

Negotiating freedom of speech in hierarchical societies: The case of Ethiopian journalists

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Thesis for the master's program in Global Journalism at NLA University Collage

Kristiansand, Norway

May 2023

Acknowledgments

I am greatly indebted to the journalists for sharing their experience, knowledge and insightful perception without which this study would not be real. Thank you all for your heartfelt engagement and generous time.

The following individuals deserve my deepest gratitude for their support in the process of conducting this research: my advisor Carol Azungi Dralega, professor Terje Skjerdal, Thera Mjaaland and Solomon Kebede for their guidance, valuable inspiration and critical input from which this thesis has benefited greatly.

My special thanks goes to Tormod Nuland, for all the support and encouragement, thank you for being you!

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Abstract

This research examines the role of socio-cultural assumptions in shaping journalistic work and the practice of freedom of speech in Ethiopia through the view and experience of Ethiopian journalists. Using qualitative methods for data collection and analysis, the study aims at drawing attention to a little discussed aspect of freedom of speech and the media in Ethiopia from a socio-cultural point of view.

Within a bit more than 100 years, Ethiopia has seen major changes of regimes, from a feudal monarchy via a socialist military regime to a federal model. All these have to a degree started initiatives where the space has been opened for a free press, before the space have been more or less closed down again. Why is that? What makes these different political systems act in the same way of dominating and controlling the media system? Reviewed literatures informed this research that hierarchy is regarded as viable social order, guiding all aspects in society from the political structure down to the family level and socialization of children. The data collected through in-depth interviews with ten Ethiopian journalists also reveal that hierarchy and domination is dominant feature of social relations both at home and the work place. Silencing starts at home where by submission of children to adults is regarded as giving respect and a base for strong sense of keeping ones' dignity.

Using concepts on socialization drawn from the works of Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Elder-Vass (2012) in analyzing respondents' views and experience, this thesis tries to explain how socio-cultural assumptions influences the practice of freedom of speech in Ethiopia.

Chapter one: Introduction

This research is concerning the role of socio-cultural assumptions in shaping the practice of journalism and freedom of speech in Ethiopia, with the reference to the experience of Ethiopian journalists.

1.1 Problem statement

The press that began about a century ago¹ in Ethiopia is said to be introduced as part of a modernization process by the political system of the time, who had become increasingly influenced by Western civilisation (Reta, 2013). However, in the book "Historical guide to world media freedom", Ethiopia has been reported as a country with no media freedom for more than 60 years from 1948 to 2012. The point is, there were three ideologically different political systems in power since the establishment of the press work in the early 20th century. These are, the feudal power structure that began the press work as a sign of modernity, the socialist military regime that took power following the 1974 Ethiopian revolution removing the monarchical rule, and the post 1991 era. Whitten-Woodring & Van Belle, (2014, p. 175-177) refer to the third regime as "Anocracy"².

However, despite the difference in these political systems and their contrasting ideology, media control by the governments, authoritative media leadership and lack of professional journalism has been the defining characteristics of the Ethiopian media system throughout its existence (Aadland & Fackler, 1999; Reta, 2013; Skjerdal, 2012). Moreover, Ethiopia is a country that has been ruled by an absolute monarchy system until as recent as the beginning of the 1970s. The centuries old monarchical socio-political system was removed by bloody revolution. But political power transfer through the use of violence including civil wars continues to be the norm. The military regime who took power from the aristocrats in 1974 was overthrown in 1991 after 17 years of civil war. The winning forces established a coalition government of EPRDF³,

¹ There were press products that appeared in the country earlier run by European missionaries and colonizers who started operating in the Northern and Eastern part of Ethiopia beginning the mid-19th century. (Reta, 2013)

² A semi-democratic political system.

³ The Ethiopian People Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) was a coalition of four political parties that was in power until 2018.

which was ousted in 2018 by young reformists within the party “in what looks like a ‘soft revolution’ ” (Menychle, 2019, p.25). Though the power transfer was peaceful in the beginning, soon the disagreement between the coalition parties, escalated to a tragic and devastating civil war that is still not resolved. Literatures suggest that using violence as the only way to resolve differences is part of the political culture in Ethiopia (Abbink, 2006; Abdissa, 2019).

The question of what lies behind this similarity of domination by the political system brings this study to look into the issue of socio-cultural assumptions, which are the guiding principles of social relations including the characters and organizations of social institutions such as political and media systems. As asserted by Brett & Gelfand (2006, p. 175), social institutions are agents of culture as they “carry culture in their ideology and reinforce that ideology by rewarding and sanctioning consistent social interaction within the culture”.

Thus, through the understanding of Ethiopian journalists regarding the societal norms and values they have been socialized into, this research explores the role of socio-cultural assumptions in Ethiopian societies in shaping journalistic practice as well as freedom of speech in Ethiopia. Employing a qualitative research approach, the data has been collected using in-depth interview and analyzed thematically. Theoretical concepts drawn from the works of Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Elder-Vass (2012) in the area of socialization and the role of individuals as a group in sustaining social structures have been used to analyze the data.

1.2 Research questions

RQ-1. What is the perception of Ethiopian journalists regarding the socio-cultural values and norms that they have been socialized into in shaping their journalistic practice?

RQ-2. What is the view of the journalists about the contribution of socio-cultural assumptions of Ethiopian societies in facilitating or/and hampering the practice of freedom of speech in Ethiopia.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1.3.1 General Objective

The main objective of this research is to understand the role of socio-cultural assumptions in shaping the practice of journalism and freedom of speech in Ethiopia.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- To understand the perception of Ethiopian journalists regarding the socio-cultural environment that they have been socialized into in shaping their journalistic work.
- To explore respondents view on the contribution of socio-cultural assumptions in facilitating or/and hampering the practice of freedom of speech in Ethiopia.

1.4 Significance of the research

The bulk of the literature on the practice of journalism in Ethiopia refer to the domination of authoritarian regimes as a reason for the lack of media freedom and professional journalistic practice. While subscribing to these assertions, this research seeks to bring the attention to the role of socio-cultural assumptions in shaping the practice of journalism and freedom of speech in Ethiopia based on the perception of Ethiopian journalists.

This study contributes in understanding the journalism practice in Ethiopia by complementing it with existing literatures on the subject. In addition, it has significance in inspiring further studies on the topic in a nationwide scale in Ethiopia. Hopefully, it can also inform policies towards enhancing the role of the media and journalists in promoting the ideals of freedom of speech in Ethiopia.

1.5 Thesis organisation

The thesis is presented in five chapters. The first chapter presents problem statement, RQs and Ros, significance of the study, and thesis organization. Relevant literature and theoretical framework that guides the research are presented in the second chapter while the methodology part constitutes the third chapter. The findings of the study are presented in chapter four, and the last chapter provides discussion and conclusion.

Chapter two: Literature Review and theoretical considerations

This chapter presents review of literatures relevant to this research. Literatures on the situation of media in Ethiopia hardly look at the contribution of socio-cultural aspects for the status of journalistic practice and freedom of speech. Thus, this review relies on scholarly works that provide significant insight to this study regarding socio-cultural assumptions in Ethiopian societies though they are not specifically media studies. In this regard, the work of Donald Levine's "Wax and Gold: tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture" has paramount importance in terms of the discussion on the culture of hierarchy and its change resistance characteristics.

This chapter has two parts. Sections from 2.1 to 2.3 (together with their sub-sections) present the literature review while the theoretical framework is found in section 2.4.

2.1 The socio-cultural context

Societal perception about the social world guide and control society members through social institutions, to which their view lay out the "underlying philosophy" (Brett, 2000, p.99). Socio-cultural assumptions of a society provide the basis for the values and norms that guides social interaction, and the maintenance of social order (Brett & Gelfand, 2006, p.175).

Regarding socio-cultural assumptions in the Ethiopian context, hierarchy plays a significant role in guiding social relationship.

2.1.1 Hierarchy: as a viable social order

Hierarchy is understood as essential element to keep social order in the dominant tradition of Ethiopia⁴. A study on the culture of power and politics in Ethiopia confirms that the social order maintains rigid and vertically structured hierarchy, which "contributes to a non-egalitarian distribution of power, which is deeply entrenched, and resistant to change." (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003, p. 11). Hierarchy plays a significant role when it comes to guiding social relationship through assigning individuals into different roles and statuses based on wealth, age, gender, social status

⁴ Ethiopia is a multi-cultural/lingual nation where more than 80 languages are spoken by different groups. However, there is a "dominant tradition" (Levine, 1972, p.2) whose language evolved into becoming the official language of Ethiopia. Therefore, the discussion regarding socio-cultural assumptions is based on scholarly works referring to the dominant tradition of Ethiopia.

and ethnicity. This attitude and practice has its roots in the social norms and values that “teach Ethiopians that people are not equal.” (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003, p. 11).

Further, the assignment of superior/inferior qualities starts at home with women and children given inferior position than that of adult men. This tradition tends to keep both women and children in the background as they are perceived as less knowledgeable, and governed by emotions and not reason. (Levine, 1972[1965] p. 79 & 80). The aspect of regarding children as inferior and not taking them seriously can go through out their adolescent and young age too as it is believed that “only as a man approaches forty does he begin to gain respectability. [...] most esteemed of all is the elder, the man of sixty or seventy. Like earth, he is settled and stable.” . Levine (1972[1965] p. 79).

2.1.2 Socialization

In their recent work “Silent censor: The influence of authoritarian family socialisation on professional journalism in Ethiopia”, Dirbaba and O’Donnell, 2016, reveal that repressive socialization at family level during childhood “has a direct and negative impact on journalists’ daily professional undertakings.” (p. 928). The authors assert that child rearing through domination and control is a widely practiced social norm in Ethiopia, which is accompanied by “secretive and conservative forms of communication” (Dirbaba & O’Donnell, 2016, p. 928). Such experience of childhood deprived of journalists the capacity “to achieve professional autonomy” (ibid) both individually and collectively. According to Dirbaba & O’Donnell (2016), family orientation during childhood constantly discourages children from questioning their surroundings or entertaining new or different ideas.

Levine’s (1972 [1965], p. 79 & 105-108) observation interms of the view on development of individuality explains more in this area. The dominant tradition in Ethiopia encourages imitation where by personal identity is formed through copying character and life style of “the parent or parent-figure of the same sex” (Levine, 1972 [1965], p. 105). In the attempt to bring a child to obedience, physical punishment can be applied. Also, the strict discouragement of individual identity which start at early age lays the foundation to raise an obedient child:

The effect of [...] socialization, then, is to inhibit rather than to stimulate the development of individuality. The spirited and expressive [...] child of two or three is conditioned to become, for the rest of his childhood and to large extent throughout life, taciturn, fearful, and slightly morose. (Levine, 1972 [1965], p. 267)

This observation is revealing given the significance of the development of “*individualized identity*” (Taylor, 1997, p.101) to the practice of freedom of speech as well as to the development of democratic socio-political system.

Furthermore, the culture discourages personal identity development through self-searching and strictly demands conformity to the societal values and norms which teaches obedience and domination as a core axis of social interaction. To be obedient and as the same time learn how to be dominant seems values contrasting one another. But the contradiction serves well to the maintenance of hierarchical social order as one need to learn how to obey their superiors while dominating their inferiors. (Levine, 1972 [1965], p. 283-286).

In a related matter, there is also an aspect of conflicting values and moral standings regarding child raising in the dominant tradition in Ethiopia. On one hand, children are expected to be obedient not only to their parents but to all with superior quality than them such as elderly men, priests and authority figures. On the other hand, children (especially boys) are expected to be brave with the justification of preparing them to deal with human aggression. The view regarding the maintenance of social order in the dominant tradition in Ethiopia is related to the perception on human nature as inherently aggressive and treacherous (Levine, 1972 [1965], p. 79-85). This account observes that “the phenomenon of human aggression is seen, discussed, pondered, and worried about to a considerable extent.” (Levine, 1972 [1965], p. 85). This preoccupation on human hostility leads to contradicting values and norms regarding how to deal with the problem: It produces conflicting norms of the desire of conquering men’s aggressive impulse as the same time stimulating it. On one hand there is a desire to subdue ones’ hostile urge through observing religious rituals such as fasting, paying high respect to elders as “the men of peace”. (Levine, 1972 [1965], p. 85). But on the other hand, there is an obsession for developing ones’ “capacity for aggression both through the technique of litigation and through violent means.” (Levine, 1972 [1965], p. 85). The maintenance of conflicting values goes hand in hand

with the societal assumption that regarded ambiguity as virtue over strait forwardness. To say what one is feeling and not knowing how to be ambiguous is considered as inferior quality in the dominant tradition of Ethiopia (Levine, 1972 [1965], p. 8 & 80).

This centuries old culture of hierarchy reveals its change resistance character when Ethiopia began its journey towards modernization beginning the early 20th century. Despite the political system will to adopt western civilization, the development and practice of modern thoughts of freedom and liberty could not hold on roots. This review discusses the influence of hierarchy and domination in the political and media culture in the sections to follow.

2.2 Importing Modernity

Individual liberty and freedom of speech are the fundamentals of the modern thought that brought a new social order in the west. The social criticism of this era was a force against social inequalities of assigning people into a superior and inferior status, which destined them to contrasting treatment in terms of accessing wealth, social status and other privileges. (Ash, 2016; Taylor, 1997). The social change towards modern socio-political systems in western Europe that took place “nearly four hundred years ago” was a “turbulent birth” (McNair, 2009, p.237), as it challenges centuries old hierarchical social orders and absolute monarchical powers.

Media plays a significant role through taking sides with the republican and challenging authoritative regimes (McNair, 2009, p.237) as well as creating public awareness regarding the new liberal ideas such as freedom of speech and individual liberty. In this context, media has been constituted as a democratic institution which becomes instrumental in transforming the values and norms of the new social system into being a shared belief among the western society (Kunelius, 2009; Petäjä, 2009; Rønning, 2009).

In the case of Ethiopia, the idea of modernism was ushered in by the feudal socio-political power structure which became increasingly influenced by western civilization. Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913) had been credited for introducing modern ideas including the press, education, commerce & banking, and an “European-style

cabinet”, (Henze, 2000, p. 186). His successor, emperor Haile Selassie I (1930-1974) introduced among other development programs the first constitution in the history of the country, and established parliament right after his coronation in 1930 without any pressure from the public. (Asfa-Wosen, 2016; Henze, 2000; Lewis, 2016).

However, the practice indicates that modernity was not understood as a process of establishing a legitimized government through the practice of freedom of speech. For example, the cabinet of emperor Menelik II took a year to have its first meeting since its establishment (Henze, 200, p.186). Even then, as the feudal trend of a centralized governance with the emperor making every decision persists, which makes the cabinet minister a nominal one. (Reta, 2013, p.10).

An essential element in modernity is the will to change ones’ archaic thinking and way of life with new and creative ideas, and, communication is a key to facilitate this change. (Sparks, 2007, p. 20-37). In this regard, the introduction of the press by the feudal power structure in the dawn of the 20th century Ethiopia, though in pursuit of modernity, was not founded on the principles of freedom of speech. (Reta, 2013, p.17). Promoting modern ideals of individual liberty and freedom of speech was not part of the ‘journalistic’ job. Nor it was not up to challenging the traditional socio-political system of hierarchy and domination. To the contrary, they were mainly carrying glorifying news of the emperor and his family and “showered praises” (Reta, 2013, p.19) on the rulers. As Reta puts it, the early press works in Ethiopia “emerged within a culture of total harmony” (2013, p.19) with the political system.

What interests this research is the enduring characteristics of the early press in shaping the media culture and journalistic practice in Ethiopia from more than 100 years ago until the present day. (Reta, 2013; Skjerdal, 2012). The defining features of journalism, practice of loyalty to the political systems, absence of political criticism, and the placement of media as government entity were set up from the very beginning. (Dirbaba and O’Donnell, 2016; Reta,2016; Skjerdal, 2012). This issue will be discussed following to the socio-political context.

2.2.1 The socio-political context

A feudal power structure, where by the king was both the head of state and government by assuming control over economic sources and social institutions, was ruling Ethiopia for centuries until the beginning of the 1970s. As a feudal state, a series of conflicts for power supremacy among feudal lords dominated the political culture since the mid- 13th Century (Abdissa, 2019; Henze, 2000; Lewis, 2016; Milkias, 2011). The two major rival groups were the Amhara feudal lords that occupied the North Western and Central highlands, and the Tigray feudal lords of the northern part. These groups, though sharing a lot in common in terms of religion (orthodox Christianity) and feudal traditions, much of their relations were marked by the desire to overpower one another. (Henze, 2000; Levine, 1972[1965]). Starting from the mid-19th century, the central and northern Amhara feudal power managed to acquire modern guns and succeeded in controlling "their northern neighbors" (Lewis, 2016, p.28). An estranged relationship between the two groups continued with the feudal state in the North kept as a periphery, excluded from social and political participation (Ficquet & Dereje, 2015; Henze, 2000).

Therefore, the 20th century saw the power dominance of one group, which established a strongly centralized administration at the central region of the empire state. Once the rivalry with the North settled, the early 20th century feudal power structure went into conquering "all the peoples around them" (Lewis, 2016, p. 28), a move that established the borders of the present-day Ethiopia (Henze, 2000; Lewis, 2016).

