmad Gragn ('Ahmad the Left-handed'), equipped with fire arms and aided by the Ottoman Turks, ravaged the Christian empire that still depended on outmoded weapons of war (Milkias and Metaferia, 2005). By 1535, Ahmad Gragn led a vast Islamic empire stretching from Zeila (Seylac) to Massawa (Mistiwa) in present day Eritrea. After this triumph walk, Gragn was beaten by Emperor Galawdewos in 1543 with the help of Portuguese soldiers.

The clash between the two paved the way for the Oromo population who were neither Christians nor Muslims to expand their territory from Genale, Bale and Borena regions towards Christian highlands by using military actions. This was followed by Zemene Mesafent (period of princes) characterized by feudal anarchy when kings were nominal and the actual power was in the hands of landlords. It continued for almost 150 years and lasted till the ascension to the throne of Kassa, from Amhara Gondar, who was crowned emperor under the throne name Tewodros II of Ethiopia in 1855.

After suicide of Tewodros II at the battle of Maqdalala by refusing surrender to the General Napier who was sent to free British and other European prisoners of the Emperor, Kassa Hailu adopted Yohannes IV as a name of the king and became emperor of Ethiopia on January 21, 1872 (Zewde, 2002). Yohannes IV was killed while fighting Mahdist forces. He was succeeded by the king of Shoa, who became Emperor Menelik II in 1889. Addis Ababa was named the capital of Ethiopia in the same year by the emperor. Menelik II was an ambitious king that created the present Ethiopia towards Northern, South, East and West.

In 1896, Italian forces were defeated by the Ethiopians at Adwa and the treaty of Wichale was annulled. Italy recognized Ethiopia's independence but retained control over Eritrea.

Adwa was the greatest military operation between Africans and Europeans since the time of Hannibal. For the victors it was the most decisive, for the vanquished, the most catastrophic, given that the Italian colonialist soldiers were crushed totally and in every way. Indeed, their defeat was extraordinary in scale: their casualty figure was 70% all their artillery pieces were captured; one out of four of their generals were taken prisoner and two of the remaining as well as almost half of their staff officers were killed on the battlefield. The Battle of Adwa Reflections on the Historic Victory of Ethiopia against European Colonialism elucidates and scrutinizes this event with the hindsight of over 100 years.

In 1913, Menelik died and was succeeded by his grandson, Lij Iyasu. After internal power struggle, Lij Iyasu was deposed and was succeeded by Menelik's daughter, Zauditu, who ruled through a regent, Ras Tafari Makonnen. The internal power struggle continued between the queen and the regent and finally Zauditu died in 1930 and her successor, Ras Tafari Makonnen, became Emperor Haile Selassie I.

With the intent of high level of revenge on Ethiopia due to Italian humiliation at the battle of Adwa, it invaded Ethiopia again in 1935. In the next year, 1936, Italians

captured Addis Ababa and Haile Selassie fled to Great Britain to bring diplomatic influence on the fascist Italy invaders. The king of Italy was made emperor of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Italian Somaliland, all forming Italian East Africa. However, Ethiopian patriots had made a fierce resistance against the Italian occupation and reclaimed independence with the help of Britain in 1941 after 5 years of occupation. As a result, Emperor Haile Selassie reclaimed his throne at home in Ethiopia.

In the course of the emperor Selassie's reign, there came a strong opposition from the farmers, students, the military and other sectors of the society due to lack of timely change (Zewde, 2002). Starvation and maladministration in the country triggered new brand of opposition from farmers in Bale and Gojjam Provinces and university students at large. Slogans such as "land to tailor" were becoming popular among the university students of Ethiopia. The emperor failed to control the then opposition and the military overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. While in custody of the military, the emperor was secretly killed.

The military ruler, Teferi Benti, started leading the country with the Marxist economic orientation. However, due to internal conflict among the derg (committee of the military regime) Teferi Benti was assassinated for the good of the 'revolution'. Thus, Mengistu Haile Mariam came to power in 1977. The 'revolution' led to the killing of thousands of people. 'White and red terrors' took the lives of many young Ethiopians. The Tigrean People's Liberation Front started a war to obtain regional autonomy. Finally, after 17 years of civil war, the military regime was deposed from power in 1991. The People's Revolutionary Democratic Front of Ethiopia captured Addis Ababa and came into power while Mengistu Haile Mariam fled the country. Eritrea, awaiting independence, established a provisional government that year. After a while, it gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993.

Meanwhile, as the usual long history of Ethiopia in war, the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea led to violent clashes in 1998. War was declared the following year and it took the lives of >70,000 until ceasefire was signed between the two countries with the help of the United Nations in June 2000. In the same year, December 2000, the two countries signed a peace agreement at Algeria that enabled the prisoners to go to their respective countries.

