Original Research

Examining journalists' practice since March 2018 of the political reform of Ethiopia

Buzayehu Musbak[1]*, Mekonnen Hailemariam[2] iD

[1]MA student, Department of Journalism and Communication, Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

[2] Department of Journalism and Communication, Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

*Corresponding author: email address: bzumusback@gmail.com

Abstract

The study was carried out to determine how Ethiopia's political reform direly affected Amhara Media Corporation journalistic practices. The study explored and analyzed the opportunities and challenges of political reform on television through qualitative research. The data was mainly collected using in-depth interviews and observation. The participants were selected purposefully. Samples were selected from journalists, content editors, and management members. A total of 18 key informants participated in the study. The data was analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that in the first year of the reform, which began in April 2018, some changes were made; however, the station plays a limited role in addressing the needs of the community. Moreover, the reform does not make the station free from government and political interference. It has done better by expanding the institution and strengthening its manpower since the change, but in content, it is following a pattern out of the journalism system. The findings still indicate that the political system governs the practice of journalism. We suggest that journalists should be the hallmarks of free media and society. Journalists and the media should not be used as tools by their employers. Broadcasts should refrain from waving towards the ruling party's ideologies.

Keywords: political reform, journalism practice, press independence, Ethiopia

Introduction

In Africa, the mass media have evolved into instruments for furthering the black race's subjugation. This essay examines how African culture can be promoted by the media, instead of being disparaged by foreign shows (Weaver & Willnat, 2012; Coronel, 2010; Prathipati & Guthala, 2015; Acholonu, 2011). Today, however, African journalism continues to face a number of significant challenges. Even though the state's authority, especially its direct control over the media, may have been weakened by the new political order, numerous governments throughout the continent have developed new strategies to stymie their nascent media. Across the continent, new legal regimes are being implemented to frustrate African journalists. African journalism has navigated most of these challenges in pursuit of its normative roles, but the quality of journalism in some emerging media outfits on the continent has been the subject of much debate and criticism (Ogola, 2015).

The unstable conditions caused by official measures against the media and, in certain countries, also against journalism education institutes, albeit in more covert methods, present a serious problem for journalists in the Horn of Africa (Skjerdal & Ngugi, 2007). Ethiopia, which has over 40 newspapers, is the most diverse country in eastern Africa in terms of print media, whereas Kenya is the most advanced in terms of media sophistication and journalism education programs. Ethiopia is the most populous country in eastern Africa, and the media sector is feeling the benefits of political changes and media deregulation after the Marxist junta regime, although the number of newspapers is lower today than before the 2005 national elections (Skjerdal & Ngugi, 2007; Dibu & Ahadu, 2020) state that since 1991, the Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolution Front (EPDRF) has come to power, and media practices have been a little bit reformed. Article 29 of the 1991 Ethiopian Constitution provides citizens with the right to have opinions, thoughts, and free expressions. In 2017, Ethiopia ranked among the most censored countries in the world and one of the worst journalists jailed in sub-Saharan Africa. The ruling coalition governed with an iron fist, cracked down on free speech, and regularly persecuted critical journalists and bloggers (Wiseman, 2019). Since taking office in April 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has led Ethiopia through significant reforms. The yearly census conducted by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) revealed that there were no journalists incarcerated for the first time in fourteen years. Additionally, the nation lifted its restriction on media outlets compelled to operate in exile and blocked over 260 websites (Mumo, 2019).

One-and-a-half years after the start of the reforms, Ethiopian journalists face a new set of challenges and growing pains, including ethnic division, lack of professionalism, self-censorship, and a restrictive legal environment. Even if most people still agree that the nation is headed in the right direction, the honeymoon period is over, and Abiy's reform program is starting to show signs of weakness that could reverse the gains won thus far (Wiseman, 2019). For

emerging nations like Ethiopia, the media is a fundamental source of information. In a big nation, broadcast media like television and radio are the most crucial. People's daily lives are influenced by the information they receive from the media. The low prestige of their profession, professional limitations, a lack of common journalistic ideals, a lack of confidence, plotting with corrupt elites, and outside factors including socioeconomic and political pressures are only a few of the issues that journalists face on the job (Negeri, 2013; Skjerdal, 2010).

One of Ethiopia's regional state media outlets is the Amhara Mass Media Agency (AMMA), now known as AMC (AMC). The regional administration founded AMC in 1991 with the intention of disseminating fair information on both local and national matters. It broadcasts content in five languages with the intention of advancing democratization, sustainable peace, and development. AMC distributes its news and programming throughout the region and the entire nation via radio, television, newspapers, and internet channels (Initiative Africa, 2019).

In the meanwhile, following three years of unrest, Ethiopia saw political transition in 2018. The fall of the pre-Abiy Ahmed administration was significantly influenced by the emergence of social media, citizen journalism, and television broadcasts. Prior to the new political reform's adoption, there was a more general assertion that the democratic system, freedom of expression, information, and the press, as well as human rights, were all significantly more oppressed. Following the political reform in Ethiopia, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and preservation of human rights were given special emphasis, and journalists and politicians incarcerated were released.

As a result, the post-2018 political transition has been entangled with many hopes, along with dramatic and unexpected changes like the normalization of the Horn of Africa, the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the release of citizens arbitrarily detained by the previous system, and the acceptance of various Ethiopian political parties and diaspora media labeled as terrorists (Dibu & Ahadu, 2020; Ewunetie, 2019). This study tries to address three questions: Q1: How does Amhara television enforce press freedom? Q2: To what extent does Amhara television implement media censorship? Q3: What is Amhara Television's experience with hosting ideas of diversity?

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework provides a solid basis by grounding the study in established media theory and contextualizing it within Ethiopia's political climate. However, the study focuses on media practice contexts and links media practice with the Ethiopian media scenario.

Media practice

Mass media is the sole informant of people about current events and human activities, natural phenomena and other items of public interest. It can also be

considered a "watchdog" of democracy, society, national integration, personal information of people, and the ideology of the country. As watchdogs, the news media have a responsibility to help guard the public interest by ensuring the accountability of powerful decision makers by highlighting cases of malfeasance, misadministration, and corruption, thus strengthening the transparency and effectiveness of governance (McQuail, 2005). Media as gatekeeper has been widely used to describe the general process of selection in media work, whether the micro-level editorial decisions about the choice of headline topics, images, and specific stories, or the broader macro-level balance of voices, parties, and interests that are represented as sources, authoritative spokespersons, or leaders in news coverage (Shabir & Safdar, 2015; Soroka & McAdams, 2015; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The surveillance or monitoring of the political system consolidates journalistic control (Casero et al., 2014).

Media as a public domain consisted of a space for the development of shared culture and ideas, located between the realm of 'public authority' (government) and the private realm of 'civil society' which encapsulated commercial relations and the domestic sphere. According to Magalhes (2012), public opinion is primarily influenced by factors that give some discourses more weight and influence than others. A society of privatized and dispersed individuals is being produced by the media, making it challenging for them to develop a critical and logical viewpoint that could challenge the status quo (Habermas, 1989; Livingstone, 1994).