Regarding the construction of political and cultural domination in contemporary Ethiopian societies, Eide's (2000) analysis in terms of centre/peripheral dynamics gives relevant perspective. In his book "Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia: 1974-85", he observes that the feudal power structure led by emperor Menelik II (1889-1913), laid the foundation to a dominant and hierarchical socio-political system that remained in power until 1974. Through the expansion of its territory towards the the South and West and controlling the land, the emperor established his economic superiority. At the same time, he formed a strong political circle comprises of political and religious elite groups mainly representing the Amhara ethnic groups and the clergy in the orthodox church. These two groups formed the nucleus of the ruling class

that reigns almost for a century through central authority and homogenisation of culture. According to the author, the societies in these occupant areas were referred as peripheral states by the central government, which had a “contradictory relationship” with them (Eide, 2000, p. 15).

In the meantime, this feudal power structure aspired to embrace Western modernisation through the establishment of institutions and development programs. Generally speaking, the idea of liberty and equality was not in the agenda of the feudal power structure, which was an absolute monarchical system and whose nobilities “ruled over the peasantry with iron hand” (Reta, 2013, p. 10). One can observe paradox in terms of the introduction of democratic institutions such as parliament and media accompanied by authoritarian leadership.

Emperor Haile Selassie I (1930-1974) was known for his passion to modernize his country “following the Western model” (Asfa-Wosen, 2016, p. 55) while preventing “any competing sources of power from forming” (Lewis, 2016, p. 29). Though his initiative to introduce a constitution and a parliament earned him an admiration from the west, however, there was never an election held during his 40 years in power. In fact, the constitution rather strengthened the power of the emperor through acknowledging him as a person with a divine right to rule. (Asfa-Wossen, 2016; Henze, 2000). The claim of “the divine right of kings” (Cuttica, p. 67) was the very authoritarian notion that resisted the modern idea of a civil government based on individuals’ consent, thus, was fought against by the liberal thinkers.

Since his coming to the political scene in the early 1920s, emperor Haile Selassie I was regarded as reformist leader. Despite his commitment to the expansion of the modern development programs, he was reluctant to embrace the notion of liberty through acknowledging individuals right to freedom of expression, equal rights of different ethnic and religious groups, and especially he was strongly against the formation of any political parties throughout his reign. (Henze, 2000, p. 259).

Then what was the role of the media in this transaction? The next section deals with this issue.

2.2.2 The making of media culture

The historical development of the press in Ethiopia⁵ has significant contribution in terms of shaping the media culture and journalistic practice until the present day. A media loyal to and controlled by political powers, as well as lack of professionalism in journalistic practice are characteristics that were set up at the very foundation of the press. Literature suggest that media-state relation defined by absolute dominance of the latter, the placement of the press as part of state apparatus, and the practice of silencing critical voices, are characteristics that were was set right from the very beginning and are still defining features of Ethiopian journalism. (Aadland & Fackler, 1999; Dirbaba and O'Donnell, 2015; Reta, 2013; Skjerdal, 2012).

The press that emerged at the royal court of emperor Menelik II (1889-1913), here after refers to as the local press, was initiated by individuals who themselves were members of the feudal nobility, and it was not meant for the consumption of the general public but exclusively for the nobility. (Reta, 2013; Skjerdal, 2012). The individuals who start the local press work were referred to as journalists and “bestowed high esteem” (Reta, 2013, p. 13), but they were not serving the public but themselves. As they are members of the nobility, the ‘journalists’ were not doing the press work to earn a living out of it, rather “for gaining favour with the emperor and the rest of the high-ranking nobility.” (Reta, 2013, p. 17). Therefore, the issue of individual liberty and freedom of speech was never been a concern of either the individuals in charge of the local press work or the feudal socio-political system, which was fascinated with Western modernization. (Reta, 2013, p. 16-20).

Practicing journalism through pledging loyalty to the political system and to those in power remains to be the defining feature of Ethiopian journalism for more than 100 years. (Reta, 2013; Skjerdal, 2012). However, the influencing factors that forced journalists to be loyal to the political systems at the expense of professional journalistic practice were not one and the same all the time. The tradition of loyalty to the emperor,

⁵ As mentioned in the introduction, this refers to the press established in the early 20th century by the then feudal socio-political system. Otherwise, it is documented that printing machines were in use inside the country beginning from 1863. Also, the introduction of published materials dates back to the 1600ss, with religious books in Geez language printed in Europe and shipped to the country. (Ellene, Mesfin & Alemayehu, 2003; Reta, 2013; Skjerdal 2012).

which was the major predicament to development of professional journalism started changing in the 1960s but only to be replaced by another challenge of fear (Reta, 2013, p. 108-121). When young employees with journalism education, and non-nobility background joined the press, they began to challenge the existing practice of news selection and reporting. But the young professionals' initiatives to do journalism differently had not been received well by traditionalists tension between the two become inevitable. With uncertainties regarding the consequences of such tensions, fear took precedence over professionalism (Reta, 2013, p. 112 & 113). After half a century, fear is still a challenging factor. In one of his findings Skjerdal (2012, p. 227), observes how "discourses of fear" preoccupy the imagination of journalists working for the government media leading them to choose submissive reporting despite their aspiration towards professional journalistic practice.

Another relevant media culture that has been established during the early period of the press work is the practice of silencing critical voices. The story of two "royal court papers" (Reta, 2013, p. 16), which marked the start of the press work can be a case in point. These hand written paper sheets had lots of similarities in terms of production, language use, target readers and the social status of the individuals who initiated them. They were both handwritten in Amharic language, produced in few carbon copies of not exceeding 50, and circulating only among the nobilities. They began to appear more or less at the same time, in and after 1896, and were produced by individuals who were close to the royal court. One of the papers was produced by the pen man of emperor Menelik called Desta Metike and the other by a man called Gebre Egziabher was also a member of the royal court. (Reta 2013; Skjerdal 2012).

However, there was a difference between the two royal court papers in terms of content. Though they both were sharing glorifying 'news' about the emperor and his wife, the one by Gebre Egziabher was said to be "moralistic in tone and, quite often, critical" (Reta, 2013, p. 12) of the nobility. Due to the critical nature of his writings, the author as well as his paper had "lost favour of the royal court" (Reta, 2013, p. 12) long before the author's death in 1914. While the one by the penman of the emperor, which was of "lavish praise to the emperor" (Reta, 2013, p. 19), promoted into being the first

local newspaper named *Aimro*. Skjerdal (2012, p.10) defines *Aimro* as signifying media loyalty to government, while Gebre Egziabher's paper as "political criticism".

Since then, a media critical to the political system has never been part of Ethiopian journalism before the 1990s (Reta, 2013; Skjerdal 2012). Even then, the sensitivity of the political system towards criticism caused intimidation of the media by the government (Shimelis 2002; Vaughan & Tronvoll 2003). In its just over a century existence, the media operates within the same culture of serving "the government in power." (Aadland & Fackler, 1999), despite the change in government and political discourses, from feudal to socialist and to transition period. The trend of the media serving the political system continues to date with the political system asserting more control both in terms of ownership and media content. (Dirbaba and O'Donnell, 2015; Reta, 2013).

2.2.2.1 A press by the government and for the government

Regarding media ownership, the defining moment was related with the purchasing and administration of printing machines. In 1906, emperor Menelik II ordered the purchase of a printing machine as an expression of him being pleased with the press work. This marks the establishment of "the first government printing press in Ethiopia" (Reta, 2013, p.15). Same source states that the printing machine was installed in the emperor's palace where the press work was operating from. This comes with the ardent attention and support of emperor Menelik II to the press work in relation to his interest in following European modernization. He said to be keen in the press work and closely follow up its development. It was the emperor who gave the first weekly Amharic newspaper its name "*Aimro* ("intellect")", and this fact was written in the "masthead throughout its existence" (Reta, 2013, p.13).

In this way, Ownership of printing machines by the feudal power structure was the significant measure that established a government owned and controlled media culture. More significantly, it might have set the culture of journalism practice of serving those in power instead of the public interest. The contents of *Aimro* can serve as an example here. According to Reta (2013), "*Aimro* hardly touched on issues pertaining to the everyday problems of the ordinary people". (p. 25). Rather it was promoting the culture of hierarchy and domination through persuading the public "to

be loyal to their feudal rulers and serve them faithfully.” (ibid). In doing so, the media was used to promote the hierarchy, and was serving the powerful through justifying the right of the monarchy to rule its subjects as well as preaching the propriety of submission to the public.

The trend of the media serving the political system by promoting its ideology is at work until present day with the political system asserting more control both in terms of ownership and media content. From the very foundation journalism practice was not shaped by the principle of serving the public. It was rather founded on a twisted version of serving the powerful. (Dirbaba and O’Donnell, 2015; Reta, 2013).

With a new leadership coming to the political center, the 1920s brought a change in the media environment. It is the time the media experienced freedom. The next section will briefly look at this time.

2.2.3 Glimpse of hope

Regarding the development of media culture, the 1920s saw expansion of media in terms of new printing machines and increasing numbers of press products. (Skjerdal, 2012). Also, new trends of media freedom were followed by a contradictory measure of the establishment of press censorship. Following the death of emperor Menelik II in 1913, the regent Ras Taferi Mekonen, emerged as a young reformist aristocrat leader (Asfa-Wossen, 2016; Henze, 2002). Opening the media space for free exchange of opinion and ideas was one of the areas that he showed his change-oriented leadership skill. He purchased printing machines and founded a weekly newspaper named *Berhanena Selam*. (Henze, 2000, p. 203). This weekly newspaper used as a platform for “the few young educated Ethiopians of that period” (Ellene et al., 2003, p. 29) to exchange their opinions and ideas on social change and development. However, it was a short-lived experience as “the free atmosphere did not survive the consolidation of political power by the patron after 1930” (Bahru, 2002, p. 13).

Soon after Haile Selassie I coronation (1930-1974), the media freedom came to a halt with the introduction of media censorship in the 1930s, which sustains for more than half a century until 1992. Through the assignment of his loyal and trusted men in

charge of the ministry of pen, under which the press censorship office was running, the emperor was in full control of the press. (Reta, 2013; Skjerdal, 2012).

The experience of opening and closing media freedom by the political system becomes a media trend in time of government change, which repeated itself in the 1970s, 1990s and recently in and after the change of government in 2018. (Ellene et al., 2003; Bahru, 2002; RSF, 2019).

Regarding the daily work routine, the legacy of emperor Menelik II in terms of closely following the press work as well as ownership of printing machines continued with his successor Haile Selassie I (1930-74). In early 1920s while he was the Crown Prince as Ras Teferi Mekonen, he purchased a printing machine, which was named after himself and installed in the compound of his palace. Later it changes both the name as well as location only to be established as a government printing press known today as Berhanena Selam. Since then, this printing press remains as a government entity with all the successive different political systems maintain ownership over it until present day. In addition to all state-owned press productions, the private newspapers that emerged after the post 1991 era are also dependent on the government owned printing houses. (Ellene et al., 2003; Reta, 2013; Shimelis, 2002; Skjerdal 2012).

Content wise, the crown prince was not different than his predecessor in his keen interest in and follow up of the press work. Skjerdal (2012) observes that the Crown Prince “was closely involved with the newspaper, and even assisted with proof-reading when there was shortage of personnel” (p. 10). This might have influenced the content. The press continues in the path of the first local newspaper *Aimro* and its forerunner paper sheet in glorifying the monarchy with newspapers carrying of the pictures of the emperor and his family in their front page became mandatory. (Reta, 2013; Skjerdal, 2012).

Moreover, the same way as with the previous press works, stories of public concern and distress such as “famine, drought, unemployment and inflation” would not be entertained as they were regarded as issues that “could damage the reputation of the empire”. (Skjerdal, 2012, p. 11 & 12).

Since the 1920s the media saw an expansion in terms of the use of better functioning printing machines, increasing numbers of publications as well as the introductions of radio and television in 1930s and 60s respectively. However, the purpose remained to be serving the interest of the feudal power structure with no practice of media plurality. Also, the media played crucial role in asserting a discourse of hierarchy and domination in relation to the establishment of a superior cultural identity based on one language and religion. (Reta, 2013, p. 109-120). As Skjerdal (2012) observes during the feudal era, the media “served to manifest imperial immunity and Amharic supremacy.” (p. 13)

The state of the media in the 1960s, was far from being a platform for exchanging of opinions and ideas (Levine, 1972[1965]; Reta, 2013). Press publications, not only were few in numbers but also were struggling due to limitation of resources. Therefore, they failed to provide the much-needed space for the discussion of issues of public interest. Besides, despite their claim to be independent voices, the media never plays an adversarial role towards the political system (Reta, 2013). It rather had an “apologetic orientation” (Levine, 1972[1965], p. 191) towards the aristocratic leadership that puts its independence in question.

In the face of the practice of democratic institutions including the media, the social movement demanding freedom of speech and other political rights in the 1960s, took to the traditional way of resolving differences through a means of violence not dialogue and negotiation. As it happened, the monarchical rule that was instrumental in introducing modern ideas paid a high price as it was removed from power through a brutal force of violence in the 1974 Ethiopian revolution (Asfa-Wossen, 2016; Henze, 2000; Lewis, 2016).

The next section looks on this phenomenon focusing on the influence of the tradition of hierarchy and domination.

2.2.4 The demand for freedom of speech

The social movement that led into the 1974 Ethiopian revolution started in the early 1960s. This movement was inspired by the newly emerged social group of intellectuals. This phenomenon was related with the introduction of modern

education in Ethiopia, which acquainted young students with “libertarian and egalitarian ideals of the West.” (Levine, 1972[1965], p. 138). Also, with the expansion of modern education through the opening of universities at home and scholarship programs, young Ethiopian students were able to pursue their higher education in Europe and the US. (Lewis, 2016). However, the exposure of the young educated Ethiopians to the Western countries meant that they became aware of the backwardness of their country “harshly revealed in the direct comparison with Western democracies.” (Asfa-Wossen, 2016; p. 55). This realization caused anger, which they directed towards the monarchy. In pursuit of bringing about socio-political change in their country, they took aim of challenging the power of the aristocratic leader, who was dedicated to the expansion of education and other modern ideas (Asfa-Wossen, 2016; Lewis, 2016).

However, social studies of the 1960s Ethiopia reveal that there was no enabling environment in terms of the development and exchanging of modern thoughts, despite the aspiration of the intellectual group towards social progress. Analysis provided by scholars regarding the challenges of hierarchy in terms of inhibiting solidarity based on commonly agreed principles among the intellectuals change enthusiasts. Levine (1972[1965]) linked this obstacle with the cultural orientation towards self and community in the dominant tradition in Ethiopia. According to this source, the tradition gives much priority to “private interest that leaves little room for the consideration of communal needs.” (Levine, 1972[1965], p. 242). This observation is seconded by a source who wrote the “Desire for personal betterment and a guarantee of steady, prestigious government employment was always stronger...” (Henze, 2000, p.259) among the intellectuals. Further, the tendency of asserting the personal advantage together with hierarchical attitude based on cultural identity became an obstacle for the intellectuals’ group to build trust with each other, reach consensus for the common good, and stand together in unity. There was little effort to establish strong professional associations, though, it was significant step towards bringing them together. Therefore, despite the zeal of the newly emerging intellectual class to see their country developed in the Western way, there were no vibrant social

engagements, formal or informal, with the purpose of creating intellectual dialogue. (Levine, 1972[1965], p. 238-286).

The second relevant analysis is related to the challenge of hierarchy in terms of creating tension between the traditionalists, and the young educated groups. (Henze, 2000; Levine 1972[1965]; Lewis, 2016). The coming of a new social class of the young educated group “with ideas of freedom of speech and political organization” (Lewis, 2016, p. 31) means that the rigidly stratified social hierarchy has been challenged. The customary “relationship between superior and subordinate” (Levine, 1972[1965], p. 274) based on age and social status could not hold its ground. The old traditionalists who were occupying the decision-making position in the government offices and the young educated groups who seek for their freedom came to the point where the latter eventually revolt against the former. (Levine, 1972[1965]; Lewis, 2016).

Moreover, the idea that was championed by the intellectuals regarding the backwardness of the country was received as harsh criticism by the aristocratic leadership, provoking resentment. The sensitivity to criticism has its root with the tradition of hierarchy that inhibits the development of individuality, according to Levine (1972[1965], p. 275-286). The process of socialization in the dominant tradition of Ethiopia does not encourage individual excellence through knowing oneself, identifying ones’ interest and ability. With the absence of the tradition of self-examination coupled with the focus on ones’ rank in social status, thus, public criticism can easily be perceived as an attack on ones’ “dignity” (Levine, 1972[1965], p. 284).

At the end, though both parties, the aristocratic leadership and the intellectual groups were aspiring towards Western modernization, they failed to find common ground for a common cause. A hostile relationship built up that eventually led to violence, which destroyed both camps. (Asfa-Wossen, 2016; Lewis, 2016; Milkias, 2011). The violence began with a failed coup d’état of December 1960 that was led by some of the intellectuals and military officials with aristocratic background. It took the lives of many nobilities and government officials, including the coup d’état. But it inspires students in universities and high schools, which marked the beginning of a social

movement that eventually led to the 1974 revolution. (Asfa-Wossen, 2016; Henze, 2000; Milkias, 2011).