Significantly, the EPRDF (the people's revolutionary democratic front) administration in 1994, embarked on federalism that divided the country into regions based on ethnicity (Adejumobi, 2007).

## **THE MEDIA IN ETHIOPIA**

Printing came into Ethiopia during the reign of Menelik II in the late 19th century (Reta, 2013). *Aimero* was the first newspaper (1902-1903) and it was published in Amharic. Another early newspaper was *Le Semeurd'Ethiope* which existed between 1905 and 1911 (Zinaye, 2000). Radio and television came into Ethiopia in 1935 and 1964 (Gebremedhin, 2006). Television broadcasting still remains undeveloped in Ethiopia as there are only three channels; the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation 1 and the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation 2 (EBC 2). Initially, EBC 1 was only broadcasting for 12 h on working days and 18 h on weekends. It now broadcasts 24 h. EBC 2 broadcasts only 2 h and has short area transmission. EBC 1 broadcasts in Tigrigna, AfanOrmo (Oromiffa), Amharic, French, Arabic, Somaligna, Afarigna and English while EBC 2 only broadcasts to the capital city, Addis Ababa in Amharic. EBC 3 is majorly for entertainment and it broadcasts mostly syndicated programmes. It is a 24 h transmission station.

Since, EBC is the national broadcaster, it allocates airtime for regional television stations to broadcast their programs. Moreover, through television satellites like *Nilesat oromia* (Oromia TV), *Amhara* (Amhara TV) and *Ethiopian Somali* (ES TV), regions now have their own TV stations which run independently. They broadcast  $>12$  h day<sup>-1</sup>. Other regions are preparing themselves to open autonomous TV stations. Addis Ababa is to launch a TV station called "Addis TV" to broadcast 18 h a day on *Nilesat* satellite.

The national state-run radio broadcaster is EBC Ethiopian National Radio Ethiopia. It broadcasts in Amharic, Afan Oromo, Tigrigna, Afar, Somali, Arabic, English and French. Radio Ethiopia claims its signal covers over 80% of Ethiopian territory (Gebremedhin, 2006). Another national station is Radio Fana Broadcasting Corporation. Formerly solely owned by the ruling EPRDF, it claims 80% coverage of the country. At regional level, there are at least 20 state-owned radio stations. These include the FM Addis 97.1, Addis Ababa City Administration Radio Station (FM 96.3), Amhara Mass media (includes Amhara radio, FM 96.9, 91.4, 91.2, 88.0 and 87.9), Harar Station, Metu Station, Voice of Weyanie (Tigriga), Debub mass media (includes FM 100.9 and 92.3) Dire Dawa FM. There are also seven private commercial FM radio stations. The 6 of these are based in Addis Ababa (Sheger FM 102.1, Zami FM 90.7, Fana FM 98.1, Afro FM 105.3, Admas FM 101.1 and Abay FM 102.9 on trial now) and one in Mekelle (Dimtsi Woyane Tigray) (EBA, 2014).

The print media have flourished better in Ethiopia. Besides the two early press earlier mentioned, Emperor Haile Selassie I also started a newspaper during the World War I to counter the German propaganda. It was an Amharic newspaper with the title *Yetor Wore* (War News) (Zinaye, 2000). *Berhanena Selam*, another Amharic newspaper was also founded on January 1, 1925 (Skjerdal, 2011). There was also one monthly magazine which published in different European languages and Amharic. It was started by one Mr. Weizinger. *L'Ethiopie Commerciale*, French weekly started in 1932. In 1935, two newspapers were established: the quarterly *Kasate Birhan* (the light giver) and a political weekly, *Atibiya Kokeb* (the morning star). They were, however, short-lived.

The invasion of Ethiopia by Italy in 1935 caused a lull in the printing activities. At the end of the interregnum, newspapers such as *Addis Zemen* and *Sendek Alamachen* were established in 1941. *Addis Zemen*, owned by Ethiopian national government, still exists till today and it is a major newspaper in Ethiopia. It is published in Amharic. Its sister publications (on the same stable) include *Ethiopian Herald* (English) and *Bariisaa* (Oromiffa). These other publications are just like appendages to *Addis Zemen*. *Addis Zemen* is daily; *Ethiopian Herald* is daily but does not appear on Mondays and *Bariisaa* is weekly. *Addis Zemen* is in broadsheet format, *Herald* in the Berliner and *Bariisaa* in the tabloid.

The media policy of the EPRDF government provided impetus for the establishment of more private newspapers in Ethiopia. However, most of these newspapers are Amharic. Amharic private presses based on social and political issues are *Addis Admas*, *Reporter*, *Ethio-Channel*, etc. Meanwhile, there was a clampdown on the private press after the 2005 elections as many journalists were arrested and many of the newspapers were proscribed by the EPDRF government. The private press in Ethiopia operates in an awkward circumstance as they have to rely on government press or the EPRDF press for printing. Through this lever, the presses have on occasions refused to print publications that are considered antagonistic to the EPRDF government. This kind of scenario stifles independent and opposition press.