Media and political reform in Ethiopia

Ethiopia's political change was largely brought about by the country's official media and social media platforms. Politicians, activists, and those who refused using the conventional media found a home on the social media site. During national political demonstrations against the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front government, social media platforms have been used as an alternate information source (Fekede, 2019).

Ethiopian journalists face a set of challenges and growing pains, including ethnic division, lack of professionalism, self-censorship, and a restrictive legal environment. After the reform, Abiy loosens the controls on the media, unblocks 260 critical websites and television channels, and releases dozens of journalists from prison (Wimmer et al., 2016; Comstock & Scharrer, 2008; Bhuiyan, 2011; Wiseman, 2019; Gessese, 2019). One and a half years after the start of the reforms, Ethiopian journalists are facing a set of challenges and growing pains, including ethnic division, lack of professionalism, self-censorship, and a restrictive legal environment. ,(Fekede, 2019; Gessese, 2019; Dibu, & Ahadu, 2020)

Methods

An exploratory qualitative research design was used to investigate the effects of the country's current political reforms on the journalistic practice of Amhara

television. It can be used to better comprehend a subject, determine how or why a certain phenomenon is happening, and forecast future events. Human beings construct an individual and personal view of the world based on their specific interactions with their environments. Because of this, a lot of what people—including researchers—consider to be reality is actually just a collection of their own perceptions, conclusions, and opinions (Cropley, 2019). A qualitative method concerned with the quality of information gains an understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations for actions and establishes how people interpret and describe their experiences and the world around them. Methods provide insight into the setting of a problem and generate ideas (MacDonald & Headlam**,** 2015). The reason for choosing a qualitative research approach is that qualitative data were used to obtain detailed information about the situation and to provide extensive explanations of the research questions raised in the study area (Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, because qualitative methods are typically so adaptable, they allow greater freedom and adaptation of the researcher-study participant interaction.

Purposive sampling was the method used to choose participants. According to Abate (2018), Pandey and Mishra (2015), the fundamental premise of purpose sampling is that by exercising sound judgment regarding the purpose of an investigation, researchers can strategically select adequate cases for a study and analyze the information effectively; this is picking cases that are typical of a problem in focus.

The study case was chosen on purpose because the researcher is familiar with the study area, having worked there for a long time. In addition, the researcher uses purposive sampling to select interviewees. In this study, journalists and content editors who work on Amhara TV are included as part of the interview and group discussion; some of the management members are also included in the interview. To collect valuable and credible data, the researchers carefully select professionals from Amhara television based on seniority and proximity. According to these requirements, the researchers purposefully selected participants, that is, reporters from the newsroom and program department (eight), editors (two from all departments), members of the media management team (two), and practitioners from the two departments for the focus group discussion (six), due to their seniority and proximity to the case. A total of 18 participants are included in the study.

Results and Discussion

The political agenda guided journalism practice

The practice of Amhara television journalism has been highly influenced by the political situation in Ethiopia. Study participants confirmed that the medium was influenced by national and regional circumstances that prohibited freedom of journalism practice. Thus, Amhara television is influenced by the political agenda set by the Ethiopian government. The media tend to be the mouthpieces of the political agenda of the government. In terms of journalism practice

concepts, practitioners had different levels of awareness and understanding based on their year of experience. To better understand their perspectives, the participants were asked how journalism was practiced in Amhara television before and after the reform. The study participants explained the concepts in terms of moral and ethical journalistic perspectives in terms of responsibility, accountability, independence, and harm minimization roles. Some of the awareness and understandings given by study participants are as follows:

> In terms of freedom of expression of the media, I did not see any difference before and after the change. We are moving in the usual way. Before the change, Amhara television was under intense pressure to address issues that could not be resolved. It is still picking up. In fact, after two or three years of the change, I think the television station has stopped criticizing the government (I2, June 18, 2021). National and regional circumstances often dominate the media. And it did not pose its agenda. We often rely on government issues instead of publics. The political situation in the country has had a profound effect on us and has helped shape our agendas. We often cover political agendas. The media is always following politics. We are not working on a report that will have an impact on the planning policy. In fact, we seem to be the spokespersons for the politician (I3, June 18, 2021). In our media, political issues get more attention than any other issues. The 15 June case, citizen displacement in Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia, and public protests to avoid the former regime: all have controlled the media since the change. Almost all of these reports are covered by government and party intervention. The journalist does not have the right to investigate matters and report the facts in his own way. We do not publish in-depth reports on why so many political issues have occurred and what to expect next. The journalist is working as a spokesperson for the party (I4, June 10, 2021).

As the participant responds sometimes they talk to the victims when Amharas are attacked. Citizens speak out against intimidation. But the media are afraid to hold the responsible party accountable. Even if Amhara television tries to act right, no government official is accountable for his/her actions. Journalists are also forced to give up on the issue that makes officials responsible. The participants emphasize that when they produce political matters it is an obligation to follow the politicians' rules, not the media editorial. Thus, the Amhara television journalism practice at least did not obey the editorial guidelines.

> We have previously reported on issues that contradict the ruling party. Since March 2010, we have been holding discussions on various issues that will challenge the government for the next three to four months. We make reports based on political issues that can bring the country together (I5, June 14, 2021). When we look at the operation of Amhara television, as the institution is owned by the government, we look at government policies, procedures, plans, and needs. After this political change, before we produce the news or program, the information will be edited and reviewed by the editorial board.

At this point, I do not believe that we are practicing journalism properly. We have to move on to the public question, but our focus is more on the activities of the government and the ruling party. By just quoting the word "change," they say that the proposed plan is a stumbling block to change; this idea is said to be out of date and will not be reported. As a result, it is difficult to say that we are practicing journalism properly. We did not properly raise community agendas (FGD1, June 24, 2021). Before the change, Amhara TV was in need of regional leadership and fought a fierce battle with the then government, raising relevant ideas. It was also the leading media outlet in the country. But after the change, the change leaders want to be supported, not criticized. They have taken away the freedom of the media that they use to promote their own ideas. They make the station do the propaganda work for their own sake. We could not repeat our journalistic struggles of the previous years. Sometime before and after the change, the way we sought the truth has been reversed by the change today. I think for this reason our followers are leaving us (I6, June 18, 2021).

In terms of the above concept, most of the participants have relatively similar responses. The statements given above by practitioners and editors explain that there is not a great difference in journalism practices since the country's political reform. According to the participants, In fact, before the political change, the Amhara television was doing better. It was a media that stood for people and truth, rather than for politicians and their political agendas. Public concern of the media decreased after the reform. Journalists' gatekeeping and agenda setting were influenced by political scenarios that challenged the media and the citizens in general.

The participants also explained that it was a media outlet that resisted government interference. According to the participants, Amhara television had made a significant contribution to the country's political transformation. Participants also noted that in some months after the reform, the media was given the opportunity to operate freely, but after some time things changed.

As the participants explain, this is mainly due to the fact that the state and federal governments have started using the Television to promote their own agenda. Participants say that the journalist was not only worked on the principle of journalism, but also pursued to fulfill the political interests of the government. On the other hand, the management members did not agree with those statements. A management member who was asked the same question responded as follows.