The ending of the centuries of feudal political system in Ethiopia, however, did not open a new era towards liberty. But the tradition of hierarchy, manifested through the inability to recognize equal rights of others to speak on issues of public interest, continued to guide relationships both in the political and media environment. A case in point is the intellectual groups' claim to superiority over the military group regarding their knowledge of Marxist theory⁶, and their subsequent assertion that they are "much more qualified to lead Ethiopia than the junta of military officers" (Lewis, 2016, p. 32). Therefore, history repeated itself as in the 1960s social movement, where by the intellectuals failed to find a common ground with the aristocratic leadership. Soon hostile relationship developed between the military and the intellectual groups that resulted in the "bloody urban warfare (the red terror)" (Lewis, 2016, p. 32) that costs thousands of lives mainly of young students and intellectuals (Henze, 2000; Milkias, 2011). Molvaer observes it was "the most savage outburst of violence known in recent Ethiopian history" (1995, p. 144).

In the media environment legacies from the feudal era continued. For example, during the time of power struggle mentioned above, the media experienced freedom as it had never seen before (Ellene et al., 2003; Skjerdal, 2012). The situation depicted much similarity with that of the short-lived media freedom in the early 1920s. (discussed in section 2.2.3 above).

As observed by Bahru, the media was entertaining "an almost uninhibited discussion of national issues, with various individuals and groups advancing their respective recipes for social transformation." (Bahru, 2002, p. 13). However, this exchange of ideas did not help to bring the political rivals into resolving their differences through dialogue. (Henze, 2000). In the same way as in the early 1920s, with the consolidation of power by the socialist military government, the media freedom practiced for shorter period came to an end. (Bahru, 2002). This was followed by the reinstatement of media

⁶ Through the course of the 1960s, the intellectual groups shifted from following Western liberal ideals to Marxist thinking. (Lewis, 2016, p. 31)

ensorship, which was “far more severe than during the Empire” (Skjerdal, 2012, p.15). Also, the legacy of state-media relationship defined by domination and control of the former continues. Further, all media outlets including printing houses nationalized and declared as government entities, which strengthen the government ownership over the media. No private media was allowed before the early 1990s. (Reta, 2013; Skjerdal, 2012).

In general, the media situation during the military socialist regime (1974-1991) was referred to as “a dark chapter in the history of Ethiopian media and journalism.” (Skjerdal, 2012, p.14). Media loyalty to the political system and serving the interest of the government continues. However, this was also a time that witnessed outspoken journalists against some practices of the government and its officials. The reaction towards such critics was harsh that “fear and anxiety” (Skjerdal, 2012, p.14), became prevalent in the work place as those journalists paid high price of persecution including disappearance. (Reta, 2013; Skjerdal, 2012).

The early 1990s saw another change of government as a result of a 17 years of civil war, which the military regime was engaged in against its political rivals throughout its time in power. With this came a change in the media environment and the demand for freedom of speech among other political rights became vocal than ever. This time it was journalists and civil societies in the forefront of challenging the political system in demanding those rights (Bahru,2002; Vaughan & Tornvoll, 2003).

In general, from the early 1990s onwards, the media environment is undergoing through different phases of positive changes and challenges as well. The last section of this literature review discusses about it next.

2.3 A mix of new trends and old habits

The new development in the media environment was the emergence of privately owned newspapers in 1992 and the ending of media censorship. But the 1990s were the time that Ethiopia has begun to be marked as one of the African countries with high number of journalists in jail and exiled. (CPJ, 2015; Skjerdal, 2012). The troubled relationship between the private press and the new government started immediately after the latter assumed power in 1991, and fired some of the veteran journalists and

editors on the basis of their 'loyalty' to the previous government. Some among these journalists and editors went on establishing their own private newspapers immediately after losing their job. (Skjerdal, 2012).

Though the main one, this is not the only defining feature of the media situation of the 1990s onwards. As Skjerdal (2012) observes, it was "an interchange between coercion and liberalization (and correspondingly between irresponsible journalism and professionalism; uniformity and diversity)." (p.17). Especially in terms of laws and regulations, the media environment saw significant changes, which provide the basis for freedom of expression and the media. A year into power in 1992, the new government issued a press law that put an end to media censorship and endorses private media ownership right to Ethiopian citizens. Also, the constitution of the 1995 included articles that certify the protection of freedom of expression and free media. These legal frameworks were drawn from the 1948th United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights (Shimelis 2002; Skjerdal, 2012; Zenebe, 2011).

However, media cultures from the past still persist, such as the government ownership of the national medias, which influences the media content towards promoting government policies and activities. (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003; Shimelis, 2002). Therefore, the practice of media as part of government entity as well as the state-media relationship marked by the domination of the political system over the media pursue. Another similarity with the past was uninhibited media freedom in the aftermath of the new government seizing power, as was the case in the early 1920s and the mid-1970s. But this time, it was not cut short, and an additional channel of communicating the views and ideas emerged: the private press. (Aadland & Fackler, 1999; Bahru, 2002; Reta, 2013; Shimles, 2002; Skjerdal, 2012).

In the political sphere too, changes as well as old practices were going hand in hand. To begin with, the change of government in 1991 was a result of 17 years of civil war that the socialist military regime was engaged in since its coming to power in 1974, which is a recurrent trend of political power transfer in Ethiopia. (Abdissa, 2019). Also, the group who fought the civil war and removed the regime had its roots in the social movement of the 1960s & 70s in Ethiopia that was led by students and intellectual

groups. Therefore, there is a continuation of trends and political agendas. For example, some observed that the restructuring of the country into federal states as reversing the governing system of centralized political administration with homogenization of culture that was established by the monarchial rule (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020).

However, this reformation became one of the areas that caused fierce opposition from other political parties and the public at large. The emerging of opposition political parties was one of the new phenomena after the 1991 government change as was the private newspapers. Accounts such as Bahru (2002) maintain that the new government's measures in terms of opening up the media among other political reforms were influenced by the global order of the post 1990 era, which saw the collapse of the Soviet Union and an increasing interest in the West towards introducing democracy in the emergent countries.

In any case, opposition political parties and civil organization became active in challenging the government in power of its policies and political programs. However, as it was the case in the 1960s and the after math of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution, the inability to find a common ground on issues of public interest prevails to be the dominant feature of political engagement. Soon, hostile and polarised political environment developed between the government and opposition political parties, which was soon picked up by the medias (Bahru, 2002; Shimelis,2002). According to Aadland and Fackler "the absence of a tradition of dialogue among adversaries" in Ethiopia is "one of the causes for ... polarization" (1999, np).

Events and statements are easily interpreted to fit into the patterns of old conflict, and few people seem willing to engage in constructive dialogue with their adversaries. One also notices deep mistrust regarding an opponent's motives. Ethiopians who reflect on their own traditions often say "we sit on our own chairs and do not meet in the middle." (Aadland and Fackler, 1999, np).

In the media sphere too, tense relationship between some of the private papers and the government develops, which resulted in the media experiencing both freedom as well as suppression (Gedion,2010; Skjerdal, 2012; Zenebe, 2011). The situation was described as "A climate of mutual hostility" by Vaughan & Tronvoll's (2003, p. 72). Regarding reasons for the hostile relationship between the media and the political

system, sources indicate shortcomings from both sides. On the government part its sensitivity towards criticism resulted in the use of power to intimidate the media. On the other hand, lack of professionalism in the part of journalists does contribute. (Ellene et al., 2003, p.31; Gideon,2010; Shimelis, 2002; Zenebe, 2011).

Contrary to the first press work of the early 20th century that emerged with a “total harmony” (Reta, 2013, p.19) with the then feudal power structure, the private press of the early 1990s marked its existence through rebelling against the government from the get go. (Shimelis, 2002). But only to form another political alliance with the opposing political camp. In the first decades of its establishment, the private press, but with few exceptions, evolved into “a partisan press serving as the mouthpiece of a polarised population” (Shimelis, 2002, p. 199). Besides, the polarisation with the government was extended to the relation between the private and government medias.

...the independent press easily interprets all the stories in the government papers as propaganda, while the government media looks at the independent press with great skepticism, to the point of calling it an enemy of the people. (Aadland and Fackler, 1999, np).

The polarization inhibits the media from serving as a platform for the circulation of balanced and diverse opinions through providing clarity and perspectives to the public. (Shimelis, 2002; Skjerdal, 2012). The situation is regarded as a lost opportunity in terms of media development towards freedom. As Bahru (2002, p. 13) puts it “The perfect balance between government tolerance and professional responsibility – two important pre-conditions for the thriving of a free press – has thus remained elusive”.

The polarization was also manifested through professional associations representing journalists working in both private and state-owned medias. In fact, the situation changed after the mid-2000s with number of professional associations began to mix their membership of journalists working in any of the medias either owned privately or the state (Skjerdal, 2012, p.41 & 42). But the polarisation was one of the reasons that makes cooperation among journalists difficult to establish a media self-regulatory body, a predicament for the practice of freedom of speech. Since the coming of privately owned newspapers in early 1990s, efforts were made to establish a press council but could not be materialized until 2016. In relation to the polarized political

environment, suspicions about issues such as who could be setting the agenda was holding back journalists from involving in mutual media forums. (Solomon, 2018).

Moreover, the division was not only between journalists working for the privately and state-owned medias. There were “abnormal competition [including] labelling one another as pro and anti-government” (Solomon, 2018, p, 9) among the privately owned medias that resulted in lack of trust for them to work together for the development of the profession, protecting the right of journalists, and the promotion of freedom of speech. Lack of trust mainly based on suspecting one another of being pro or antigovernment exist among journalists working in the state-owned media too. One example can be Skjerdal’s (2012) observation of the working environment at Ethiopian Television Agency. It is about the naming of a group of new comer reporters as “‘UNMEEs ’and ‘al-Shabaabs’” (Skjerdal, 2012, p. 194), by the senior journalists, which means that they are brought by the government to avoid the senior journalists influence in the news room as well as to put pressure on them. The same suspicion can be heard about journalists (media workers) based on their ethnicity that they are government supporters by default, just because they belong to the ethnicity of people in power. (Skjerdal, 2012, p. 194-200).

To sum up, the absence of working together for professional development and the advancement of freedom of speech among journalists draw a similarity with the social movement of the 1960s, that marked the beginning of open challenge against the political system. As discussed in section 2.2.4, despite their strong desire and will towards bringing about socio-political change in Ethiopia, the newly formed intellectual social class of the 1960s was not able to harness their energy together through creating platform for discussions and dialogue. A striking similarity can be drawn with of situations of professional associations in the 1960s in lacking systematic organization and not being goal oriented. As observed by Levine (1972[1965]) “Professional associations, clubs devoted to intellectual matters, and even informal discussion groups exist not at all or else in haphazard form.” (p. 191).

This research made the gap of journalists lacking the ability to focus on issues that they have in common a point of attention during the data collection. The reflection of

respondents on this subject, as well as generally on the challenges of journalistic practice and freedom of speech in Ethiopia is presented in chapter four. Now concepts that this research used to analyze the data is presented as follows.

2.4 Theoretical considerations

2.4.1 The significance of primary socialization

In the process of introduction of individuals into becoming members of a society, primary socialization is crucial. This is because the emotional attachment that the child has with the persons raising them facilitates smooth process of internalization, which is a significant phenomenon in the maintenance of a social structure or a segment of it. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 150). In relation to this, values and norms internalized at the primary socialization process could be retained and reflected throughout ones' life cycle as they are "...so much more firmly entrenched in consciousness than the worlds internalized in secondary socializations." (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 154).

These authors refer to people who are responsible of induction during primary socialisation as "significant others" (Berger & Luckmann (1966, p. 151), who introduced the newcomers to the objective social world as they understood and interpreted it based on their own social status among other factors. In other words, the child takes on the social world of their significant others including their own situations as defined by their significant others. At this stage of socialization, "the child does not apprehend [their] significant others as institutional functionaries but as mediators of reality" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 161). And through internalizing the "roles and attitudes" (ibid) of their significant others, as well as performing the roles assigned to them, the individuals take part in the social world of their significant others, and make it their own.

In the process of socialisation, role assignment is a key factor in terms of determining the eligibility of individuals to access "specific areas of socially objectivated knowledge" including "norms, values, and even emotions.", which are associated with a given role, according to Berger & Luckmann (1966, p. 94). Therefore, role assignment based on factors such as gender and age can determine individuals' social place and status, as well as their ability to access, acquire and administer the social "stock of knowledge" (ibid). This is also related with the relevance of each and every

social role in terms of representing the social institution, which is responsible for the assignment of individual social roles based on its established stock of knowledge. In this arrangement, though all roles assigned to individuals are performed as representatives of the established social institution, there are roles that represent the order of the institution “in its totality more than others.” (Berger & Luckmann (1966, p. 93).

Historically, social roles that endowed with representing the order of the social institution in its entirety “have been most commonly located in the political and religious institutions.” (Berger & Luckmann (1966, p. 94). These roles are instrumental in maintaining the social institutions through guiding individual members’ code of conduct according to the established stock of knowledge as well as checking individuals’ role performance as part of legitimating the order of the social institution. In doing so, role assignment is a controlling mechanism that ascertains individuals’ participation in the social world through internalising, and performing their assigned roles according to the established norms and values of the social institution, that they have been introduced into. Therefore, individuals’ conformity to roles assigned to them is demanded by any means, including coercion.

As soon as actors are typified as role performers, their conduct is *ipso facto* susceptible to enforcement. Compliance and non-compliance with socially defined role standards cease to be optional, though, of course, the severity of sanctions may vary from case to case. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 92).

However, while the social institutions through the guidance of its stock of knowledge dictates individuals’ social role assignment, it is individuals’ performance of their assigned roles what guarantee the maintenance of the social stock of knowledge as well as the sustainability of the social institution that the individuals have become part of through the process of socialisation. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 94). Though social institutions can be represented by other embodiments such as linguistic symbolisations, “the representations of an institution in and by roles is thus the representation *par excellence*, on which all other representations are dependent.” (Ibid, p.93).

The significance of role performance by individuals when they come as a group to the maintenance of social structure has been given much emphasis in Elder-Vass 's (2012) analysis regarding the making of social reality. The next section discusses on this issue.

2.4.2 Building and sustaining of social structures

In his book "The reality of social construction", the author defines social structure as "some sort of social force with causal significance." (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 21), and attributes the casual power to the human agency whose interaction as a group creates the mechanism that produce the causal force of social structures. Elder-Vass refers society members who are abided by social norms and rules as well as committed to create a tendency on others to do the same" norm circles" (2012, p. 22).

According to Elder-Vass's theory of the *norm circles*, individuals' interaction with each other is guided by established social norms and values of social entities such as culture, language, knowledge, and discourse. But it is the individuals' commitment as a group through "endorsing and enforcing" (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 22) the norms and values, which gives the social entities the mechanism that produces its force to keep going. On the other hand, in the absence of such commitment of individuals as a group and their communication regarding the norms and rules, the social structure would lose its force and cease to continue. (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 22 & 33).

The base for norm circles lays on individuals' adherence to a given social norm or norms but what makes norm circles significant is the dedication of these individuals to the "collective endorsement" (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 27) of norms. The commitment and interaction of the individuals as a group through approving, social norms and creating a tendency on others to do the same, however, does not necessarily imply that all members of a norm circle are known to each other. They are rather "a set of unconnected individuals ...its members are influenced by the relations they have with each other, irrespective of how strong their consciousness is of the group as such." (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 23). But what binds them is a sense of belongingness to and representing of something "wider than themselves" (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 26), which provokes their commitment towards each other and to the norm in question. This is to mean that "members of a norm circle share a sense, however vague and minimal, that

they are taking part in a collective endorsement of the norm.” (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 27). Therefore, though “the effectiveness of norm-circles depends fundamentally on the beliefs of individuals” (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 27), it is when these beliefs are endorsed by other members and produce same practice by many that they become shared meaning upon which social entities are constructed.

Another relevant point in the norm circles conception is about factors that affect the influencing power of norm circles in the process of guiding individuals towards a certain behavior instead of another. Once established, social norms and rules have the power to confront individual society members to comply through the assignment of social roles, performing ones’ assigned role and controlling each other’s’ role performance. As quoted by Elder-Vass (2012, p. 23);

If I do not submit to the conventions of society, if in my dress I do not conform to the customs observed in my country and my class, the ridicule I provoke, the social isolation in which I am kept, produce, although in an attenuated form, the same effect as a punishment in the strict sense of the word. (Durkhiem 1964 [1894]: 2-3)

In addition to social control, there are other reasons that influence individuals to endorse one social norm instead of the other. In a given social structure, there can be competing norms and rules with different influencing power (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 28-30). In such competition, those social norms and rules together with their norm circles who have the support of powerful social structures such as political or religious institutions can exert more influence than others. In this case, the influence will not only be on individuals but on “the normative environment” (ibid) as a whole to the extent of changing it.