There are also Amharic weekly newspapers based on sport. These include *Ethio-Sport*, *League-Sport*, *Hatrack*, *World-Sport*, etc. There are few private newspapers published in English and other local languages. The English newspapers include *Fortune*, *Capital*, *Sub-SaharanInformer*, *Daily Monitor*, etc. None of the English publications is daily except *Daily Monitor*. The readership of the English publications is also low compared to their Amharic counterparts.

## **THE PARALLELS**

Printing came into Ethiopia during the reign of Menelik II in the late 19th century. It should be noted that Menelik II (formerly known as King Shoa) was an ambitious king that created the present Ethiopia towards Northern, South, East and West. He also named Addis Ababa the capital of Ethiopia the same year he ascended the throne. In 1896, he also led the Ethiopians to defeat the Italian forces at Adwa while the treaty of Wichale was annulled. It is therefore, instructive to recognise that the dynamism of Emperor Menelik II also brought about the emergence of printing in Ethiopia. Printing then was a major technological innovation. It was therefore not out of place that such technological innovation came into Ethiopia during the reign of an emperor so dynamic as Emperor Menelik II.

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government. This kind of scenario stifles independent and opposition press. Skjerdal (2011) discloses that the present regime in Ethiopia promised a free and open media climate when it came to power in 1991. The markets were indeed opened up for private print publications. The privatisation in the broadcasting sector did not however, come until 2006. Even, this only happened with radio broadcasting. There is as yet no independent television station in Ethiopia.

Skjerdal (2010) notes that Ethiopia has witnessed significant changes in national media policy since, 2007. Both the broadcasting law of 1991 and the general media law of 1992 have been replaced by new and more liberal laws, although certain control measures persist. The introduction of an access to information proclamation in 2008 and the hosting of weekly briefings open to both private and the state media were indications of improvement in the state transparency. The atmosphere was conducive to the extent that the media industry itself embarked on the establishment of an independent media council. Skjerdal (2011) however, notes that: despite the fact that the government officially supports media independence, control continues on the informal level. Websites are blocked and foreign short-wave radio broadcasts are jammed. Private media outlets experience verbal attacks and warnings from the official media. They fear persecution under a recently passed anti-terror legislation. Self-censorship is common both in state-operated and privately-owned media outlets (Skjerdal, 2008, 2010).

Meanwhile, a draft policy of the EPRDF government on development journalism (EBA, 2008) accuses the previous regimes in Ethiopia of using the media for their own selfish ends. The Ethiopian empire (until 1974) saw the media as a means to reinforce feudalism as a divine ruling system while the Marxist military junta (1974-91) introduced strict censorship and created the media as mere propaganda tools.

However, as already mentioned, press freedom under EPRDF government he is also not particularly good. The government used a 1992 Press Proclamation as a means of restricting the rights of private media (Gebremedhin, 2006). In 2003, the government introduced a draft law as a platform for addressing domestic and international criticism of the deteriorating situation with the media (Global Campaign for Free Expression, 2004). Ross (2010) reports that the draft law generated years of debate among members of the media international media organisations and government proponents. In July 2008, after nearly 6 years of controversy surrounding the draft media law, the house of people's representatives passed the mass media and freedom of information proclamation (press law) (Mushtaq, 2008; Ross, 2010).

It is instructive to note and reiterate that prior to the 2008 Press Law, the EPRDF government had managed the affairs of the press with the Article 29 of the 1995 Ethiopian Constitution and the 1992 Press Proclamation. Article 29 of the Constitution, amongst other things, affords freedom of the press and mass media by ensuring the opportunity for access to information of interest to the public and prohibiting censorship. The article also transcribes media's right to institutional independence and legal protection to enable the accommodation of different ideas necessary to a democratic society (Ross, 2010). Press freedom was also enshrined in the Press Proclamation No. 34/1992 (CPJ, 2001). However, Article 10 of The Proclamation yet confers on government the authority to restrict the press and prosecute journalists (Gebremedhin, 2006). Ross (2010) remarks that it is under this Press Proclamation that the Ethiopian government prosecuted journalists and limited the freedom of press that is outlined in the 1995 constitution.