Before the change, Amhara TV started to broadcast for 18 hours a day. At the time, the people of the Amhara region raised serious concerns about good governance. We wondered how to handle this question and how to answer it. Then we began to work harder on our programs, such as 'yeketemochmedirek' and 'anidleanind'. At the 'yeketemochmedirek', we were able to get people and leadership to meet face-to-face and discuss. Before 2008, leaders and people were far apart, and so-called leaders were

unquestionable. At our 'anidleanind' program, we also raised the public awareness that leaders must be held accountable (I7, June; 14, 2021).When the Wolkait issue was raised in various parts of the region, Amhara television aired a public question. We boldly raised the issue of constitutional reform and the need for a federal system reform. As a result, for example, the ruling party changed its name and form. And before that, Amhara TV was a major contributor to the change. Now we are covering the atrocities and killings that are happening in the area. But we could not do some of it on the spot. There are times when we try to cover it with the phone. When we first report the issues, we will measure the impact. It is because the media has to be the voice of the people. If we do not address the issue, we will not be a voice for the citizens (I8, June; 13, 2021)

Participants claim that Amhara television is a channel that is heading in the same direction before and after the reform. In the past, Amhara television used to convey public grievances through programs such as Yeketemoch Mederek and 'anidleanind', and he explained that they are still doing the same thing. Yeketemoch Mederek is a radio and television program produced based on the forum held between city administrators and citizens. The forum is organized and presided over by journalists in the media. In the forum, issues related to lack of good governance and infrastructure development problems were most frequently raised.

Researchers observe that those programs are currently discontinued. In addition to the questions raised by the public, reports that the journalists used to work from their own ideas have now been significantly reduced. Also, the researchers noted that after the political reform of the country the focus on social and economic issues has shifted to politics, and even those issues were not being properly reported.

Most of the explanations given by the interviewees in terms of the practice of Amhara television journalism before and after the political reform indicated that nothing changed and that the television station is following the same pattern as it did in previous years. Lack of conditions to follow the principles of journalism also hindered their work. The media, in turn, should be aware of their authority and social responsibility, and they must do their best to serve the community and answer the crucial questions of the people. Finally, there are differences in understanding Amhara TV journalism practices between journalists and media managers. The journalists reflect on what is really going on in the field. However, the media managers still sided with the political concerns of the elites.

Factors Influencing Journalism Practice in Amhara Television
Internal factors

The journalists make some of the decisions in collaboration with coworkers and management, but they also make these decisions alone, using their experience, education, and sense of journalistic norms as a guide. At times, reporters will face an ethical situation wherein their choice of what to cover and

how to cover it will conflict with the desires of people inside and outside the organization.

The participants were explained about the main internal and external factors that influence the journalism practice in Amhara television, some are listed below.

When you want to do something special, you will be forced to stay ordinary. For example, we need to be balanced in dealing with grievances. But sometimes there are those who find it difficult to be balanced or to include all ideas. And it can also be difficult to get the idea out and get people to discuss it. I think Amhara television's lack of consistent media approach is a challenge for the station (I2, June; 18, 2021). We choose the issues to make news or programs. But in the end, there are processes that go through the management members. The topic must be reviewed at an editorial meeting. It keeps us dependent on the managements demand. That is not the right way to practice journalism (I3, June; 18, 2021).

If the media, which is the voice of the people, is not free and independent, it will deviate from the purpose for which it was established. According to the participants, the biggest internal problem at Amhara TV is the interference of the managers. The journalist lost his freedom to do his job according to his professional ethics. It is difficult for them to report because they are the management members who make decisions about reports. Even if the system does not allow it, they follow orders from above in order not to lose their jobs. As a journalistic profession, this practice is not correct. Leaders can follow the editorial policy of the media and give leadership, but their responsibility does not lead them to decide the work of the journalist. As a result, by not implementing this, the journalists said that it is an obstacle for them to do their professional duties flawlessly.

Journalists are the practitioners of news gathering and editing. The quality of news gathering and editing depends on their professional ability. In the era of financial media, many journalists have the problem of insufficient professional ability (Wang, 2019). They do not pay attention to improving their professional ability. Some people try to find the number of news hits in their work but do not pay attention to the authenticity of the news.

One of the problems with journalists in Amhara television is the lack of capacity. The lack of professionalism is one of the problems. I think there is a gap in learning new things, as well as in trying to gain knowledge through training and in dealing with current issues. The problem is that our institution has little interest in training and education. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge between the journalist and the editor is also a challenge for better reporting. In our media, we follow a traditional journalist practice. Among the external challenges, as our media is state-owned the intervention of ruling party politicians exists. There are many who oppose freedom. The legitimacy of a journalist's reporting will depend on the current state of affairs in the government (I4, June 10, 2021).

Before an article is created, an idea or story pitch is delegated by the newsroom and whether it has any importance to their audience is considered. The participants noted that the journalist's inability to improve his knowledge was another problem. Failure to keep up with the demands of modern journalism can itself hinder the success of the practice. Developing self-knowledge through reading or regular training will help the journalist to carry out his or her work smoothly. With the current shift in journalism, where online media outlets dominate readership, journalists are influenced by many factors when creating news content for the public and content that will engage their audience. Journalists are academically trained to keep personal biases out of the newsroom and facilitate the news objectively. There are many internal and external influences that affect a journalist's view on what content should be reported. On the other hand, practitioners mentioned that the interference of the content editors' management and board members is another problem for them. When the journalist makes activities to prepare reports, they will not be able to gather information as they intended and will not be able to do on their own way.

> There is editing in journalism. Our reports will be reviewed from the beginning of the planning. We talk to the editor about how to do it. The idea of the editor is influential. They also determine what ideas should be included and what not. Sometimes the news you make is influenced and you do not have the freedom to practice journalism the way you want it. In particular, there is interference from the board members and government officials of our organization. Occasionally, you will need the approval of these individuals to cover a topic. (FGD: 2, June; 24, 2021). In journalism, the role of the editor is to control the work being done. We mentored reporters to not produce reports that can cause ethnic cleansing. Although the editor is the last person to decide occasionally, people at the leadership level also interfere with the relevance of the news coverage and challenge professional liberties of the editor. If the news is passed without these people seeing it and if it is not good for them, it will not be transmitted again. Or they reduce the idea and re-edited it then they allow us to transmit it. So, the editor is completely free (I6, June; 18, 2021).

Editors should pay attention to empathy, think about the audience of the news, dig out the news information they like and are interested in, and then better meet the needs of the audience. Participants noted that the failure of Amhara television content editors to adhere to the principles of journalism is creating a gap in their work. As mentioned above, content editors need to pay attention to emotion, think of news audiences, dig into the news they want, and better meet the needs of the viewer. However, they are unfairly interfering with the work of a journalist. According to the research participants, this issue is preventing them from doing their work freely and independently.

> The current political structure and alignment pose a major challenge to journalism. When a political issue is reported, it is often associated with one political party or ideology. The report itself can either support or oppose it.