This does not mean, however, that the influence of norm circles always resulted in a change of behavior on individuals towards a social norm or norms but is limited to creating disposition on individuals towards “appropriate behavior” (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 27). Therefore, individuals’ endorsement of a certain norm and even practicing them does not necessarily prove their behavioral change regarding the norm in question. Also, it does not show that they are “personally committed to the rightness of those norms.” but for “instrumental reasons” (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 29). Individuals can be committed through endorsing and enforcing social norms and rules due to the trust

they have established on “the normative environment” (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 33) in general or for the sake of the norm circles involved.

Moreover, the normative environment is a result of individuals’ beliefs that they have established through their normative interactive communication with other people, which include the norm circles. Through this normative causal process individuals become part of the communication through endorsing and enforcing the social norms, thus, became instrumental to sustain the social entity. A change in those interactions and communications might have resulted in “producing different beliefs, the normative environment itself could be-would be- constructed differently.” (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 33).

2. 5 Summary

The following research findings and theoretical conceptions have been discussed in this chapter. While the first three sections deal with the literature review, section 2.4 presented theoretical considerations. Contemporary works on social and political culture in Ethiopia informed this research that social hierarchy is the dominant discourse that guides social relations at every level of social institutions from family to political organizations. The review also looked at how the tradition of hierarchy and domination got its strength with the support of political and religious institutions, which facilitates the establishment of strongly centralized feudal administration that led Ethiopia until the early 1970s. This feudal power structure was also instrumental in introducing modern ideas to Ethiopia including the press. However, the analysis of the reviewed studies revealed that the social practice and behaviors, which are the result of hierarchical social norms proved to be predicaments to the effectiveness of the process of modernization.

Most importantly, assessing the journalistic practice and media culture as established by the modernization process led by the feudal power structure was the central point of this review. The literature put on view that the press was established mainly to promote the values of the feudal power structure, which are basically hierarchy and domination. Therefore, the issue of freedom of speech and individual liberty was not the concern of the press from the very beginning. Moreover, the media also inherited

a culture of authoritative leadership, one reason that prevents the development of journalism practice.

Regarding theoretical considerations, the process of socialization is the main framework employed to analyze the data obtained through individual in-depth interviews. The focus is on the everlasting impact of primary socialization in imprinting social values and norms that an individual is nurtured with when they are becoming members of society. Also, the role of individuals as keepers and maintainers of social norms and values in even when they are not clearly aware of their involvement in building a social reality with others. These insights are essential to the present research by providing the scope through which it understands journalistic practice and the situation of freedom of speech in Ethiopia.

The next chapter explains issues that this research considers in the choice of methods for the collection and analysis of data. Also, the research design, ethical considerations, and limitations of the methodology employed are among issues discussed in chapter three as follow.

Chapter three- Methodology

3.1 The research design

The aim of this research is to examine the role of socio-cultural assumptions in shaping the practice of journalism and freedom of speech in Ethiopia. To do this, the work experience of Ethiopian journalists in view of social values and norms that they have been socialised with was explored. Due to the nature of the study, which is inquiring the way Ethiopian journalists are interpreting their work experience and social world, this research employs qualitative methodology.

One of the main concerns of qualitative research is understanding a social phenomenon “through the eyes of the subject” (Bryman, 2012, p. 399). Thus, using individual in-depth interview for collecting data, and qualitative method of analysis, the research provides rich description and insight regarding the influence of societal values and norms on journalistic practice and freedom of speech in Ethiopia.

The research design follows the interpretative approach, which studies social reality through giving meaning to respondents’ understanding and interpretation of the social context being studied. The approach argues that humans and their ability to analyse the social world they are living in is fundamental in the process of knowledge production. Therefore, methods that employ studying human beings should be different than that used to study the natural world or matters. (Bryman, 2012; Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Another justification for the choice of qualitative methodology to this study is the place it provides to the researcher. Qualitative approach considers the researcher as an integral part of the research process, which is founded in the stance of considering social reality as an outcome of the interaction between social actors including the researcher (Bryman, 2012, p. 380).

3.1.1 Identification of the social inquiry

This study is a result of an inquiry that developed through my work experience as a journalist in Ethiopia. I began my journalism career as a news reporter for the state owned national television agency (Ethiopian Television) at a time when it was the only

television station in the country. It was also a time that the private press was thriving, which marked the beginning of a change in the media landscape.

I was part of the social context when the issue of freedom of speech and the media became high on the political agenda, and the the private media was at the forefront of demanding for it. Strained relationship between some private medias and the political system became part of the media environment in which the latter taking measures against the former , at times amounting to the closing of media houses and jailing of journalists working for them. The tense relationship was also reflected on professional associations of journalists working in the private and state medias. These associations were unable to work together based on common shared values of journalism. In this situation one cannot help questioning the reason behind the lack of will to find a common ground while all the concerned parties claiming to have same agenda of upholding freedom of speech and democracy.

My work experience also contributes to the choice of social hierarchy as a frame work. I worked as a weekly television program producer focusing on women and gender issues for the best part of 13 years. This experience gives me an understanding on the hierarchical nature of the social interaction in Ethiopia which starts at home. While producing the TV programs, through the collection of stories of women and men from different walks of life, I was able to make sense of the similarity of the social interaction guided by a patriarchal system despite differences of the subjects in terms of their educational background, economic status and location within the country.

The combination of these two interrelated experiences prompts me to examine the practice of freedom of speech and the media in Ethiopia through the understanding of fellow Ethiopian journalists regarding hierarchical social order, and its influence on their journalistic job.

3.2 Research setting and recruitment of respondents

This study focuses on individual journalists' account regarding their work experience in relation to the situation of freedom of speech in Ethiopia. It is not bound to a specific media house, rather, it approaches journalists working in different media outlets such as newspapers, radio, and television. There is a variety in terms of media ownership

too, as journalists working in state as well as privately owned medias have taken part in this study. As to the current location of respondents, out of the total of 10, half are residing in Ethiopia, two are in Europe and three are living in the US.

Regarding sampling, purposive sampling is employed for the sake of achieving variety in terms of respondents background such as gender and religion. These variables are relevant to identify similarities or/and differences in terms of the influence of societal values and norms with regard to respondents' background. But the study was successful only achieving equal participation in terms of gender (5 female and 5 male journalists have been participated).

When it comes to the recruitment, the study uses the snowball method. The selection process began with a web search aiming at identifying respondents fitting the target profile. The plan was to get names of journalists whose experience attracted attention from the international human rights organisations such as Center for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ), Freedom House, and Reporters without Borders (Rsf). Thus, the search used the phrase "challenges of practicing journalism in Ethiopia". The articles and reports in this search carry the detaining of journalists such as Eskinder Nega, Temesegen Desalegn, and the zone 9 journalists & bloggers. The second step was securing entry to one of them with the assumption of starting the snowballing upon conducting the first interview. The first attempt to reach Eskinder was not successful as he was back in prison at that time. My second attempt to reach out to Temsgegn Desalegn was successful in getting access to his WhatsApp account. I sent him a text message first, and then talked to him. He responded that he would not mind to take part in the study but he wanted to see my ID just to make sure that the interview is going to be used only for the intended purpose. I sent him a picture of my NLA student ID, but I could not go further as the subject stopped communicating. Getting access to the journalists in the group of the zone 9 bloggers was also time consuming.

While awaiting access to members of this group with the help of a colleague, a female journalist was contacted and gave her consent to take part in the study. She became the first research participant who started the snowball moving, leading to recruitment of five respondents. In the meantime, with the help of another colleague, one of the

members from the zone 9 journalists and bloggers group agreed to take part in the study. She also helped in the recruitment of another member of the group who also gave access to the the third member and so on. Respondents were contacted through emails, telephone, WhatsApp and Facebook messages. In total, ten journalists between the age of 30 and 52 with various background in terms of gender, age, religion and work place have taken part in the individual in-depth interview.

Table 1: profile of respondents

Gender		Education		Religion			Media outlets (that the journalists work for)		
M	F	BA	MA	Muslim	Christians	Non-believers	Privately-owned	State owned	Work for both
5	5	6	4	1	4	5	5	2	3

3.3 Data collection

This research employs individual in-depth interview method with semi-structured questions for data collection. This method was chosen for the purpose of facilitating the production of meaning through understanding journalists’ view on the subject matter. Qualitative approach encourages the use of methods that reflects empathy to the research subject in the process of generating data that enables the researcher to build meanings and produce knowledge about the social reality being studied. (Bryman 2012, 399-405).

The data was collected within the six months of February-July 2020 through individual in-depth interviews by means of Skype video recordings as well as notes. The notes served two purposes. One due to poor internet connection with respondents residing in Ethiopia, taking handwritten notes was necessary in times of video/audio interruptions (the connection was the worst with two interviewees out of the five respondents living in Ethiopia). The other purpose was to keep notes on my observations. Later, during the process of data preparation, these notes were included in the transcribed documents. (Elliott & Timulak, 2005, p. 152 & 153).

Amharic was the language used in all the interviews, as it was a language all the participants and the researcher were well versed with. Regarding time, all the interviews took longer time than the planned 45 minutes. This happened because the level of engagement from the respondents (in most cases) meant that focusing on time

keeping would have been a distraction rather than benefit. In some cases, also the poor internet connection would demand repetition of questions and answers, especially with respondents residing in Ethiopia.

A guideline, which was prepared based on the research questions of this study was important to keep the focus of the in-depth interviews. However, the questions were subject to revision depending on the respondents' understanding of the questions and their response accordingly. One benefit of conducting the individual in-depth interview on video was that I was able to observe the reaction of the respondents to determine whether the question was clear or not. For example, I could see the reluctance in answering the first question regarding their upbringing through the reaction of "what is the relevance?" look from some respondents, while others responded from their gender role perspective. But when the question is presented in relation to their practice of journalism as well as the principles of freedom of speech, the responses become very relevant. Also, I noticed that respondents were more engaging when the interview started with their work experience as a journalist rather than socialization at home. As noted by Elliott & Timulak (2005, p. 151), interviews in qualitative approach allows revision of the focus based on the indication of the data. In this regard, this research has been benefiting from the reassessment of the focus.

3.4 Data management and analysis

The data collected through the individual in-depth interview is managed using the thematic analysis method. This method provides a framework consisting of themes captured with basis on recurrent emerging words, expressions and ideas from the collected data, and by relating them according to their significance to the research questions of the study. Readings on qualitative data analysis by Bryman (2012) and Elliott & Timulak (2005) greatly helped in guiding the data management and analysis of this research.

The preparation of the data began with the transcribing the recording of the first interview, followed by the initial reading of the transcribed document. This was helpful in giving me feedback on the way the interview was conducted, the quality of the recording and the relevance of the information obtained. But most importantly, in

all cases, the initial readings of the transcribed documents were helpful in understanding the collected data, which guides me on how to go about dividing the data into “distinctive *meaning units*” (Elliott & Timulak, 2005, p. 153). That is, the emerging of similar catchy words and expressions started informing me how to categorize the data in to meaningful units of analysis in line with the research questions of this research. Though unique to the individual, words and expressions of respondents revealed more of similarities in some areas such as on the social role and status as a child. Working with the data as it began making sense was fascinating. At this point, I built a table where I gathered together these expressions that indicates similarity in one box (for each set of meaning units), and placing the number (code) of the respondents on the next column (see annex-I). Views that did not generate similar expression or were not said by many respondents were also captured.

Once the meaning units were set in three domains (based on the interview guideline), I proceed into categorising the sets of meaning units within each of them. At the stage of meaning unit development, the views that did not generate similarity, were put individually. But when I started establishing order (relationship) between the sets of meaning units, they made sense as a similar unit, and I put them under one category. This category emerged as one of the main findings of this study. As suggested by Elliott & Timulak (2005, p. 155) the decision not to discard those individual views (thin data) “just because they are infrequent”, has benefited the study.

The rich data obtained through the individual in-depth interviews provide interrelated thematic areas that has been categorized in three domains (as shown in table in annex-I). The first domain contains respondents’ reflection regarding the socialization process and role and status as a child in relation to the values learned during upbringing. The second domain is focused on the effect of the acquired or/and not acquired societal values through the process of socialization on their journalistic work as well as the practice of freedom of speech. The third captured the view of respondents regarding their contribution in promoting the values of freedom of speech. While the overall process was time consuming, it was also fascinating to see the data making more sense day by day.

3.5 Ethical considerations

This study is conducted in complying with the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) regulations regarding the processing of personal data of research subjects. Based on the information provided by NLA during the thesis preparation course (GJ 321), the researcher applied to NSD for the purpose of insuring the protection of the rights of research subjects and of their personal data. An interview guide sent by the research supervisor was one of the documents submitted in the application to NSD. Research subjects were provided with information on the research through an informed consent form that was prepared based on a template obtained from NSD. The informed consent document explains relevant issues such as the purpose of the study including the research questions, that participation is voluntary, regarding the processing of personal data, and the right to remain anonymous as well as withdrawal from the study at any time. This informed consent was sent to potential respondents and data collection was taking place after consent was granted either through signing the form or verbally.

Only 1 out of 10 research participants wished to remain anonymous, and another one gave a pseudonym. However, considering the fragile nature of the media freedom situation in Ethiopia, I anonymised the personal data of all the subjects, and put them in a separate sheet locked with a password. Attention was also given during transcription of names.

The other ethical consideration was regarding the relationship between the researcher and respondents during data collection. Though from different media houses, the majority of the respondents as well as the researcher began their media career in the 1990s. This contributed to the attainment of equal position between the researcher and the respondents during the individual in-depth-interviews sessions. In addition, the use of Skype video as an interview platform contributed positively in creating equal setting between the researcher and the respondents.

3.6 Limitations of Methodology

One of the limitations of qualitative research is in the area of quality assessment with the lack of distinctive criteria unlike in the case of quantitative research. The problematic nature of using measurement tools in quantitative research such as

reliability, and validity in qualitative research prompt scholars to come up with alternative criteria of measuring qualitative researches in their own term.(Bryman,2012; Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Criteria such as trustworthiness is one of the suggestions to quality assertion in qualitative researches. This criterion impeded other four criteria that parallel criteria in quantitative research (Bryman, 2012, 390-393). Accordingly, through observing ethical considerations, being committed to understand the subject matter of the study, having the skills to undertake the task, being diligence in data collection & analysis, and maintaining transparency, this research attempt to establish quality. Also, by providing rich descriptions of the views and reflections of research participants, this study attempts to indicate the transferability of the findings in to other social settings. (Elliott & Timulak, 2005; Bryman, 2012).

In addition to this, the “impact and importance” of research can help to establish the quality of the study according to Yardley (2000) as quoted by Bryman (2012, p, 393). Given the current situation regarding freedom of speech in Ethiopia, and the current context of civil war and rampant crackdowns on the media, this study is important in identifying the underlying reason as to the absence of dialogue.

3.7 Summary

The chapter on methodology presented the process in which this research was conducted, starting from the development of the inquiry. The section on research design explains the choice of qualitative methodology and the relevance of the approach used in examining the social reality in question. This chapter also explains the limitations in the method used focusing on the issue of criteria of measurement for qualitative research. Ethical considerations taken in terms of protecting respondents’ personal data, researcher-respondent relationship during the individual in-depth interview, and the treatment of the data has been told in section 3.3. The process of selecting research participants through snow ball method, data collection and the analysis all are outlined in section 3.4-3.6.

The findings of this research will be presented in chapter four next.

Chapter four: Research findings and analysis

This chapter presents findings of the study, aiming to examine the role of socio-cultural assumptions in shaping the practice of journalism and freedom of speech in Ethiopia. The results of the thematic analysis framework produced from data obtained through in-depth interviews is the base of the discussion. In addition, relevant literatures and conceptual frameworks reviewed in chapter two are used to analyze the findings of the study.

The presentation in this chapter is divided in four categories, directly related to the research questions. The first two sub-section address the view of respondents regarding the social values and norms that they have been socialized into in shaping their journalistic work, which refers to research question number one. The third sub-section deals with respondents' view on the contribution of socio-cultural assumptions in Ethiopian societies to the practice of freedom of speech in Ethiopia; research question number 2. The last sub-section present findings on the view of respondents regarding their contribution to the promotion of the values of freedom of speech.

In dealing with the first research question, findings in this regard are divided into two areas: socialisation during upbringing and the work environment.

4.1 The home: where the silencing starts

Similar opinions have been obtained from the respondents in terms of their understanding of the societal norms and values that they have been socialized into. The journalists recognise that hierarchy and domination with societal values, which prefers sameness over individuality, secrecy over straightforward communication, and silence over dialogue is the norm when growing up. Respondents view hierarchy at home as the root of authoritarianism whereby the bread-winner dominates over the rest of the family, and as a place where individuals' assignment of status as superior/inferior starts. The home being the starting point of inequality is observed in the works of Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003, and Levine, 1972[1965], which are reviewed in chapter 2 of this study.

Further, respondents' understanding of the process of socialization during childhood is in line with what has been revealed by Dirbaba & O'Donnell (2016, p. 928) regarding

the social custom of “secretive and conservative forms of communication” and its negative effect on their journalistic work. Here are the highlights of the findings in this regard.