The 2005 elections in Ethiopia had profound impact on press freedom in the country. In its desperation to crush opposition and stifle avenues for protestations as a result of conflicting claims to victory, the government headed by late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi revoked the accreditation of journalists from both Voice of America and Deutsche-Welle as part of effort to impede attention garnered by foreign press (IPI, 2006; Ross, 2010). The government accused the journalists of filing "unbalanced reports" on the elections (CPJ, 2006; Ross, 2010). It later turned its attention to local independent press, using Press Proclamation of 1992 to charge them for criminal defamation incitement to violence, publication of false information and other offences. In November 2005, the government began a massive crack-down on journalists working in the private media. More than a dozen journalists were detained, editors and publishers were blacklisted. It also threatened to charge journalists with treason, an offence that carries death penalty (CPJ, 2006). State-owned media alleged private and foreign media as well as the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association (EFJA) of planning terror. The crackdown also saw at least eight newspapers closed while certain members of the media had to flee the country to escape persecution (CPJ, 2008). CPJ (2008) and Ross (2010) also reports that as a result of the media crackdown, many journalists worked under self-censorship and foreign press operated under a "strictly enforced regimen of renewable 1 year residency and accreditation permits".

The situation with press freedom in Ethiopia has not changed under the new leader, Hailemariam Desalegn. For instance in April 2013, an independent newspaper editor, Woubshet Taye was transferred from Kilinto Prison to a

remote detention facility in the town of Ziwayto. Woubshet, former deputy editor of the now defunct independent weekly Awramba Times has been imprisoned since June 2011 on vague terrorism charges (CPJ, 2013a). Similarly, nine journalists were convicted in 2013 on trumped-up charges of terrorism. Five of the nine are exiled and were thus tried in absentia. The sentences ranged from 8 years to life imprisonment. While two Swedish journalists imprisoned for 14 months for reporting on the separatist Ogaden rebels were released, six local journalists including the award-winning Eskinder Nega remained behind bars (CPJ, 2013b).

CPJ (2014) in its online report of 2013 events, notes the following: a year after the death of Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn succeeded in preserving the repressive climate in Ethiopia. Several journalists faced interrogation or prosecution for writing about the late leader, his policies and even his widow. One journalist, Temesghen Desalegn, former chief editor of the critical weekly Fetehe was charged in February with defaming the government in connection with his articles on Meles. Some reporters attempting to cover other sensitive topics, like anti-government protests and the forced eviction of farmers were also detained and harassed while others fled the country fearing arrest. The government did not disclose the health where abouts or legal status of two journalists who have been in custody for 7 years. Authorities banned two independent newspapers, accusing them of violating press regulations as well as a private broadcaster which was reporting extensively on peaceful protests by Ethiopian Muslims. The country faced international condemnation over the imprisonment of journalists who were serving heavy terms on vague terrorism charges, but the Ethiopian government retaliated by imposing harsher conditions on them including the threat of solitary confinement. Authorities continued to crack down on the online press.

## CONCLUSION

Emperor Tewodros II began Ethiopia's modern history. The modernisation process was quickened under Emperors Menelik II and Haile Selassie. It is therefore, noteworthy that printing came into Ethiopia during the reign of Menelik II. The emergence of printing in Ethiopia heralded the beginning of mass media in the country. Emperor Selassie also established a newspaper during the First World War (1914-1918) to counter German propaganda. The establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 1991 by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) opened up the space for the print media but not so much for the

broadcast media. In demonstration of its claim to democratic ethos, the EPRDF engendered (print) media plurality. This however is fraught with anti-democratic measures as the media continue to face strangulation through legal and physical means. The draconian provisions in the media laws of the country are brought to bear on the media.

The government and the ruling party have monopoly of large scale and commercial printing in the country. The various print media that were established as a result of the space opened by the government use the government and the party presses for their printing. This gives the government the opportunity to emasculate the media by denying critical and opposition newspapers the chance of printing anytime an infringement is felt under the guise of lack of newsprints or machine breakdown. Some other newspaper organisations have also been shut down while journalists are indiscriminately harassed, arrested and jailed. Some journalists have also run into exile.

Even though, EPRDF touts democracy by establishing the Federal Democratic Republic, its rise to power was anything but democratic. It led what it called a revolution which ousted the Derg Regime in 1991. So, EPRDF never came to power through the ballot boxes. Since, its antecedent was not democratic, it has fought tooth and nail to remain in power, brooking no opposition. That was why, the onslaught against the media started after the controversial 2005 elections, the results of which the opposition had disputed. To ensure that some of its activities remain secretive to the populace, the government also extended the media clampdown to foreign media. That was why, the death of President Meles Zenawi was not announced to the public until days after the demise. The late president nursed an ailment for a long time without the information brought to the notice of the populace. Zenawi led the revolution and assumed power in 1991 after the fall of the Derg regime. He remained the head of the government till his death in August 2012.

This study has demonstrated the parallels between political events and happenings in the media sector. It has demonstrated how the nature of government and characters of leaders impact on the media system and happenings in the media sphere.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

This study believes that the ERPFD government has done well by liberalising the media space in Ethiopia. It will however, do better to allow unfettered press freedom so as to enhance better democracy in the country. This is the only way history can be on the side of the government.

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