This is one of the temptations. The presence of social networks is also a treat. In 2012 and 2013, in particular, our journalists feared reprisals from social networks. The proliferation and pervasiveness of ideas on social networks jeopardize journalism. To address this, we have provided leadership training, especially on media freedom and access to information. But the political agenda does not give us enough opportunity to do so (I8, June 13, 2021).

The government and the media have symbiotic relationships, but in Ethiopia, it is more than that government officials influence the media. Public official pressures, amateurism and burden of living cost are main factor influencing journalists to act unethically (Chekol, 2018). It is widely recognized that governments hold information not for themselves, but rather on behalf of the public, and that, as a result, public bodies must provide access to that information. This recognition is reflected in the widespread adoption of access to information laws by countries around the world, as well as the numerous authoritative international agreements and statements on the issue.

External factors

The participants stated that they had to deal with a variety of problems, both internal and external, in the course of their reporting. Primarily, the public's view of the media as government advocate has made it difficult for them to access information that could be used as a source of information. The reason given for this is the one mentioned earlier that the media is being used as a propaganda tool for the ruling party, rather than raising the voice of the people and being the voice of the voiceless citizens.

As the participants explained, the reluctance of political leaders and party officials to provide the required information to journalists hampers the work. Although they know that they will be held responsible for not answering their questions, they will simply ignore it. Researchers have also repeatedly observed this.

The lack of access to information from outside sources and the lack of consent are also a problem for the journalist. Government officials refused to provide information. Individuals are afraid to be interviewed. Whatever your idea, there are a number of factors that can affect your reporting, both inside and outside the organization (I3, June 18, 2021). Amhara TV has its own identity in the field of journalism. The television station deals with the most serious issues. As a result, people do not want to provide information on violent issues. The biggest challenge for our journalists is access to information. The low level of accountability has been a challenge, especially when officials in government structures have been told not to provide information (I7, 14 June 2021). There is a situation where the community does not see Amhara television separately from the government and the ruling party. That, in turn, prevents him/her from giving information clearly. When we come to the internal influence, there are already some common practices (I2, June 18, 2021)

For a time, there was a one-on-one confrontation program between political officials and journalists, which held the officials accountable for their actions and took responsibility for the destruction. But now they are no longer. There are occasionally investigative journalism activities that are not effective because they are not consistent.

In turn, the FDRE constitution explicitly provides that everyone has the right to seek and receive information. The freedom of mass media and access to information proclamation number 590/2008 gives effect to this constitutional guarantee. According to this proclamation, the public and also journalists have the right to receive information from anywhere from any who. Officials who are required to provide information must also comply with this provision. However, the participants stated that their inability to do so and their lack of accountability and responsibility were a problem for the journalism profession.

Balance and objectivity before and after the reform

The uniquely influential role of television and radio in electoral politics was recognized from the beginning of the radio age. In the sense of providing equal time, radio and television broadcast stations must provide an equivalent opportunity to anyone who requests it. This means that if a station gives a given amount of time to a candidate in prime time, it must do the same for another candidate who requests it, at the same price if applicable. For every functioning democracy, the existence of opposition is vital. They have the right to use the medium and be treated accordingly. Ethiopian media representation of opposition parties depends mainly on who owns the media (Ayana, 2020). If the media is owned by the government, opposition parties are represented as enemy. Privately owned media, however, represent opposition parties as more than partners. The participants explained how Amhara television accommodates or balances different ideologies and points of view. They answer as follows:

> In terms of idea diversity, our site tries to accommodate the views of different parties. But knowingly or unknowingly, more than 90 percent of the ruling party's work and ideas are circulating just because the management decides to do so. Even if they are involved, sometimes it is difficult to say that political parties are adequately accommodated. We have created opportunities for individuals to express themselves on economic and political issues. However, the majority are those who express and support the ruling party's interests. We do not present people who criticize government policy. It is not because we cannot get one, it is because we don't allow them to speak. (I1, May 8, 2021). There are gaps in Amhara television in terms of accommodating different opinions and views at the individual and institutional levels. Individuals and parties have often complained that we did not provide fair coverage and that the institution is the voice of the ruling party. In particular, our media did not provide coverage when an opposite political parties joint statement on the damage done to the public. At the same time, people who are actively involved on social media will not be interested when we invite them. Their

failure to take advantage of this opportunity has hampered the work of the media. When the media itself facilitates the situation, people are reluctant to participate because they portray it as only a government voice (I2, June 18, 2021).

From the above texts, the researcher noted that the Amhara television mainly treated the opposition parties and individuals as if they had no a right to use the media. The media do less positively cover the protesters, condemning their actions, and misreporting their voices. The justification Ballinger gave for such negative treatment of protesters was that protests by their nature challenge the dominant political system. This is because protests are usually held for social and political changes. Thus, in order to culminate such threats, the media, which is owned by the government, acts as one protector of the interests of the government.

According to the participant's testimony, before and after the reform, the Amhara television eye towards opposition parties and individuals did not change significantly due to the reform. Before the reform, the oppositions were seen as neutral; similarly after the reform, the majority of its report considered them as neutral. From this information, the researcher understood that the Amhara television never saw a considerable difference in its tone for oppositions due to the new reform (Bent, 2018).

According to the point of view of other participants, Amhara TV only broadcasts pluralism during the election season.

In the current election season, the parties' questions to get air time on Amhara television are being accepted. But I cannot say that they were given a fair chance on Amhara television before the election campaign and the support rally started. As our site is funded by the government, much of the time is devoted to the ruling party and the government. Opposition parties did not have time. From the journalist's work plan to the production, it depends on the needs of the government (I4, June 10, 2021). We are not providing opportunities for parties and individuals to present their options on good governance or development issues. Even after the change, we have eliminated all programs that the public can challenge and demand leadership, instead of treating ideas that are outside the realm of government. Questions to ask and differences of opinion are limited by said change is fraught with many challenges. Only in the previous election was this given a chance. But for the time being, no air time is provided to accommodate variations in the system. Pluralism and diversity of thinking are not broadcast on Amhara TV as it was before the change (I5, June 14, 2021). The challenges to diversify ideas have increased since the change. Due to the political views of the individual who wanted to express his views on our media, the programs that were on air were stopped. This shows that neither the government nor the media leadership has opened Amhara television to diversity. It is a one-sided media. We always reflect only the interests of the government and the party in power, and nothing has changed despite the change (FGD 2, June 24, 2021).

Reform in the media has a double goal. One is to make the media vibrant and professional. The second is those in which the media are organized in a way that can ethically and professionally practice their duty; they can play a decisive role in the nation-building process. To achieve this, the media must treat everyone equally. As long as it is a national or state based media, it must accommodate idea diversity. According to the participant, Amhara television is serving as the propaganda machine of the government. It is operating in the interest of the ruling elite. As a result, we have come to realize that viewers have lost faith in the media. They do not dare to express themselves freely because they think that Amhara television is a media institution that works only for the leaders of the ruling party. It is noted that there was a north-south dichotomy in the press; some of the private presses were serving as a mouthpiece for certain opposition political parties, while the government press was also serving as a conduit to the government propaganda (Seifu, 2008).