4.2.1 What does a child know?

The process of socialization during upbringing was defined by respondents as being one of silencing and domination, not getting a chance to involve in dialogue, not being taken seriously or considered good enough, being excluded, left in the dark. The general approach towards children in the society is based upon the perception that children know little. (Levine, 1972[1965] p. 79 & 80). Thus, children have to listen to adults and just obey.

Children are not expected nor allowed to talk with adults on serious issues, including those of the family co. As a child, the response one can get when trying to ask questions or to be involved in discussion with adults, is being told to keep quiet. The following Amharic expressions show similarity of respondents’ experiences as well as understanding of societal perceptions on children.

Table 2- showing similarity of respondents’ view regarding silencing at home

Respondents	Amharic expression	English translation
Maraki	“እቤትም ሆነ ትምህርት ቤት የሚያናግርሽ በክርክርም በምንም የሚያሳትፍሽ ሰው የለም። “ልጆች ናችሁ ዞር በሉ ነው የምትባይው”	Both at home and school, people were not interested to talk to you or engage with you in discussions. The attitude was like “go away, you are children”
Kidest	“ልጅ ዝም በል እየተባለ ነው የሚያደገው። “አዋቂ ሲያወራ ልጅና ጫማ ወደ አልጋ ስር” የሚባል አነጋገር አለ”	We are raised being told to keep quiet. The saying “when adults talk, children go hiding under the bed” tells a lot.
Belay	“ዝምተኝነት ጨዋነት ነው ተብለሽ ነው የምታደግው”	As a child you have been told that “being quiet is a virtue”
Zab	“ትልቅ ሲናገር ዝም ብሎ ማዳመጥ የጨዋነት ምልክት ተደርጎ ነው የሚወሰደው። ትልቅ ሲጫወት “ልጆች ይውጡ” ይባላል።	When adults are talking, the virtuous thing for children to do is to be quiet and listen. Also, children can be told to go out when adults are chatting.

Debab	“እኩል ማውራት አይፈቀድም፣ “መልስ መመለስ ለትልቅ ሰው” የሚባልበት ቤተሰብ ውስጥ ነው ያደኩት”	I grew up in a house where talking with adults on equal terms is not allowed. Replying for an adult is a very daring matter that no child would do.
Lydia	ልጅ እያለን like ከ18 አመት በታች እያለን በቤት ውስጥ በአንድ ጉዳይ ላይ ተነጋግሮ ተግባብቶ የመወሰን ነገር እኔ አላስታውሰም	Looking back, I do not remember the time we as children were involved in family talks. Decisions regarding our needs can be easily decided by our mother.
Adam	እኔ ያደኩበት ቤተሰብ ማለት “ልጅ አዋቂ ፊት መናገር የለበትም” ብለው ነው እንትን የሚሉት	The rule in the family I grew up in is “a child should keep quiet when adults are talking”
Hunegnaw	እኔ አሁን ልጅ እያለሁ ስጦይቅ “አትጠይቅ”፣ የሆነ ነገር ተፈጥሮ “ለምን ይህ ይሆናል?” ስልም “ምን አገባህ?” እየተባልኩ ነው ያደኩት እስከማስታውሰው ድረስ።	growing up I was discouraged to ask questions, when something happen and I asked “why?” I would be told “It is not your concern”
Gelila	“በቤት ውስጥ ልጆች “ጸጥ በሉ ነው” የሚባለው...እና ጸጥ ማለት ነው።”	At home children would be told to “keep quiet” and they have to do so.
Kemal	“አፋርነት እና ዝምተኝነት እንደ ጩዋ ወይም መልካም አስተዳደግ እንዳገኘ ሰው ነው የሚያስቆጥረው።”	As a child, being shy and keeping your silence was considered as decency with good upbringing.

The data shows that silencing children is a common experience together with secrecy. Engaging children in discussion at home and encouraging them to express themselves is not considered as important value. Rather, keeping them quiet while adults are talking is perceived as a way of teaching them decency, politeness and respect for adults. The lesson is to respect people older than oneself, and show humility in the face of elderly men (mostly religious and/or community leaders), and authority figures, through magnifying the importance of the speaker.

For a child to interrupt an adult’s speech is indecent, a challenge that can cause punishment. “There is an atmosphere of creating fear in you that makes challenging them unthinkable.”, says Zab (in-depth interview, 31.03.20). This view is seconded by another respondent, Adam, who observes “the attempt to express ones’ opinion publicly can be ridiculed as pompous, despite the importance of the issue one is raising” (Adam, in-depth interview, 21.04.20). Adam, an editor-in-chief of a privately

owned newspaper, shares relevant observation regarding how the process of socialization made issues such as religion, culture, and politics inaccessible for discussion in day-to-day life. There are also unwritten laws stating that the works of government, authority figures and rich people are unchallengeable.

Secrecy is another way of excluding children from involving in dialogue at home. Some respondents say such experience of secrecy create a feeling of confusion in them as it is not a matter of total abandonment by the parents, but still is being excluded. Belay, one of the respondents recalls "In one way the family seems close, we can dine and have fun together. But my parents would not allow us to listen when they talk family issues. It was confusing for me." (Belay, in-depth interview, 08.05.20).

For Kemal who currently owns a production company, the experience has additional sensation of regret of being unable to help. As a child he enjoyed his mother's affection and respect more than what his sisters could. However, he was "left in the dark" when his mother was taking advises from elderly men on issues that decided the fate of him and his family.

In my culture, a group of elderly men of religious and community leaders have the power to involve in family issues and can influence important decisions. As a woman, my mother could not make such decisions alone. Therefore, the elderly men used to come to our home frequently. During these times, we would be told to go to bedroom after greeting them. I knew they were discussing important family issues but we were not allowed even to listen. My mother was alone and did not get the help she needed from her children. (Kemal, in-depth interview, 22.06.20)

The journalists are aware of the effect of growing being silenced and with secrecy on their journalistic practice. They understand that it limits their capacity to demand for access to information as transparent communication was not part of their experience in daily life when growing up, which makes them lack the skill to identify relevant information and how to use them accordingly.

Debab is a senior radio programs producer, and she understands secrecy as a social norm that is functional beyond the home sphere such as in public institutions too. She analyses the effect of secrecy as a social norm on the practice of journalism as it limits the freedom to ask, obtain and disseminate information.

There is a huge knowledge gap regarding the concept of information in the first place. It can be demanding information about government budget, for example, what amount goes to which department? What does it imply? What are the repercussions? I do not think there is much awareness about the significance of knowing such issues even within the educated group of society let alone among the public at large. Also, the social norm of secrecy might play a role in terms of the reluctance of government offices to make such information available to the public. The journalist as society member may not be conscious of the relevance, thus, does not pay attention to demand for such information with the purpose of informing the public. Since they cannot demand for critical and relevant information on their own initiative, they ended up serving as public relations. I believe this has connection with the way our society is thinking about information and the fact that secrecy is part of the social norm. (Debab, in-depth interview, 03.04.20).

The other effect of the process of socialization during child upbringing in their journalistic work is fear. Reflecting on the effect of hierarchical socio-cultural assumptions on their journalistic work, respondents point out fear of unknown consequences as a limiting factor. The next section deals with the issue of fear.

4.2.2 Fear and confusion

Fear as an ever-presented phenomenon is mentioned repetitively by the respondents. The journalists refer to the fear they grew up with as a limiting factor when they go about their journalistic work from interviewing public officials and challenging them to expressing their political stand freely for fear of unknown consequences. The respondents indicate that the process of socialization during childhood and the high demand imposed for them to conform to hierarchical social values and norms has a way of instilling fear, which they claim is limiting them from doing their journalism job courageously.

As already mentioned, the practice of not involving children in dialogue by silencing and/or secrecy is a way of nurturing them with good social behavior; to make them sensible to others and decent human beings. However, the method of teaching these values in most cases involves intimidation including physical punishment. And this way of demanding conformity to social values and norms can take place in other social institutions such as schools. Same way adults at home take the liberty of punishing children for any reason in the disguise of discipline, teachers at school also can do it. Therefore, growing with fear due to such pressure at home and at school is a

common experience among respondents, which cast its shadow on their journalism practice too.

Belay who still shows anger when talking about childhood memories of physical punishment says it is “terrorizing” that leaves a psychological scar throughout ones’ life. Regarding the paradoxical nature of the socialization process, the same respondent says “For example, the culture teaches you that being quiet is decent. But it also instils fear in you. It is not discipline but it has the double purpose of making you a fearful person. Even though what you have been told are good values such as ‘do not steal, do not lie, do not be jealous of others’ and so on, the way they are teaching you these values is through beating. So, what is the moral of it?” (Belay, in-depth interview). Belay argues that punishing children in the name of discipline in schools is a way of imposing the values and thoughts of the teachers, a practice that inhibits the development of one’s own idea and pattern of thinking.

We took everything the teacher said without questioning out of fear, and this has adverse impact on the habit of critical thinking. Both female and male students develop fear. And we are the result of all these influences. The values we learn at home and schools result in the repression of emotions. It is appalling to think back how they used to beat us. And how can you be critical growing up in a such situation? (Belay, in-depth interview, 08.05.20)

This view touches upon a valid point regarding the influence of social values and norms on journalism practice, the importance of critical thinking to the profession.

Another respondent, Kidest, seconds Belay’s view that the socialization has a way of making one fearful. She reflects on her experience of fear at home and physical punishment at school.

Anything can be taken as a mistake that justifies them punishing you. I remember an event where my teacher pinched me on my cheek until it bled and sent me back home. It was for the simple reason that my notebook was out of blank pages and I was not taking notes during her class. And the reason I did not have a new notebook was because I was afraid of asking my mother to buy me one. You see the extent of our fear? At that time, I did not think of asking my mother for anything I was very much afraid of her. Leave alone to think asking her to buy me a notebook was my right and it was her duty as well. I do not know even what I was afraid of because when I told them what happened at school, I just got a new one. (Kidest, in-depth interview,24.02.20).

This respondent analyses the method of discipline at home as leaving one confused and making it difficult to know what is right and wrong. Some respondents, including Kidest, think of the positive side of the discipline at home and in schools. They say it is helpful in keeping them away from danger such as from bad influences, and helping them in succeeding in their education. However, all agree that the downside outweighs the positive sides as it results in causing them fear, confusion, lack of confidence and self-doubt. It is about an inherited fear of not knowing what is the right thing to do in a given situation, and fear of the unknown consequences of their actions.

Regarding the influence of fear on their journalistic work, the majority of the respondents talk about the fear of challenging authority figures and interrupting interviewees, especially people older than them as their shortcomings. The respondents admit that interviewing people older than their age and those in leadership position can be difficult, especially if they have to contradict the ideas of the interviewees. Lydia speaks about her experiences of attending press conferences and the challenges with fear. She looks at the process of socialization during upbringing as an inhibiting factor that challenges one's confidence.

First, there is the lack of the skill to ask questions and engaging in 'hard' conversations, we definitely lack the courage to challenge, and can be shy or fearful to confront authorities. But there is an element of intimidation from the bodyguard or the public officer of the official who is giving the press conference. They can simply 'warn' you with a certain kind of look. In addition, family members and the public can feed into your fear by way of showing concern. People can tell you "Why do not you keep quiet and play it safe? Why do you dare to challenge the government, they are the ones with more power". Imagine, growing with fear, and then smelling all the fear around you, how can you do your job properly? (Lydia, in-depth interview, 09.04.20).

The influence of fear can be more limiting in terms of making the right professional judgement and the ability to produce balanced information. One of the cases shows the struggle of a journalist, Debab, whose personal values keep affecting her professional judgement. She calls it "the fear of thinking outside the box". Debab admits that it is challenging for her to entertain opinions that are different than those she upholds as standards in her media works. She explains, "it is difficult for me to let go my biases and give space for other opinions. Because I was taught that was the only right way, and they are firmly installed in me." For example, issues such as ethnical differences and sexual identity are among the challenging subjects for her.

Even though I am aware of the right of individuals to have different opinions and worldview, when those differences seem against my values, it puts me in a dilemma. Because, I uphold those values as standard and they are part of my self-identity and changing that gives me fear. (Debab, in-depth interview, 03.04.20).

Belay's case is in terms of the discourage he would have to deal with public offices to access information. For him it is about the hesitation of officers to provide the information, which is related to suspicious attitude that the public has against journalists. But his use of the Amharic expression “ካራ ለካራ ነገ”⁷, is well describing of the lack of trust being a mutual feeling.

I was always scared of asking information from public offices because there is always this inquiry-not always necessarily expressed in words-but gives you the message that they are questioning you “what is your motive for asking this information?”. I know this because I am the product of my family and my society. I know the other side also has the same social values as me, so we are watching each other carefully as we do not trust one another. (Belay, in-depth interview, 08.05.20).

Fear of consequences also can make a journalist choose their safety with silence instead of standing for truth. Zab's experience can be a case in point. He states that in his journalistic practice, the most difficult thing was the dilemma between “telling the truth through exposing wrongdoings of those in power and my security.” He asserts that due to the uncertainty, he chooses to “play it safe through silence” though it was not a choice that gave him a peace of mind.

But it is difficult, you know, I ask myself “why I am feeling so much fear?”. I think, upbringing is contributing a lot in this regard. I mean you do not learn about right and/or wrong in a clear way when you grow up. You cannot be sure what action can cause you punishment or commendation. The same is true at work place too, I think. The fact that reactions vary depending on your superiors and you are at the mercy of them makes you uncertain on what can go right or wrong. It is not easy to know for sure! (Zab, in-depth interview, 31.03.20).

The “play it safe” strategy is employed by journalists working for the private media too. Kidest observes that thinking about possible consequences, thus, refraining oneself from “daring too much” is part of the routine of journalistic work. She says fear is affecting everyone including the editors, which makes reporters “to be conscious of their safety when they do stories”.

⁷ which can be translated as we are both cut from the same cloth.

Another relevant point mentioned by respondents like Hunegnaw is the similarity of hierarchy at the work place that triggers the fear they have been growing up with. Hunegnaw's experience was in his lack of courage to present his ideas to his colleagues in editorial meetings in the newsroom. He would keep quiet, even when his articles were unfairly criticized. Referring to the hierarchy and domination at home, Hunegnaw argues that growing up in such environment can affect ones' self-confidence. He says "it is frustrating because it is very limiting to unleash my potential". (Hunegnaw, in-depth interview, 22.05.20).

The next sub-section focuses on the work environment.

4.2 The work place: hierarchy mirroring the home

Respondents' reflection shows similarity regarding the manifestation of hierarchy in the newsroom. It is indicated that seniority is taken as a license to dominate juniors. Some note that being female and/ or young can be factors for not being taken seriously or being disregarded. The tradition of giving much space and respect for seniority in terms of age and leadership is an extension of the practice at home, in which seniors or /and superiors assume paternal supervision over juniors or younger colleagues. Also, conformity to tradition through safeguarding the dominant discourse (in terms of culture, religion and political opinion) is in function, which threatens the space for plurality of ideas. Some say like in the home, sameness is appreciated while individual style is discouraged.

Factors that bring differences in privilege are varied: seniority (age or/and status), gender, ethnicity, town/rural background, education, network-closeness to authorities or persons of influence, and political affiliation. Of these factors, the combination of younger age and being female can cause more discrimination that affects income and professional growth. For example, junior female reporters can get less salary than their male counterparts in privately-owned medias. In her junior years, Kidest says she and her female colleague of the same age were receiving less salary than their male colleagues. They were even discriminated in bonuses. This was one of the reasons that made her leave the media she had spent three years working for. While the junior male colleagues were given bonuses regularly for the reason of

“keeping up their appearances.” she and her female colleague never got it, despite their equal contribution to the success of the media.

This opinion was supported by three male respondents who reveal that junior female reporters are on demand by private medias as they can work for low salaries. Belay observes “I know some private papers that are hiring female journalists not because they were gender sensitive but for their cheap labor and obedience.” The word obedience means female reporters are less demanding of their rights and less resistant of the domination from their editors, that they can go wherever they have been dispatched to gather information with meagre resource provided to them.

The other point that relates the hierarchy in the newsroom with that of the home is that domination and discrimination can be exercised by female editors/media owners as well. It shows that hierarchical social order is a dominant discourse and whoever is in power can dominate or discriminate. In this regard, Gelila shares her experience:

My boss, the media owner, is female but she is following the same pattern of domination. She prefers male reporters to cover current issues in relation to politics. I have told her my desire to work on those areas but she always assigned my male colleagues instead, and I am for the ‘soft’ news. Sometimes she can use me as a messenger to tell my male colleague about his assignments. She does not see my courage as positive gesture. Everybody can have fear in them including our male colleagues, but my attempt to overcome my fear at times can be ridiculed. Especially when you are a junior, there is “who does she think she is?” attitude, which is very discouraging. I just wanted to bring the best out of me but senior staff who think of themselves high can be very damaging than helpful.” (Gelila, in-depth interview, 29.05.20).

Another fellow participant, Kidest recalls how the actions of her female editors remind her of her mothers’ treatment at home: being given orders with serious faces and sometimes being scolded at. Kidest started working for the national radio at the age of 16 by producing programs for children. She says “I think it might be due to my young age, but the female editors were assuming mothers’ role when they gave us assignment. Obviously, it would make us fearful for making any mistakes.” (Kidest, in-depth interview, 24.02.20).

Another observation of similarity with the home is the preference of sameness over individuality in writing styles. Maraki, for example, comments on the role of senior editors in reproducing sameness by discouraging individual style. She says “there

were times that my articles would appear with different language and expressions to the extent that I could not see myself in them.” According to this respondent, it was a way of safeguarding the dominant discourse, be it concerning political issues or socio-cultural beliefs. For example, it is difficult to criticize the orthodox church if the editor has a religious background linked to this church. And in relation to the tradition of journalism practice, most of the senior journalists have that background. This kind of safeguarding can also be extended to organizations like the African Union (AU) with the justification of “protection of the reputation of such esteemed organizations” as Maraki put it.

Any critical reporting against these establishments will be ‘censored’ by senior editors, even in medias owned privately. Respondents who face such challenges interpret it as an extension of the home, where old traditions are kept by elders through domination and controlling of other members of the family.

Hierarchy in the news room is also manifested through a “superior/inferior” distinction. This opinion is shared by Adam and Hunegnaw who state that the hierarchical social order can be expressed through individual relationships whereby those who assume superior positions are taking moral authority over the rest. These respondents maintain that there is lack of equal treatment of people in the news room that stems from cultural prejudices and stereotyping attitudes. Adam observes “counting on their social status, there are people who perceive themselves as super human and look down upon others with different background.” He added that those who are placed high in the hierarchy can be disrespectful towards those in lower position through derogatory talk. The other side can cope with such kind of “patronizing relationships” through limiting their communication or keeping their silence, according to Adam. Hunegnaw on his part observes that rural urban differences can also make a hierarchy. According to him identifying a persons’ whereabouts is easy by their Amharic accent. And with that “a social status can easily be established as the Amharic dialect spoken in the capital city Addis Ababa is considered as standard and superior” (Hungenaw, in-depth interview, 22.05.20).

Other relevant points mentioned by respondents are the absence of accountability, and blame shifting. According to the journalists, individuals who assume high status in the hierarchy are not held to account, but those in the lower rank are easy to be blamed for issues that go wrong. Lydia who has worked both in private and state media confirms that though it is more rigid in the state-owned medias, hierarchy is at work in privately owned medias too. This respondent views the top-down domination at work place as an extension of the rule at home even with its effect of causing bottom-up fear or/and disassociation.

In summary, findings discussed so far have shown the deep understanding of respondents regarding the socio-cultural values and norms that they have been socialized into in shaping their journalistic work. However, there is an absence of acknowledging socio-cultural assumptions as a significant issue. During the data collection, the majority of the journalists could not help themselves to argue that my inquiry should focus on the political system as the source of all the challenges to the practice of freedom of speech and the media in Ethiopia. The opinion of respondents regarding the significance of socio-cultural assumption varies from “I never saw it that way, but it can be” (Kidest, in-depth interview, 24.02.20) to those who recognize the contribution but “still the social influence is nothing compared to the bad deeds of the government.” (Belay, in-depth interview, 26.02.20).

I will revert to this in the conclusion (Chapter 5). For now, let the presentation of findings proceed.

4.3 Negotiating freedom of speech

This section deals with findings that has direct relevance to the research question number two, which sought to find out respondents view on the contribution of socio-cultural assumptions of Ethiopian societies on the practice of freedom of speech in Ethiopia. As presented in the analysis framework (Annex:I), the data provides respondents’ similar views on issues related to the contribution of socio-cultural assumptions on the practice of freedom of speech in Ethiopia. Focusing on the hierarchy and domination at home, respondents point out issues that they consider as inhibiting factors to the practice of freedom of speech in Ethiopian context.

Respondents' observation in terms of societal pressure on individuals to conform to family values without questioning, illuminates the discussion in the literature review (section 2.1.2) regarding the inhibition of the development of individuality in the dominant tradition of Ethiopia. (Levine (1972[1965])).

4.3.3 On the values of freedom of speech

Reflecting on this issue, the majority of the respondents focus on their individual freedom to have an opinion on issues of public interest together with the government's duty to not limit this fundamental human right. The journalists define the concept of freedom of speech using short phrases such as self-empowerment, self-assertion, standing for one's truth, it is about telling the truth, a tool to fighting injustice, and voice to the voiceless.

Moreover, associating themselves with the watch dog role of journalism, the majority of the respondents understand freedom of speech as source of empowerment to their struggle against the political system. Though the journalists claim that they are not interested in politics they believe that their role as a journalist should be to make the government accountable to the socio-political injustices on behalf of the society.

Four respondents namely Belay, Zab, Huenegnaw and Adam were able to reflect on the normative tenet of freedom of speech, which draws similarity. They define freedom of speech as a birth right with core values of liberty, equality, and coexistence. Belay and Zab states that respect to human beings is the moral base of individual liberty and freedom of speech. Belay added that this respect to mankind is founded in the understanding that "they are created in the likeness and sameness of God". For Adam trust on the good intentions of human beings regarding their practice of freedom of speech is the foundation. He says "the understanding that individuals will not abuse their birth right to freedom" is what constitutes the social contract based on individual liberty.

These four respondents share similar views, that freedom of speech and individual liberty is fundamental to the establishment as well as the maintenance of a democratic culture. Moreover, they agree that a democratic social order is a way to equality that

leads to socio-political changes in a society. However, their opinions differ mainly on the issue of individual freedom versus social obligation.

Zab is of the opinion that the practice of freedom of speech should consider the socio-cultural development of Ethiopian society. Zab recons that “there is no democracy without the practice of freedom of speech, a value based on the recognition of the equal rights of individuals.” But he also maintains that sometimes it can be necessary to put limit on the practice of freedom of speech. Asserting the practice of freedom of speech depends on the socio-economic development of a society, he based his argument on the situation of the majority of the population in his country, Ethiopia.

In my opinion, the majority of the population is far from understanding liberal concepts such as freedom of speech. We are referring to an insignificant number of the population when we talk of political enlightenment. These are the few educated and urban dwellers; I could say one percent of the total population. The rest is still in the dark with no basic education, which could have helped them to understand and relate to such modern concepts. (Zab, in-depth interview, 31.03.20).

Zab refers to his field trips to different parts of the country for elections coverage as eye opener for him to understand the gap between the political hype in the capital city, Addis Ababa, and other places. He observes that people’s participation in the election does not mean they have the understanding on basic concepts of election and how does it relate to their daily life. Their participation can mean just serving the political interest of a certain group, which is affiliated with them for different reasons. Therefore, Zab concludes, “freedom of speech is relative as it is limited by socio-economic development of the society. Sometimes it can be necessary to protect society from chaos which can be caused by a cultural shock between traditional and modern thinking.”

On the other hand, Belay, Hunegnaw and Adam strongly argue against the idea of limiting freedom of speech and individual liberty. They agree that the heavy weight that traditional thinking and the low level of socio-economic development of the Ethiopian society can put on the adaptability of modern thoughts. However, they maintain that the social context rather justifies to exert more pressure on the government so that they could change the situation through building democratic

institutions, as well as leading by example through tolerating those who are demanding for freedom of speech. These respondents based their argument on the universality of freedom of speech as a birth right that one can “exercise at any time and under any circumstances”.

However, the value of freedom of speech in terms of dialoguing for the purpose of reaching at a common goal, or exchanging of ideas for the purpose of building shared values seems a less recognized issue. This can be related to the focus given to the watch dog role of journalists. Majority of the respondents reflects on the fourth state status of the media in the West as a role model that they yearn for their country. Therefore, the general understanding of respondents is focused on the empowering nature of freedom of speech for journalists as they fight against the political system on behalf of the society. The strong perception of some of the respondents on their watch dog journalistic role gives the impression that the personal interest took precedence over any other considerations.

Adam is of the opinion that the individual does not have to be considerate of the impact of their freedom to speak on others. Quoting Salman Rushdie, he insists that it is not his duty to protect the audience from being affected while practicing his freedom of speech. “I do not really care about the emotions of the audience. I do not accept the idea of limiting individuals’ freedom to speak for the sake of protecting certain groups of the society.” He believes that freedom of speech as practiced in the Western countries can be practiced in his country too. For this, he asserts, there should be a “check and balance” system in place, which can prevent the government from making laws that limit the practice of freedom of speech. Based on this understanding, Adam confirms his commitment to keep the political system in check through exercising his individual freedom to speak.

Though agreeing with Adam’s view on the relevance of freedom of speech to hold governments accountable, Belay differs on the issue of the individuals’ duty while exercising the freedom to speak. For him, the purpose of practicing freedom of speech goes beyond asserting individual freedom. He maintains that freedom of speech should serve as a gap bridging exercise through finding “a common ground for all to

play in according to the rules". However, asked if he was playing by this rule while practicing his freedom to speak, Belay responds "the government was undemocratic that it was not possible to do dialogue with them. They rush to repression and force you to retaliate".

Belay is not the only one leaning towards rebelling as a means to secure freedom. Belay and fellow respondents relate the tendency of rebelling with the societal pressure on individuals to conform with hierarchical social norms. Referring to the process of socialization during upbringing, these respondents maintain that the domination to keep one in the sameness circle is rigid, which left the person with the option either to submit, manipulate, or rebel.

4.3.1 The home effect: Sameness as the preferred societal value

A view that shared by all respondents regarding hierarchy at home is how sameness as opposed to individuality is regarded as a virtuous societal norm. The journalists observe that such upbringing gives no space for the individual to have different opinion on issues that regarded by their families as righteous and of high value. Reflecting on their experiences in terms of the pressure to conform to established societal norms, religious practices⁸ were mentioned by the respondents as an example. For Adam, deciding not to follow his family's religion was the "biggest struggle" of his life. His family was not ready to accept his difference, and he was met with strong resistance, which "pushes" him towards "rebellion". (There will be more on this at 4.3.4).

But another fellow respondent, Zab, deals the same challenge in different way.

I do not consider myself as a believer or an observant of the orthodox christian religion. But there were times that I did observe religious practices such as fasting, just out of fear of the unknown regarding peoples' reaction due to my believe or disbelieve. This is a topic that I could not dare to discuss with anybody (Zab, in-depth interview, 31.03.20).

Zab explains his choice in dealing the challenge of "being different" in relation to the social norm that celebrates sameness as a virtue. He argues that if people think in their

⁸ The mentioning of religion in this section is not as a topic by its own merit, but as used by respondents as example of showing the pressure from society.

own way, it can cause them the problem of being isolated from the group in the least of circumstances. Thus, they will be forced to pretend that they are in the same boat as the group for fear of unknown consequences. "I understand that collective thinking is much more encouraged in our society. Showing sameness is preferred over thinking differently and walking your own path. One is expected just to confirm with established norms.", asserts Zab.

Individual choices can be perceived as an act of rejecting the family and its values, thus, disrupting the family's unity. Gelila's reflection is an example in this regard

As a female in the house, you are expected to have the devotion to take care of your brothers. To give priority to yourself in terms of having desires to pursue your education, aspiring to be a career woman, and being economically independent is considered as selfishness. And you can be told that such behavior is not expected from a woman. If you do not agree to abandon your dreams, you can be made to be ashamed of yourself. No one will support and encourage you, instead everybody will start to 'advise' you to come to your senses. Your desire to be self-reliant is understood as your lack of love for your family. The culture has a way of keeping women down and at the same time trying to convince them that it is for their own good. The appreciated social value for women is to be selfless through taking care of the need of their family members even at the expense of their own. To this end, the culture promotes dependency of women as a virtue. (Gelila, in-depth interview, 29.05.20)

A fellow female respondent, Lydia, seconded this opinion who says thinking differently for women can cost their reputation as being indecent. "Individual freedom is seen as breaking away from the group, which is perceived as rejecting the group and their values. Your desire to fly in an own orbit, is taken as wrong doing and that person can be told to 'behave' by parents for example." She added that even talking ones' individual achievement is not appreciated. But referring to groups based on sameness can be a different matter.

It is common to hear expressions such as "oh the Amhara people would not do this, or no! the Oromos would not do this". This indicates the social habit of adoring or/and defending of people as a group. I view this as a problem of being superficial and a way of denying the societal lack of the ability to acknowledge individuals for their outstanding achievement. Appreciating and promoting good behavior of individuals is almost a non-existent value. (Lydia, in-depth interview, 09.04.20).

The journalists also argue that socio-cultural assumptions are not only inhibiting individuals' freedom but are the causes of intolerance between individuals and groups of people. For Zab, the intolerance of differences and the use of violence to resolve

difference is a social habit that starts at home. Referring to an exemplary incident from a memoir of one of the contemporary Ethiopian politicians, Zab asserts that the incident between the politician and his father can be representatives of the experience “all of us”. The setting of the incident (that Zab is referring to) is early 1960s Ethiopia, whereby political opposition against the then aristocratic rule was in its rise. The politician was a young university student at the time when one day involved in discussion with his father regarding one of the hot political issues of the time; the Eritreans question for secession. The father as a member of the bureaucracy of the aristocratic government was not happy with the question. But for the young university student and his political group the issue was a just question of determining on ones’ freedom as a nation. However, revealing his thoughts that night did not followed by a pleasant and mature conversation with his father. Rather it earned him two punches in his face, which left him and his mother in utter shock.

Though this incident happened in the 1960s, Zab analyses that it depicts similarities with the way same situations were handled in most households of his generation too.

Looking back, the politician reflects that at the time his father had a much wider view of the situation than him. But the point that I took form this incident is that, at home, there was no room for t a person to express their opinion freely. He was stopped by force from sharing his views regardless of their relevance. Chances are high that such experiences can teach one how to impose their idea on others by force. There is this fear of power, and distancing oneself form powerful figures due to this. And this has its root from home. I wonder how many ideas are silenced in such a way in every household as this is a reality to date for the majority of families in our society. Therefore, as a journalist if you do not have the habit of expressing your views at home and dialoguing with family members, if you do not have the custom of asking question to your father, how come you can do this in public and in front of a politician? (Zab, in-depth interview, 31.03.20).

Debab focuses on the lack of social habit in terms of informing and consulting concerned individuals in decision making. She argues that decision makers can make relevant decisions on behalf of other individuals without informing or consulting them. This is due to the absence of the culture of dialogue, and it is the same at every level of social institutions, be it at government offices, public schools or at home.

Families deciding on important issues such as moving from place to place without involving their children in discussion is not unusual thing. In these days, there are places where a young girl can be informed by her parents that she will be married in a month time. As a student, being ‘surprised’ by our teachers with exam that they would

take the result seriously was part of my school experience. Therefore, for me the pattern we are seeing in the political environment, where the coming of the public to the street in a hasty way with political questions is the result of the hierarchical social order (Debab, in-depth interview, 03.04.20).

Belay looks into the socialization process in hierarchical social order and the teaching of moral values. And he argues that the home is not a place where one can learn and practice what is right and wrong in relation to defending ones' right while respecting that of others. Belay points out the difficulty of understanding ideas such as fairness, justice and how to defend them, as one would find out that what they have been taught about these values and what they are seen as in practice are two different issues. He maintains that the use and perception of power in hierarchical social order can be one source of such discrepancies.

Referring to an experience, Belay argues that authorities including those at community level can exercise absolute power, which can affect the resistance of the public towards social injustice. For example, he explains, if a young man challenged a chairperson of the local association (called Idir) for his wrong doing or unfairness, no one will stand by the young man including his own father. He even can be 'disciplined' by his family as his action would be taken as wrong doing. The young man's father will automatically take side with the chairperson, who most of the times are elderly, 'respected' men in the neighborhood. The reason for this is because the chairperson can exercise his power and ban the young man's father from the Idir, and this will be a high cost for the father to pay. Therefore, the father prefers to overlook the social injustice allegedly performed by the chairperson of the Idir for the sake of preserving his Idir's membership. Belay concludes by questioning what good such an experience during upbringing can teach a person about social injustice, the rule of law and how to defend it.

Belay, however, insists that the influence of the hierarchical social order is "nothing" compared to the pressure from the government. He perceives the political system as a head which is "rotting and apparently will affect the rest of the body". Belay maintains that "the uncivilized" nature of the political system in Ethiopia is responsible for the challenges of journalism and practice of freedom of speech. And with the civilization of the political system the influence of the hierarchical social order "will disappear".

The tendency of perceiving the influence of socio-cultural assumptions as less significant is shared by other respondents too. As mentioned earlier some even admit that they never viewed it as having a relation to the practice of journalism as such. One respondent argues “we have a culture of dialogue and negotiation” while the majority maintain that with the political system is the area where they (as journalists) should keep on their eyes. Then with the coming of democratized political system, the rest will be in order.

Respondents also did self-reflection on the inability to work together as journalists. They relate the problem with the socio-cultural values and norms that they have been socialized into. The next section deals with it.