According to the participants, individuals and institutions opposed to the regime have access to the media during the election season and when the opposition shares ideas with the government. This practice restricts freedom of expression and prevents the public or the audience from having different ideas from different parties. Citizens who support or oppose the government will be forced to listen only to the propaganda of the ruling party. Konvitz (2003) also endorses the importance of the free press and notes that freedom of press is vital to a " free government and to a society that values differences of points of view, intellectual and artistic ferment, originality, the cultivation of a critical faculty, and an open mind on the part of its citizens" (p. 145).

There are also additional manifestations that Amhara television was not giving equal chances to different parties. According to the participants and the researcher, Amhara TV has previously banned some musicians and their work from airing because of their political ideology. The works of Tewodros Kassahun (Teddy Afro) and Fasil Demoz, who are well known in Ethiopia by criticizing the government through their music, have been banned from broadcasting on television. However, following the recent political reform in the country, their music has gained the opportunity to be aired.

Sometime after the change, the program of those who criticized the government and complained about the current political process was suspended. For example, a program which involves journalist and activist Temesgen Desalegn was not edited in an appropriate way. That has caused a great deal of controversy among viewers. In addition to these, members of the Amhara National Movement (ANM) and the Amhara Democratic People's Movement (ADD), who have been asked for airtime to share their views with the public, have repeatedly complained that their request has been rejected (Hailegiorgis, 2023). This is an indication that Amhara television does not pay enough attention to dissidents.

On the contrary, there are participants in the study who say that after the political transition, Amhara television has begun to create opportunities for parties and individuals with different views and opinions to express their views.

> Amhara Television is a multifaceted broadcaster. After the change, political issues dominated news coverage. And I think that Amhara TV has provided an opportunity for individuals and groups to express their views on various issues. Since the change of government, various points of view have been widely covered in our reports. I have invited many thoughtful people to my program. In fact, invited guests are required to argue. But people do not want to participate in the idea because of their assumption that the media belong to the government and that it is the mouth of the government. The door is open for political parties to express their views. But they do not take advantage of the opportunity (FGD 3, June 24, 2021). Amhara television has been very supportive of pluralism. We want our site to accommodate a diversity of ideas. We think our society also learns to respect other people's ideas as it practices diversity. Our purpose is not to reflect the views of one party. Previous suspicions were that the media was a servant of the ruling party. However, we have limited our relations with the ruling party since 2008. We have enacted a law that says that our journalists should not be members of any political party. This is done to ensure that the journalist does not discriminate against the party in which he is registered. This makes us the first in the country. We are also ready to make political parties use our site at any time. We can say that we are trying to treat everyone equally on our television (FGD4, June 24, 2021).

Based on those explanations, even though Amhara television has gaps in implementing idea pluralism before the change, there have been improvements since the political reform. Management members who participated in the study attribute that efforts are being made to give parties and individuals with different political views better access to the media and to express their views to the public (Kasoma, 1997; Kruger, 2004).

The legal limitations it allows concern "the honor and reputation of individuals" and "propaganda for war". However, according to the respondent's explanation, this is not entirely practice in Amhara TV.

> According to our media, in the early years of reform there was freedom. We were discussing all the issues that could not be touched on. This later changed. We were brought back as party advocates. Amhara TV, especially in recent times, has been able to report on strong ideas with the interest of the Prosperity Party. Reports are being reviewed to support the change, not in terms of identifying the gaps in society. This has to do with the limits of the journalist's activities. The limitation is not only in space, but also in thought. There were times when even on-air programs were discontinued. Due to interference from the media, the journalist was unable to work freely (I2, June 18, 2021). Before the change, Amhara TV had more freedom. Our work focused on social change, and as our motto states, we were striving for

societal change. It was also one of the first media outlets in the country to raise intangible political issues. It has been a major media outlet since 2008 until the change. After the change, I couldn't say that we have the freedom to perform. Now we are not even able to report what we are supposed to do. As a result, the audience boldly told us that we were not providing accurate information. Efforts to respect the profession are good, but after the change, especially in political matters, our institution has not taken the opportunity to lead the government as it has in the past. We are under the control of the prosperity party (I3, June 18, 2021).

From the above points, the researchers understands that, prior to the political reform in the country, the media could freely cover most of the subjects independently. The Amhara television has done a great job in terms of independence and has gained popularity before the change. Amhara television also plays a vital role and was instrumental in bringing about the change. The participants noted that Amhara television was a partner of the community by boldly asking and interviewing government officials about their wrong doing. In addition, they attribute that before the change takes place the Amhara television also called on the concerned parties to respond to the issue of border enforcement and ethnic-based issues, which has been the question of the people of Amhara for years. Participants reported that most journalists working for the government and media outlets close to the government did not plan for themselves, but only on suggestions from the 'governing body' or on topics that the government wanted.

Art. 29 (2) (b) of the Ethiopian Constitution states: 'Freedom of the press shall specifically include the following elements... access to information of public interest'. Art. 8 (1) of Procl. No. 34/1992 further states: 'Any press and its agents shall, without prejudice to the rights regulated by other laws, have the right to seek, obtain, and report news and information from any government source of news and information.' One of the participants said that since the reform, journalists do not have a right to gather information from government officials.

The freedom of the media has undergone a relative change. Today, as in the past, professionals in the private media are not being persecuted and imprisoned. But there are still unresolved issues with professional freedom and access to information. It is difficult for the media to answer the questions of identity, ethnicity, and issues that must be addressed by the government. Journalists working privately or in the state media could not ask questions and receive answers from top government officials (I4, June 10, 2021).

There have been numerous cases of journalists arrested for criticizing government policies, harassment of the opposition, and abuse of power or corruption by government officials or particular government actions. Some were held for stories that may have been untrue or were speculative or difficult to substantiate. Fearing this, the Amhara television journalists did not dare to report freely in the face of orders from the authorities. Even if they do the reporting work, they will not be able to get airtime for broadcasting.

To fulfill its constitutional responsibilities and its treaty obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in this regard, laws regulating the exercise of freedom of expression must be clearly and explicitly framed with respect to what is permitted and what is criminalized. Some participants, on the other hand, believe that there have been relative improvements in press freedom since the political transition.