4.3.2 Journalists are not exceptional: dissociation

The findings presented in this section are in line with the discussion in the literature review (section 2.3) regarding the situation of journalists’ associations in Ethiopia and journalists’ view of them. The discussion in this section is also related to the discussion in section (2.2.4) about the intellectual social groups that initiated the social movement of the 1960s in Ethiopia, with reference to the absence of the will to have a common ground for a common call in their demand for freedom of speech and other political rights.

The view on journalists’ associations is not positive, and avoiding membership is regarded as an act of being non-political. Only three out of the ten respondents of this research are members of journalists’ associations. Also, the response of those journalists who do not have membership is similar. Despite the differences in their background of working for state or/and privately owned medias, all the seven respondents view the associations as a political affair. Therefore, they do not want to relate with the associations as they want to distance themselves from politics.

Some state that they could not see the importance of journalists’ associations to their professional growth. When asked if they are members of a journalist association, the majority reply with questions as “what is the use of journalists’ associations?”. Debab is one of the respondents who confirms that she does not need any support from any

association. Referring to the media she was working for⁹, she states that she feels secure as her work has “nothing to do with the government.” Like Debab, Hunegnaw also does not see the importance of being a member of a journalist association. But his reservation is with regard to the failure of the existing journalists’ association to be willing to find a common ground as journalists and work together.

The way I see it, the pressure from the government is not the only problem here. Journalists are not exceptional as they are the product of the societal values that avoids dialogue, negotiation, and the will to compromise. That is why they fail to work together. All the initiatives to establish a united professional association reach nowhere because of this reason too. But it always been said “the government is pressuring us; it denies us a license” (Hunegnaw, in-depth interview, 22.05.20).

Since its establishment in 1976, the Ethiopian Journalists’ Association (EJA), has been the only association for more than three decades. Similarly, with the state-owned medias, EJA as well as its members too are perceived to have political affiliation with the ruling parties. (see 2.3). This has been discouraging for journalists including those working for state medias to join the association. In 1992 with the change of the media landscape in Ethiopia, which saw the opening of private medias, various journalists’ associations began to establish. One of them was Ethiopian Free Press Journalists’ Association (EFJA) representing journalists working in the private media.

Following this, there were initiatives to form a press council, which was not successful for almost two decades until 2016. Absence of trust between journalists working in different medias and who have membership in different journalists’ associations was one reason mentioned by respondents. But the absence of trust was not only between journalists from different associations. Disagreements between members within an association was a common problem including within EFJA too. (see 2.3).

This research finds first-hand information that confirms what has been discussed in the literature review regarding journalists’ associations in Ethiopia. A member of EFJA, Maraki, observes that the fear and suspicion of government infiltration causes absence of trust between members within the association. In relation to this, there were medias who were “suspected of having connection with the government”. And the

⁹ This respondent used to work for an international public broadcasting service.

newspaper she was working with was among the 'suspected' ones. Thus, accepting journalists working for those newspapers as members was causing debate and disagreements. Maraki recalls the time and energy wasted in members' meetings due to lack of direct and clear talks, which pose difficulties to make decisions on relevant issues including the establishment of press council.

To begin with, the idea of forming a press council was first initiated by the government. So, the suspicion already begins. And the other point was some members was not comfortable to discuss their stand clearly for fear of members like me, who are working in medias alleged to have government affiliation. (Maraki, in-depth interview, 17.02.20).

Belay reflects on the "lost opportunities" of journalists to stand together for their collective rights in the face of the pressure from the political system, as well as "the injustice coming from our employers too". Representing EFJA, Belay takes part in meetings in relation to the attempt to form a press council. Looking back, he realizes that the hierarchical social orientation contributes a lot to the inability of journalists to bring themselves together and form a press council. "But" Belay stresses, "this is besides the senseless pressure from the government".

Belay admits that at the time he put all the blame for the disagreement between journalist working for state versus privately-owned medias on the political system and became more determined to fight back. Besides, information he was getting from his fellow journalists working in state-medias that was only proving his doubts against the government. At the time, the conversations seemed genuine and their concerns were only for their jobs and safety when they claimed "the government is against EFJA and due to this they fear to work with EFJA as it could brought them difficulties." (Belay, in-depth interview). Later he started questioning things as he began to observe the manner of communication they had in meetings. His attendance in journalists' forums that were sponsored by international donors were eye openers.

One of the forums started on a promising note regarding cooperation, but after three days, it failed to bring an agreement. Belay stresses that the challenges in this forum made him realize that "the socio-cultural makeup is pulling us behind". He recalls the rigidity of discussants to accept ideas coming from the other group, because they

consider the other group as “opponent rather than partner”. Belay relates this with the influence of hierarchical social orientation.

Every group wants to take the upper hand in establishing the press council, which shows the desire to control and dominate is everywhere. Each group wants to take the leadership, and to establish their rule of game. This is the result of the societal norms and values that we have been socialized into. We are oriented in to valuing the status of an individual rather than their ideas. It seems we cannot function unless the order of superiority and subordination been established. (Belay, in-depth interview, 08.05.20).

Looking inward, Belay reveals important point that helps understand the reason behind the inability to work together to establish a press council.

We do not have the tradition of reaching a consensus. But why is that? I ask myself. I understand that we base on hatred in defining our relationships. We came to the conference room with pre-conceived ideas, thus, with already established negativity towards each other. Also, the majority of us do not come to the table with the interest to learn more about the press council and its benefits to us. We are there to win in promoting our ideas regarding how the press council should be formed. Therefore, the discussion is aimed at discrediting the ideas of the ‘opponent’. There were few who came with open mind but they would be soon discouraged by the groups who already established animosity between themselves. We ‘missed’ the idea of finding a common ground. So, all the investment in funding, time, and energy could not yield a result. (ibid).

Journalists’ inability to work together is manifested in other areas of cooperation, even among journalists with same political ‘stand’. Lydia’s reflection on unsuccessful attempts of working together with supposedly like-minded journalists can be a case in point. She recalls the projects as “fascinating ideas” that did not materialize just because the cooperation could not go further after the initial talk.

It was because we were not able to converse on our expectations, how to go about it on each step, and specific role assumptions based on each one of us ability and talent because we could not surpass our egos. Due to the patriarchal social orientation, we were stubborn to accept each other’s ideas, rather we were saying to each other “listen to me, my idea is the best”. When I look back now and think of those failed projects, I can see my mistake and the others too. We were not conversing and give one another space rather we were trying to show up how we are smarter than the other. We could not pass our greed, ego. So, we failed. (Lydia, in-depth interview, 09.04.20).

Similar expression of “we do not have the culture of working together” was used by more than three respondents when reflecting on the issue. In the same way, the phrase “journalists are not exceptional” was also mentioned by some respondents to indicate

that their actions are influenced by hierarchical values that inhibits them to accept one another on equal ground.

During the individual in-depth interviews, respondents were asked how they joined the journalism profession. Accordingly, all responded that they did so by their own choice. However, the majority claimed that their choice was based on their interest in literature. Some even indicated that they were not interested in politics, at least at the start of their career with a perception of separating politics from their journalistic practice. This is in association with the societal understanding of politics as an act of support to or standing against the government, which causes the tendency of distancing oneself from politics. This view towards politics is common among Ethiopian journalists. (Skjerdal, 2017).

Only two respondents, Zab and Adam, claimed that they started working on the media for the sake of promoting the practice of freedom of speech. Zab joined the profession of journalism in the mid-1990s by working for state-owned media. He says, at the time, he had high hopes that the momentum of press freedom in the country would continue and the media would be a platform for free exchanging of ideas and opinions. Therefore, he wanted to take part in the process of enlightening the public through the exchange of different political opinions. Adam came to the profession a decade later, when the demand for freedom of speech was high. He confirms that in light of this context he came to the media with the purpose of using it as tool to challenge the political system.

Some of the respondents associate their tendency of distancing themselves from politics with the societal orientation that considers politics and government authority untouchable. But despite their claim to be neutral from politics, all the respondents are enthusiastic about the demand for freedom of speech from the government. In light of this, respondents' reflection on their understanding of the values of freedom of speech will be addressed next.

4.3.4 Rebellious as a way to freedom

The title for this section was inspired by the reflection of one of the respondents, Adam, who joined journalism to use it as a tool to fight for freedom of speech. Adam is open about his rebellious tendency, which he claims to be provoked by the rigidity of the

culture to prevent individuals from choosing their own way of believing, thinking and talking. It started when just past the age of 20, and he chose to not follow his family's (parents) value in terms of religion. His hope was the family would understand and accept his choice as they were "modern family", but it did not work that way so he "rebelled". (Adam, individual interview, 21.04.20).

On the other hand, however, it was a challenge that took him to the next level of standing for his "freedom" by making bold decisions on either to believe or to reject other societal values. Adam gives credit for his first challenge of 'negotiating' with his family regarding his religious belief, as it gives him the determination to fight against hierarchy and domination. Adam 'confesses' that he has a "revolutionist tendency", and linked it to the socialization process during upbringing.

By being vocal and outspoken now as an adult, I think I am taking revenge on what I was forbidden to do during my childhood. I am doing exactly what I have been told to not to do when I was a child: challenging areas that the hierarchical social discourses assumes as 'untouchables' such as politics, government and authority figures (Adam, individual interview, 21.04.20).

Belay agrees with Adams' view of confronting the 'untouchables' as well as what brings the tendency of rebelling in them: the social pressure during upbringing into submitting for authority figures.

Though appreciating her fellow journalists who confront the government, Kidest questions whether this should be the only way to practice ones' freedom of speech. Kidest observes that resisting of new ideas and individuals who 'think' differently is a socio-cultural trait, which is rooted at home and growing stronger in the political sphere. Therefore, "sometimes I think, for those standing in opposition to the established political discourse, it can be like crushing with a wall."

Lydia, Kemal and Hunegnaw have slightly different opinions. While they share the view regarding the domination and pressure from the government, they point out that the inability to compromise seems an inherited social behavior. Lydia cites two scenarios and uses the Amharic expression የማርያም መንገድ, literally meaning St. Mary's path. It is an expression of a gracious gesture of a victorious/powerful group to the less powerful/defeated group of allowing a narrow passage to their safety.

On the one hand there is this patriarchal way of governance, which is dominant, controlling and vocal “I am the leader, you have to listen to my idea!” a situation that gives the other side no chance but to go for overthrowing that power. But there are times where the government gives የማርያም መንገድ (Mary’s path), and sadly would not be used by the other side. There is lack of the will to share. Take the election of 2005 for example¹⁰, the government has given የማርያም መንገድ (Mary’s path) but instead of using what they got, they say “oh, the government has to surrender totally, it should be a totally wipe out and we have to start clean.” Currently too, there are groups who are contemplating to go for a revolution! I always wonder why do not they think of a civilized talk, dialogue, negotiation, and make it work? (Lydia, in-depth interview, 09.04.20).

Moreover, Hunegnaw and Kemal share an opinion that demanding rights through rebellion is the pattern in Ethiopian political history since the 1990s. According to Hunegnaw, the attitude “my view or my party’s stand is the only truth that everyone should follow” is what causes strife and violent clashes between young revolutionist university students of the 1960s. Sadly, added Hunegnaw, this pattern of intolerance of any kind of differences accompanied by attacking each other is still defining relationships of university students of this era.

Kemal relates this trend with the patriarchal social order that functions through a total submission of individuals to authority. He observes that this social order leaves no room for dialogue and negotiation, but push one “either to submit or to rebel”. He also argues that this social order “makes us fearful and rigid”.

I believe that as a society we have fear to accept plurality. Therefore, we do not have the mind set to accommodate plurality. Accepting and respecting others with equal treatment is a practice that is lacking everywhere be it at home, in school, at work place and including in government offices. The resistance to plurality is making us rigid as a society. (Kemal, in-depth interview, 22.06.20).

According to the respondents, the placing of status in the hierarchical social order can be based upon factors such as age, gender, economic status, education, ethnic background, and urban/rural division. Altogether, the thinking that human beings are equal is not part of the social guiding principles despite being “a rhetoric in schools, work place, and in legal documents.” as Kemal put it.

¹⁰ In the 2005 national election the oppositions won Addis Ababa (all the seats for the capital city administration),

4.3.5 Respondents' perception of their contribution

In general, the journalists view their contribution to the promotion of the values of freedom of speech in terms of the pressure they put on the government. In relation to this, the 2018 change of government was a source of achievement for some who regarded it as “undemocratic, authoritarian, and uncivilized” (Belay, in-depth interview).

Four out of the ten journalists who took part in this research were imprisoned by the government ousted in 2018. Thus, these four respondents (Belay, Gelila, Adam, and Hunegnaw) perceive the political change as part of their journalistic work achievement. For example, Belay confirms that he “struggles to change the political system” as he was convinced that fighting the political system “by any means possible” was the way out to the socio-political crisis of the country. Belay’s conviction of challenging the political system is shared by his fellow respondents Adam, Hunegnaw and Lydia. These three respondents measure their contribution in terms of creating public awareness on “how to stand for freedom of speech and against the repression of the government” (Lydia, in-depth interview, 09.04.20). Also, they believe that their imprisonment will “inspire the young generation to challenge the government” as Lydia put it.

In addition to this, Hunegnaw is proud of what he and his colleagues in the private media were doing in exposing government corruption. He thinks the political officials do not have any concern for the well-being of citizens and the country but only for their political party. Thus, what the private media was doing was to defend the country from such misadministration. And in doing this, lots of journalists have sacrificed their job, leaving their country to exile, and imprisonment. He is also willing to do so as long as it is bringing the change that he desires to the nation through the change of the political system in power.

Regarding their contribution in terms of challenging the hierarchical social order, only one respondent say that a privately owned newspaper he used to work with had a project on this. And they have issued a commentary piece about the influence of a feudal culture in the socio-political life. Others perceive their contribution in terms of

promoting plurality. Kemal, Kidest and Debab claim that through focusing on groups of the society who were mis or/and under-represented in the media such as women, children and Muslims, they play part in enhancing media plurality. One respondent, Zab, count on his conscious use of words and expressions to avoid partiality in his reporting. He cites congratulatory media messages on religious public holidays as an example of media partiality with one group while discriminating the other.

For example, television message on holidays observed by orthodox Christians would say “congratulation on the day of our Lord....”. Such messages not only assume every audience as a believer but also put the media among the celebrators, which discriminate non-believers. Moreover, on Muslim holidays the media messages would address specifically the group in celebration. Therefore, it was important for me to avoid such partialities in my reports if I happen to report on those days. (Zab, in-depth interview, 31.03.20).

There are respondents who feel they “could have done more” (Lydia and Maraki) in terms of being “a voice to the voiceless” (Lydia) and standing by fellow journalists who were “pressurized by the government” (Maraki).

As mentioned earlier, the majority of the respondents have a sense of measuring their achievement in terms of the challenge they put up against the political system in power. And they relate the way forward mainly with the will of the political system to democratize itself and change the society accordingly. Or that economic growth and expansion of urbanization will do the miracle of changing hierarchical socio-cultural assumptions and their negative effect on freedom of speech.

Freedom of expression is very much important in urban areas. Because the political conversations and everything is concentrated in urban areas. Rural-urban migration is increasing now in all the country. This means when individuals leave their original place (the rural setting), and migrate to urban areas, they will be forced to assimilate with the culture. Which means they will start to respect differences and individual liberty. (Adam, in-depth interview, 21.04.20).

Adam asserts that with development of information technology in the country, more people will get to learn the importance of individual rights to speak ones’ own thoughts without any limitations. Thus, with the rapid increase of rural-urban migration and urbanization the society soon will embrace modern life style as it is in the Western countries.

Zab agrees with the idea of the need to embrace a modern life style, but not as optimistic as his fellow respondents regarding the future. Recalling his work travels, into different rural societies in Ethiopia, he stresses that the majority of the population is far from understanding modern concepts such as freedom of speech, and democracy. As to the reasons, Zab observes, it is not only lack of information but also socio-cultural influences that manifest through “a deep-rooted resistance towards new ideas and life style.” Unlike Adam, Zab is critical of relating the idea of modernity only with urban life and the concentration of political activities in and around town areas. He rather is of the opinion that “enlightening the mass wherever they are is the way to the future” (Zab, in-depth interview, 31.03.20) concerning the practice of freedom of speech.

Hunegnaw seconded Zab’s opinion regarding the need for journalists to focus on enlightening the public on social values related to freedom of speech and individual liberty. On a similar note, Lydia reflects on the need for journalists to lead the way to civilized way of public discourse among politicians than following them in their polarized way of dealing with their differences. She maintains that sometimes the gaps are created not based on the real issues at hand but by “stereotype assumptions, which are the result of hierarchical social relationships”. Therefore, journalists including herself can address the problem through “bringing two people/ groups with opposite ideas to talk”, which will be leading to develop the will to find a common ground to work together.

To sum up, compared to the opinion regarding the political system, little has been said about how to deal with the problem of hierarchical socio-cultural assumptions. Moreover, when it comes to looking at their role as journalists with regard to socio-cultural assumptions, it seems the majority of the respondents could not figure out what they can do about it.