Of course, there are improvements. But we have a long way to go in terms of international media. Violations of the right to freedom of movement were particularly prevalent. The media was moving freely. All of that is gradually being curtailed. The change is not like the first few months. There are gaps, especially in terms of information. (FGD 5, June 24, 2021). With the change of government, freedom of expression began to take hold. But because of the problems that remain in the country with the emergence of a skeptical society, our reporters are losing volunteers who are willing for interviews. Scholars' interviews will also cut short to suit the program, which will make them skeptical. They always complain about it. For example, when we talk to a senior government official, we may not be able to get answers for some questions, and they even force us to leave the agenda (FGD 6, June 24, 2021). We have provided press freedom in our institution both before and after the change. Especially after the change, we have created an opportunity for our journalists to freely express their thoughts and opinions. The fact that the AMC is led by journalists and professionals from top to bottom gives us this opportunity. We suppressed the pressure, threats, and grievances of our journalists. That is, to avoid being too strict with themselves (FGD 3, June 24, 2021)

According to the participants, even though after the change there was still a slight glimmer of freedom the government has direct control over the news outlet. The freedom of the press and the development of a well-informed society where the right to information is respected are closely connected to the enjoyment of the full range of human rights civil, political, social, economic, and cultural. That is why freedom of the press is so essential. Based on the above explanation, the researcher realized that in the early months of the political change, the journalist had better freedom to report on the Amhara television, but there is still leadership intervention.

As Amhara television is part of the state-run media, when there are important and sensitive political issues, journalists will report it on the orders of the top leadership. For example, the Wolkait issue, the Sudan border dispute, the genocide of innocent Amharas in the Benishangul-Gumz and Oromia regions and other issues were not made public as they were supposed to report. This will happen at the behest of the political leaders.

Challenges of hate speech and misinformation in Amhara television

According to the European Institute of Peace 2021, fake news, misinformation, and hate speech have thrived in the Ethiopian media ecosystem,

and particularly online. This is strongly correlated with significant, tragic, real-world consequences, exacerbated preexisting tensions, and contributed to violence and conflict. To date, Ethiopia's response to combating the spread of fake news, misinformation, and hate speech has been, by necessity, heavy handed, with the go-to response to escalation being to turn off the Internet for the entire country.

As stressed earlier, most ethno-religious conflicts are politically motivated, and, coincidently, politics happens to be the bridge that brings fake news and hate speech together. Furthermore, no political game can be devoid of propaganda, which characteristically embodies deliberate and strategic manipulation of untruth and hateful comments such as name calling (Malaolu, 2012).

Fake news and hate speech can be used to cause political instability in society. Some of the respondents states that after the political reform there is a hate speech in the Amhara television in some circumstances:

> I think the ways in which we have gone about criticizing the late regime, especially after the change, have led us to classify one party. I think we have linked the ruling government to one nation and made the nation itself exploiters and thieves. This opened the door for the indigenous community to be skeptical (I2, June 18, 2021). I believe hate speech is very common. In all our reports on the eve of the political transition, we have used all the information that could have tainted tplf. This information may be good for the benefit of the region, but it is unethical in terms of journalistic ethics. We hate the tplf because it opposes the interests of our region and offends our people. We should report this in a balanced and appropriate way. But hate speeches have still been made and are being made on Amhara TV. (I5, June 14, 2021)

History has shown that the media can incite people to violence. Hitler used the media to create an entire worldview of hatred for Jews and other minority groups. Rwanda's radio RTLM urged listeners to pick up machetes and take to the streets to kill what they called 'cockroaches'. From the points of the participants, the researcher noted that during the pre-revolutionary period and in the post-political reform, reports were made on Amhara television, blaming some individuals and parties. According to the study participants, just because of the EPRDF, which governed the country for the past three decades, came from the Tigray region, many of the region's indigenous people were criminalized in bulk.

As the participant mentioned, hate speech has been heard on various news and programs on Amhara television since the departure of the previous EPRDF administration. At the time being, even though it is a wrong doing, it is common for hate speech to be disseminated in Amhara television otherwise. Professionally, media companies are expected to aspire to calm the dispute between people; however, different interests are observed through their framing. In the Amhara television, the news and program framing emphasized on blaming the late ruling party members without including their respond to balance. One of the participants said:

After the change, hate speeches and false information were reported on Amhara TV. The institution serves primarily the people of Amhara. However, we did not give professional advice about how to co-exist with Tigray, Oromia, and other peoples and how to deal with bad threats and hate speech from others. Instead, we blame others for the country's political instability. The journalist does not practice his profession. Political issues are covered according to the wishes of the party. In particular, we were involved in a competition with the Tigray media. The interest-based work of the TV station was not done after the change. In fact, we are having an unbalanced time (I4, June 10, 2021).

Accuses TPLF for the instabilities and conflicts in Ethiopia and Amhara, in particular, propaganda and bias are rife in Amhara television coverage, says the participant. These ethno-political conflicts are among the news beats the media report that challenge the journalist's professional detachment. Similar to the federalism structure of the country, the media are highly ethnocentric. Most of the journalists and editors the researcher asked view hate speech as growing and a major problem for Amhara TV. Shortly after the conflict in Tigray began in November 2020, the Government, recognizing the risks of fake news and misinformation, launched a State of Emergency Fact Check Social Media Account. But it works only for social media, so other national and regional media were free to do whatever they wanted regarding TPLF. Hateful expressions are mostly motivated and carried out on grounds of race, prejudice, and national, tribal, or faith-based discrimination, in addition to sexual alignment. However, the media sometimes take sides. Media professionals frequently use the Rwanda case to demonstrate the negative consequence of biased and partisan journalism. It signifies the role that the media can play for the needy societies. Amhara television can present alternative mechanisms available that can dry the conflict and focus on constructing win-win strategies.

As the station follows the development and peace journalism frame, it could tries to hide events related to destruction, death, and causalities and exposes cultural or structural violence like hate speech, words of war, social injustice that may have a connection with the norms and cultures of a society. This makes the station more responsible for the political stability of the country. As the respondents mention on the issue, bearing in mind the negative effects of fake news and hate speech, coupled with their potential to unleash chaos and violence which may affect the security and welfare of individuals and states alike. Amhara television must take the right path to realize its own vision through peace journalism.

On the other hand, there are those who say that Amhara TV is a media institution that does not spread hate speech or false information.

Following the change, Amhara TV did not broadcast fake news. No individual, institution, or group has been falsely accused (FGD 2, June 24, 2021). The reputation of Amhara television is that it will not rise by hate speech and false reports. Amhara TV has a better experience in assessing the

impact of broadcast. The Amhara people have gone through various hardships in the country. Our media had the opportunity to incite hatred and fabricate false accusations more than any other regional media outlet. But because of professionals and leaders who stand for the truth and the principle of journalism, reports that deviate from professional ethics are by no means acceptable. We will only focus on the facts because the results of the reports are well-evaluated. Therefore, Amhara TV focuses on solutions (I3, June 18, 2021).

Having a culturally and ethnically diverse society, conflict is expected in Ethiopia. The unfair allocation of resources, ethnically motivated politics, and wrongly narrated historical relationships remain the cause of different ethnically motivated conflicts (Mulatu, 2019). Under Proclamation no. 1185 In February 2020, the Ethiopian parliament passed a proclamation aimed at countering hate speech and defines 'hate speech' as any speech that deliberately promotes hatred, discrimination, or attack against a person or group based on protected status. It is because it has become necessary to prevent and suppress by law the deliberate dissemination of hate speech and disinformation.

Ethiopia has been undergoing a massive legal reform project since April 2018. Different state and private media use their institution as a tool to fight with the then leading party of the country. In contrast, Amhara television, they refrained from such activities, the participants said. The respondents attribute that the fact that the media is run by people who know the profession very well and are knowledgeable about the profession has prevented the institution from engaging in unethical activities.

Challenges of media censorship in Amhara TV

As journalism is supposed to be a public service, it should be guided by a code of ethics. Otherwise, journalists face a variety of conflicts of interest including their own self-interest, as well as the interest of their relatives that affect their integrity, independence, and credibility (Kruger, 2004). Censorship has been used to monitor public morals, to control public awareness, and to silence opposition. Self-censorship is a type of free speech restriction or 'opinion expression inhibition' (Hayes et al., 2005) that is not carried out by official actors, but applied by a person or entity responsible for producing a piece of creative expression, to prevent any perceived negative reaction to that expression. The response to media censorship in Amhara television is as follows:

The censorship comes from three parties. The first is that the journalist himself distances himself from the idea of reporting, the second is the media character and practice, and the third is related to the source of the information. Top-down reporting plans within the site are restricted. It can only be poured into the opening. Second, if the reporter is repeatedly rejected by the editor, he will refrain from reporting on various issues. The interference of the government bodies and the growth of social networks will also lead to

censorship. The unwillingness of our reporting sources is creating censorship in itself (FGD5, June 24, 2021).

This obviously showed that the editors and management members had worked for the interests of their parties, as most of them take their responsibility out of the professional aspects and this could force the reporters to censor themselves and break out of any of the challenges. Self-censorship is widely regarded as a threat to media freedom and has been described as 'the most corrosive and insidious form of censorship' for journalists (Cronau, 1995).

The way journalists are transmitting information is quite different due to self-censorship, and the interviewees related the practice of self-censorship with largely political atmospheres of Ethiopia. They believe that freedom of expression is not properly implemented, and they referred to measures taken by the government in the past years. Many media institution leaders and journalists were jailed due to their reporting and attitudes so; journalists of AMC censor themselves to far from such penalty as the researcher understood from the above data facts.

> Editors are often said to be the ultimate accountants for news or programs. But in our practice, there is interference from management and administration. When the reporter and the editor need to talk and plan, the management and other politicians will interfere in various ways and claim that this idea does not keep pace with the times, does not support the change, and this is not the case for the Amhara people (FGD 3, June 24, 2021).

The respondents explained that the AMC management members are ordering the content editors to censor themselves for the sake of their job security and survival. In the minds of practitioners, there is also the question of warranty on their daily news production. They doubt that no one takes responsibility for their news due to this reason, they frustrate not to practice peace and development journalism with its guiding principles and they are forced to censor themselves even the ground facts and the real societal stories.

The political environment also appears to have an impact on journalists' perception of self-censorship. In Amhara television, as elsewere, self-censorship is usually associated with societies that have strong tendencies to exert state control over the media. Based on the respondents answer the Amhara television has been criticised for fostering self-censorship in newsrooms. The critique in this regard is particularly aimed at the public broadcaster, which has been accused of being a tool for the ruling party. This is perhaps only to be expected given that official outlets are customarily framed as mouthpieces for the authorities rather than public service media channels proper.

Other informants affirm that the self-censorship practices are not an exceptional activity but belong to the daily routines of news production.

> There is censorship from the beginning, not directly but indirectly. Even if the government said that media freedom has been guaranteed, in Amhara television it has been censorship, and it has been implemented in a number of ways (I4, June 10, 2021). To collect, organize, and deliver information to the

audience, the needs of the reporter, the editor, the management, and the institution create problems. Many facts remain hidden as the ruling party refuses to provide anti-government reports to the public. Since our media is state-based, Facts that do not benefit the region do not come out. These issues hinder the delivery of accurate information to the audience (I5, June 14, 2021)

The practitioner was emphatic: "As a state media, they cannot say a lot of terrible things about the government. There are many gaps. They cannot also be extremely critical of the government.' The self-censorship practices that the journalists refer to are almost always seen in relation to the government or government offices. Although the informant mentions the 'ruling party', it is the 'government' that stands out as the authority that provokes self-censorship.

Self-censorship also comes to the fore with issues concerning ethnicity. These are sensitive questions in Ethiopia with its history of ethnic conflicts.

There is a conflict of interest in our reporting process. The first is our tribe. I went to the meeting and made a report. Hearing that Amhara had been killed and displaced from the village forced me to focus on my work to prevent this. The other is money. If a journalist earns inappropriate money when he or she goes out to report, there will be no accountability, they just cover up the fact (I4, June 10, 2021). Our media serves the people of the Amhara region. The people of Amhara are currently the most oppressed people in the country. I and the other journalist are more interested in the tribe from which we came. Therefore, we do reports to support and promote regional interests. That action creates a conflict of interest (I3, June 18, 2021)

Self-censorship is particularly prevalent in sensitive political stories, especially regarding ethnicity. The now political chaos is a case in point. According to the informants, the media management, which usually keeps out of the daily news production, got directly involved in the news-making process. The state media system, by its very structure, overrides the dominant ethical norms of the professional community. It is therefore regarded as useless to strive for more professional standards as long as the government has a firm grip over the media organization. This view is explained by the Amhara television reporter:

The government has promised freedom to the media after the political change, but the reality is different. The officials will contact our bosses, not us directly. Fearing this, we self-censor. You cannot write against the ruling party. You do not criticize the government policy. As a result, when it comes to sensitive areas like political issues, we are not providing complete information to the audience (I1, 8 May 2021).

The government has promised media freedom after the political change, but the reality is different, said the participant. In a country that claims to follow a free media system, such government interference not only violates the freedom of the press, but also deprives the public of access to accurate information. According to the informant, the journalist began to censor himself out of fear. It is very difficult to be a voice for the people in this way. The freedom of the press in Amhara television is still not safe.

Unlike official censorship, self-censorship is considered more 'insidious' because of its invisibility (Cronau, 1995), which would make audiences none the wiser about withheld or manipulated information. Dictatorships and struggling democracies disguise media censorship as a tool for maintaining law and order; their real motive, however, is to maintain public ignorance. In addition to the government's censorship of the media, there were also allegations that the journalist's ethnicity, religion, and identity were factors in his or her work as a journalist.

As a journalist, we must leave our identities behind wherever we go. We must forget about religion, race, and the environment. We need to be careful that we do not discriminate in any way. We need to forget ourselves. Even if there is a conflict of interest in the current reality of journalism, I think we should be careful (FGD 4, June 24, 2021). Conflicts of interest confront the journalist. Sometimes I see reports based on the interests of the journalist. It takes precedence over your community or ethnic group. We have also seen conflicts of interest in the environment and in the interests of individuals affect our reporting (I2, June 18, 2021).

Based on the above explanation, just like there are journalists who censor themselves by just thinking that the government will be angry with them and refrain from covering certain topics, there are also Journalists who are active in discriminating on the basis of race, religion, and political affiliation. In general, blind support, blind opposition, and fear are major problems. This has put the media environment and the profession of journalism at risk. The state-run media, which are directly or indirectly funded by the government, are run by government appointees, and they report only on what the government wants. Precensorship is forbidden in any form, which means that you cannot prevent it from happening again. The media is free to do as they please, but will be held accountable for their actions if they engage in hate speech or incitement to war.

Impacts of political reform in Amhara television

Different political changes have occurred in Ethiopia at different times. These changes were largely due to the ongoing social, economic, and political problems in the country and were aimed at a better life. Since taking office, Prime Minister Abiy Ahimed has taken a number of steps, including the entry of political parties with different political views, the signing of a peace agreement with Eritrea, the launch of institutional reforms in institutions such as the Electoral Board and the Supreme Court, and various restrictions on human rights are considered to be major steps in the change. Journalism, which has been plagued by political, repressive, and income-related problems, has not been able to recover from previous government pressures.

In the current context of the country, it is difficult for a journalist or the media to follow the ethics of journalism as the audience is a victim of political extremism. The Amhara television played a great role for the ongoing political

reform says the participant, but the reform does not make the station free from government interference.

> We have been contributing to the change as a voice of the people, reaching places that we have not been before. After the change, there is a dynamic and unpredictable pressure, especially when it comes to controlling the work. We are busy here and there due to the political instability in the country. Amhara TV is not living up to its original purpose. Because of the circumstances of our nation, the journalist is not talking to his own experts and making reports that can change the society. Even the so-called Leadership of Change got the right to produce contents by themselves. We live in a time when information is often hidden and untrue. Even our leaders are supportive of the change and the problems created by the change are being suppressed (FGD 5, June 24, 2021).

From 2010 until the removal of the previous EPRDF administration in March 2010, Amhara television has done a great job of holding government officials accountable and echoing basic public demands. According to the Journalists covered the protests and demonstrations at various times places. For example, in August 2010 Amhara TV reported on protests in Bahir Dar, Gondar, and other towns in the region, and it did its part to end the oppression of the people and to establish a new democratic system in the country. In the first year of the political reform there was a fundamental change in Amhara television. There was perhaps a removal of fear mechanisms in the newsroom.

But after a year things have been changed. The situation in the press in the country is deeply disturbing. The reason for this is that the media landscape is as polarized as never before and that parts of the media are being blamed for playing a pivotal role in the turbulence that has erupted in various parts of the country since 2019 (Skjerdal & Moges, 2020). The suspicion of many people is that the media are being exploited to propagate an ethnic agenda.

Furthermore, as the participant explained the AMC's individuals, instead of focusing on the mistakes and gaps of the transition period, who claim to be part of the political transition, have focused on blaming the previous government. As a result, the wrongdoings of the regime have not been made public on Amhara television. This has provoked public outrage. There have been repeated complaints that Amhara television could not be a voice for attacks on Amhara natives within and outside the region.

Amhara TV has done better in terms of expanding the institution and strengthening its manpower since the change, but on the content it is following a pattern out of the journalism system, said another participant.

> After the change, we were able to have branches in different parts of the country. However, in terms of content, we are not guided by the agenda. The media has a power to make a change in government policy, but after the change Amhara TV got twisted in his arm and started doing propaganda work. Journalism is not doing as well as it should. (FGD 6, June 24, 2021)

AMC opened its own branch in Addis Ababa, from where 'correspondents' will report back to Bahir Dar and the rest of the Amhara region about national issues. The Addis Ababa branch of AMC views itself as a conduit for Amhara perspectives in the capital city, and invites persons of their ethnicity, particularly politicians and other elites, to comment on important issues and to present alternative solutions and reflections (Skjerdal & Moges, 2019). AMC has also opened additional branches in Gondar, Debre Markos, and other parts of the region. It is well-known that capacity building contributes significantly to the growth of the media. However, the media did not use the proliferation of branches to raise basic questions of the people of the region, said the participant. It makes the audience go away, said other participants.

> Before the change, Amhara television was the main media in the country. But after the change, the leaders want only to support the reform; they did not tend to criticize it. They make the station do a propaganda work for their own sake. We could not repeat our journalistic struggles as we have done in recent years. After the change, the way we sought the truth has been reversed by the change today. I think by this reason our followers are leave us (I1, May 8, 2021). Due to the change, Amhara television could not control its own way. The change and its consequences are forcing our media to shift its procedure. Either it did not carry its own editorial policy and do the job in a professional way, or it did not speak for society. It is in a confused situation (I6, June 18, 2021).

The main purpose of the media is to educate, inform, and entertain audience. There is no point in having a media without a viewer. In particular, non-profit television stations such as the Amhara television, their primary function should be the voice for voiceless citizen. Participants said it was difficult to do so due to the intervention of politicians and leaders. It is important that the leaders of the station and the region, who do not understand that losing the audience is a bad temptation for the media, refrain from their actions and allow the media to operate freely. It is also important to create an environment in which both journalists and editors can work without interference for the sake of the audience.

Conclusions

The study sought to critically investigate how the political reforms of the country changed the journalistic practice of Amhara television. The findings indicate that Amhara television serves as a propaganda machine for the government. It is operating in accordance with the interests of the ruling elite. It is a hard fact that Amhara TV is doing its best to please the people at the power. It could be said that the first year of the reform, which started in April 2018, saw some changes in Amhara television. The study shows that the station is playing a limited role in addressing the needs of its audience, since the scope and focus areas, both in terms of issues and place, are limited enough to bring some unattended differences to its audience.

Amhara TV played a great role in the ongoing political reform. But the reform does not free the station from government interference. It has done better in terms

of expanding the institution and strengthening its manpower since the change, but on the content side, it is following a pattern outside the journalism profession. Self-censorship has also been highly associated with Amhara television; the reporters are often reported to have put constraints on themselves for fear of legal or political reactions as well.

In terms of hate speech, Amhara television has been involved in hate speech since the departure of the previous EPRDF administration. Based on the understanding of Amhara television journalists, at the time being, even though it is a wrong thing, it is common for hate speech to be disseminated in Amhara television otherwise. On the other hand, before the reform, Amhara television mainly threatened the opposition parties and individuals as if they did not have a right to use the media. However, after the political transition, Amhara television has begun to create opportunities for parties and individuals with different views and opinions to express their views.

In general, Amhara television journalists have faced a variety of problems, both internal and external, in the course of their reporting over the years. Therefore, the political system governs the practice of journalism. Primarily, the public's view of the media as government advocates has made it difficult for them to access information that could be used as a source of information. The reason given for this is the one mentioned earlier: the media is being used as a propaganda tool for the ruling party rather than raising the voice of the people and being the voice of the voiceless citizens.

It is recommended that a journalist be loyal to the profession. They shouldn't be the material of their employers. Instead of waving towards or against the ruling party's ideologies, Amhara TV should have a clear ideology. To solve the problems in the media environment, extremist politics must be able to come to the fore and be corrected. To create a free and accurate media environment, government-funded media like Amhara Television should be allowed to maintain their editorial independence. Professionals, journalists, editors, and media owners must meet on their own initiative; they create a platform for criticism.

Declarations

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest at this level.

Data Availability

The data can be obtained from the main author up on reasonable request.

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