Chapter five: Discussion and Conclusion

This research shows interesting results concerning the socio-cultural assumptions in Ethiopian societies, and their role in shaping the practice of journalism and freedom of speech in Ethiopia. Through in-depth interviews with ten Ethiopian journalists, the collected data provides valuable insights on the negative effect of the socialization process during childhood, and the uncompromising societal pressure to conform to hierarchical social norms on their journalistic practice, and that of freedom of speech in general. Describing the home as the starting place of silencing and the inhibition of the development of individual identity, the respondents of this research assert that the socio-cultural assumptions give no space to the practice of freedom of speech.

However, despite this understanding, there is absence of recognizing socio-cultural assumptions as a significant issue. In other words, there is less understanding on how to deal with the problem of socio-cultural assumptions. The majority of the respondents believe that when the political system is democratized, the socio-cultural assumptions will also take same path. There is a tendency of looking at government as a power that has no connection with society if not against it and not affected/influenced by socio-cultural assumptions. And their role as a journalist is to challenge political systems in power on behalf of society.

The collected data and literatures reviewed (in chapter 2) also informed this research that hierarchical social order is still continuing to guide social relations despite the claim by different political system that ruled Ethiopia in different times that they are following Western democracy. The unchallenged hierarchical social attitude and practice, together with the above-mentioned highlights of the research findings will be discussed in brief as follows.

5.1 It is mainly about age, and then, the fear factor

The data collected through individual in-depth interviews reveals interesting results that somehow challenges the 'assumption' of this research. The nature of interview in qualitative approach in "giving power to respondents" (Elliott & Timulak, 2005, p. 151) found to be helpful during the data collection. The respondents were encouraged to

analyse their understanding of the societal values and norms with patriarchy, which was the initial assumed framework of the study.

While all respondents agree that hierarchical socio-cultural assumptions are guiding principles of social relations both at home and in other social institutions outside the home, opinions differ when it comes to patriarchy being the right framework to examine the inquiry at hand. Referring to their experiences both at home and in the work place, the main argument of the journalists in this regard is that the tendency to dominate and control is not a character only attributed to men, as women also could show the same tendency when they are in charge. Thus, the journalists argue, the concept of patriarchy would limit their scope to analyse their experiences.

The journalists maintain that it is the style of child upbringing, which instills fear and confusion that has significant effect on their journalistic practice and freedom of speech in general. And being silenced and confined from knowing (as secrecy is part of the social custom), are experiences that both the female and male respondents claim to have gone through as a child. The finding of this research relates with the assertion of Dirbaba & O'Donnell (2016) regarding the negative influence of the restrictive socialization during in limiting journalists' capacity "to achieve professional autonomy" (p.928) both individually and collectively.

Moreover, as observed by Levine (1972[1965]) in the dominant tradition of Ethiopia whereby hierarchy is perceived as viable social order, children and women are regarded as inferiors and less knowledgeable. The aspect of regarding children as inferior and not taking them seriously can go throughout their adolescent and young age too as it is believed that "only as a man approaches forty does he begin to gain respectability. [...] most esteemed of all is the elder, the man of sixty or seventy. Like earth, he is settled and stable." Levine (1972[1965] p. 79). Half a century ago since the above observation was made, recent studies such as Dirbaba & O'Donnell (2016) finds out similar social traits of hierarchy and domination during child raising.

The research at hand has also been informed by the journalists (respondents) that the way they were raised in terms of secretive communication, regarded as less knowledgeable, and restricted from going ones' way but obliged to keep tight with

family values are stopping them from practicing journalism with confidence and courage. This indicates that by virtue of their social role assignment based on age, children are considered “non-knowers” (Burger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 88) for the best of their lives. Moreover, the tradition of hierarchy in Ethiopia (as discussed in section 2.1) does not encourage the development of individuality, which implies the inhibition of creativity of ideas and thoughts. Also, it can mean that children and young adults have limited access to the social stock of knowledge, thus, limited access to administer it. (Burger & Luckmann, 1966). For example, based on respondents’ reflections, the culture of secrecy means that children are barred from accessing information, thus, being kept away from knowing. And being silenced is associated with lacking the skills of clear communication and responsiveness.

Respondents’ reflection on fear is revealing in light of Levine’s (1972[1965]) observation about the view regarding the maintenance of social order in the dominant tradition in Ethiopia. As discussed in chapter two (2.1) the fear of “man’s aggression” (Levine, 1972[1965], p. 85) based on the societal perception of human nature as inherently aggressive and treacherous is the base for having contradicting social values and moral standings in the dominant tradition of Ethiopia.

However, the interesting result of this research is yet to come: the absence of acknowledging socio-cultural assumption as equally significant issue to deal with as political systems. The next section discusses on this issue.

5.2 Defending the culture

The individual in-depth interview provides rich data that reveals respondents’ deep understanding of the hierarchical social values and norms they have been socialized into. The journalists recognize that they have been socialized into a hierarchical social values and norms, which prefers sameness over individuality, family interference that leaves no room for individual autonomy, the trend of non-accountability, the tolerance and practice of inequality and social injustice.

Regarding the effect of social values acquired through the process of socialization on their journalistic practice, all respondents maintain that it has an adverse role. Inherited fear and confusion that limits them from doing their journalistic work with

confidence has been emphasized as main predicaments. The journalists also indicate that the fear and confusion are the product of the lack of clear orientation on what is right and/or wrong during socialization, but instead pressure to submit to whoever is high in the hierarchical order be it at home or in other social relations.

However, there is a resistance to acknowledge social customs as a significant issue that needs to be challenged the same way they are holding political systems accountable. Moreover, there is a perception of viewing the government/the political system as something out there by itself with no connection to the society, to whom the journalists' pledge loyalty to. This goes with the assertion of Skjerdal (2012) regarding the dual loyalty that Ethiopian journalists working for government medias felt: for journalism profession and to their society.

During the individual in-depth interviews, some of the respondents suggest to the extent of insisting that this research should make its focus on the role of governments as "they¹¹ are the ones who is blocking freedom of speech and the media." (Maraki, in-depth interview, 17.02.20). Another respondent who was critical on the social customs that he describes as lacking the capacity to teach moral in the clearest sense and the non-tolerance for individuality, nevertheless conclude his reflection by saying "still for me the social influence is nothing compared to the bad deeds of the government." (Belay, individual in-depth interview, 26.02.20).

Two respondents stood in defense of culture. They say there are lots of cultural norms that makes them proud and unique as Ethiopians such as the respecting polite way of greeting to others specially people older than them. One of them makes it clear that it is difficult for her to criticize the culture because the "values of her community (Ethiopian society) are hers too. Therefore, she cannot stand against them as it is opposing her own beliefs." (Lydia, individual in-depth interview, 09.04.20).

This can be seen through the framework of socialization particularly the significance of primary socialization discussed in section 2.4.1. In the process of becoming members of society, children take on the social world of their significant others as their own.

¹¹ With the word "They" the respondent is referring to people in power (government officials mainly top political figures).

(Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 150). In light of this, it is possible to understand respondents' hesitation to pinpoint socio-cultural assumptions as an act of defending ones' social world, which was smoothly transferred to them through their significant others" (ibid).

It is also possible to make sense of the respondents' tendency of defending the culture through Elder-Vass's (2012) conception of the norm circles as casual forces that sustain social norms through endorsing and enforcing societal values, even when they are not aware of doing it. Individuals can do this for the sake of avoiding "negative sanctions and/or attract positive endorsement" (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 51). In light of this, and respondents' account regarding the severity of sanctions for non-conformity, it can be assumed that the defending is an act of staying loyal to the societal norms out of fear of sanctions.

On the other hand, it is also possible to see the reluctance of the journalists (to acknowledge socio-cultural assumptions as significance issue to be concerned with) as an element that contributes for the sustainment of those socio-cultural assumptions unchallenged. The next section looks into this issue.

5.3 Hierarchy unchallenged

This section recalls the discussion in the literature review (section 2.1) regarding hierarchy being considered as a viable social order in Ethiopia. It was discussed that the rigid and vertically hierarchical social order was made the dominant tradition of Ethiopia as it was supported by the feudal political system that lasted until the early 1970s. The social hierarchy in the dominant tradition of Ethiopia is built on a discourse of cultural superiority of a language and a religion (see 2.1). There were non-hierarchical social orders practiced by societies in Ethiopia such as the Oromos and societies in the southern part of Ethiopia such as the Gurages. (Bahru, 2002, p. 12).

As conceptualized by Elder-Vass's (2012) the backing of powerful social structures such as political or religious institutions, increase the influencing power of social norms to win over other societal views to the extent of changing "the normative environment" (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 29).

Thus, in Ethiopian societies, hierarchical social norms were able to become the dominant tradition as it was backed by the feudal political system and the orthodox church (see section 2.2.1). But most importantly, media also plays substantial role in maintaining hierarchy. As discussed in section 2.2.2 (the making of media culture), the press in Ethiopia was introduced as a medium to promote the monarchy and its interest. Despite the feudal socio-political system claim to introduce modernity “following the Western model” (Asfa-Wossen, 2016; p. 55), the press was never founded on principles of modern ideals of equality and liberty. Neither did it play a role in shaping the attitude of the public towards building “shared meanings” (Talbot, 2007, p. 3), based on the values of freedom of speech. To the contrary, it was promoting the culture of hierarchy and domination through persuading the public “to be loyal to their feudal rulers and serve them faithfully.” (Reta,2013, p.25). Serving the interest of political systems in power is part of the characteristics of Ethiopian journalism for more than a century till present day. (see 2.2.2-2.3).

The domination of hierarchical social-order in Ethiopian societies is not a phenomenon of the past. As discussed in 2.2.1 the functioning of power and politics in Ethiopia is highly influenced by hierarchical social order, which is highly rigid and vertically structured. (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003, p. 11). Based on the personal views and experiences of ten Ethiopian journalists, this research finds out that hierarchy and domination is guiding social relations both at home and the work place. (see 4.1 & 4.2). Besides, some of the respondents are aware of the contribution of individuals through “endorsing and enforcing” (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 22) hierarchical social values and norms. The reflection of the youngest respondent of this study has a valid point in this regard. Gelila argues that hierarchy is maintained not only by those who are assuming high status but by those who are considered as having low status too. Based on factors such as education, wealth and social position people think that some are superior to them or they consider themselves as inferior.

If they are not educated, they think educated people are better than them, poor people think that rich people are superior to them. This is true with ethnic background too. On the other side also, there are those who live with an attitude that ‘you are not equal to us’. (Gelila, in-depth interview,29.05.20).

Such normative interactive communication of individuals as a group (norm circles) based on their shared belief on certain social norms has influencing power to sustain social structures. Moreover, a change in those interactions and communications might have resulted in “producing different beliefs, the normative environment itself could be-would be- constructed differently.” (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 33).

The idea of freedom of speech and democracy has been talked about for a long time in Ethiopia. These ideas were championed by different social groups including political systems. There were unsuccessful attempts towards democracy by different political systems in Ethiopia as well as social movements that challenges those political systems in demanding freedom of speech and other political rights (see 2.2.4 & 2.3). But the question here is: what values were guiding the communication between those groups who claim to champion freedom of speech and democracy?

As discussed in 2.2 the political system of the early 20th century was instrumental in introducing modern ideas including the press as it become increasingly influenced by Western civilisation. However, the idea of freedom of speech and individual liberty was never in the agenda. The aristocratic leader, emperor Haile Selassie I, despite his passion for modernisation and development, was reluctant to embrace the notion of liberty through acknowledging individuals right to freedom of expression, equal rights of different ethnic and religious groups, and he was especially strongly against the formation of any political parties throughout his reign. (Henze, 2000, p. 259).

Neither was the communication between the various social groups of the 1960s and 70s in Ethiopia who claimed to champion modern ideas based on the values of freedom of speech. As observed by Levine (1972[1965]), despite the zeal of the intellectual groups to bring about socio-political change, there were no activities such as discussion forums facilitating the flourishing of modern ideas. He relates this gap to the hierarchical social relations that valued “rank rather than human qualities” (Levine, (1972[1965], p.284) as one of inhibiting factors.

Moreover, the assertion of self-interest through claiming superiority attached to merit to power took precedence over the will to find a common ground for the same cause among political groups since the 1970s. For example, the intellectual group who

swiftly shifted their ideology from liberal democracy to socialism in the early 1970s, could not agree to work together with the military socialist regime who took power after overthrowing the monarchy in 1974. One of the reasons was their claim of superiority over the military group regarding their knowledge of Marxist theory and their subsequent assertion that they are “much more qualified to lead Ethiopia than the junta of military officers” (Lewis, 2016, p. 32). And the fallout caused “the most savage outburst of violence known in recent Ethiopian history” (1995, p. 144).

The demand for freedom of speech after the 1990s in Ethiopia was spearheaded by journalists, mainly those attached to the privately-owned newspapers. However, the communication among journalists were not directed towards finding a common ground to establish a collective identity based on their journalistic work. It seems they were rather focusing on what makes them different from one another such as journalists working for private versus state-owned media outlets. Within the same media ownership as well, there are differences as some claim being more against the government than the others (see section 2.3). Behind all this division there is an element of asserting ones’ interest and a feeling of superiority. Calling those with different background names based on ethnicity, gender or other factors, and justifying ones’ superiority by belittling them is contrary to the values of freedom of speech: recognising others as equal and the will to find a common ground for a common goal. It is rather an indicator of continuing the discourse of superiority through the division on the bases of we are better than them.

Moreover, the findings presented in section 4.2 regarding work environment, the news room was referred to as mirroring the house, which means existence of hierarchy and domination based on age, gender, ethnicity, education, and economic status. This societal norm cannot exist by itself but in the minds of the people who are then maintaining it (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 49) through playing their part as they strive to keep a superior position over others.

In conclusion, how can this change? During the in-depth interviews, respondents were asked how the challenge on the practice of journalism and freedom of speech in Ethiopia in relation to the socio-cultural assumption can change. Diverse opinions

were forwarded. There are some who look at the home situation and their role in it. That is by minding the way they are raising their children, avoiding the same way as they experienced being silenced and by secrecy. But regarding their role as a journalist, only three journalists say they need to be aware of the socio-economic status of the society and what they could do to enlighten the society with different societal values than hierarchy and domination. The majority (including those three) are of the opinion that the socio-cultural effect will change when the political system becomes democratic. And the journalists' role is to make sure this process will take fast through challenging governments as they are doing now.

But this research argues that socio-cultural assumptions, particularly the hierarchical attitude and practice need to be challenged in the same way and passion as the political domination. Society's interference on the development of individuality has the same tendency of undermining freedom and liberty of individuals, which in return limits society's capacity to innovate and develop. Loyalty to society should be done through defending it from any power that deprives it of its freedom including its' own socio-cultural assumptions. It is high time for journalists and others who have a stake in the discourse of freedom of speech in Ethiopia to look above and beyond the fear of criticising socio-cultural traits.

This study addresses the views and experiences of ten journalists, thus, shows limited results regarding the influence of socio-cultural assumptions in the practice of journalism and freedom of speech in Ethiopia. However, it touches upon a little discussed issue and provides relevant insights, which are in line with its research objectives. It also shows the need to conduct further and extensive researches in order to fully understand the challenges of the practice of freedom of speech and the media in Ethiopia from the socio-cultural point of view.

Appendix I- Interview guide

Part I-Personal data

- Name: _____
- Age: _____
- Gender: _____
- Educational level: _____
- Current place of residence: _____
- Journalistic work experience: _____

Part-II -Socialisation in Ethiopian societies

Making sense of the societal norms and values that the journalists have been socialised into in relation to their journalistic work?

- What is your experience in relation to hierarchy and status both at home and in the work place? Can you give concrete examples?
- How in your view or experience does age, gender, upbringing, religion, position in the newsroom relate to hierarchy and status? Can you give concrete examples?
- How in your view does socio-cultural assumptions influence your journalistic work?
- How do you see the societal values and norms you have been socialized into in terms of giving you the space to develop the skills to question, challenge, expressing your thoughts and ideas freely starting from childhood home to workplace?
- How do you come to be a journalist?
- Which media were you working for?

Part III- on the practice of freedom of speech in Ethiopia

Understanding the contribution of socio-cultural assumptions of Ethiopian societies to the practice of freedom of speech.

- How do you see the societal values and norms you have been socialized into in terms of giving you the space to develop the skills to question, challenge, expressing your thoughts and ideas freely starting from childhood home to workplace?
- How in your view does socio-cultural assumptions influence the practice of freedom of speech in Ethiopia?
- How do you see your contribution in the promotion of the values of freedom of speech?
- Do you think the challenge caused by socio-cultural assumptions on the practice of journalism and freedom of speech will change? what factors can contribute to this change?

Appendix II- list of research participants

No	Pseudonyms	Education	Type of media	Years of experience	Status	Current place of residence
1	Maraki	Diploma in journalism and communication MA in health management	Privately-owned News paper	4 years	page editor	USA
2	Kidest	Diploma in language and literature MA in admin and finance	Radio, privately owned newspapers	14 years	reporter, columnist	USA
3	Belay	BA in language and literature	Privately owned newspapers	16 years	editor-in-chief	UK
4	Zab	BSc in biology	Television	4 years	Senior Tv programs producer	Sweden
5	Debab	BA in language and literature MA in journalism and communication	Radio	9 years	Senior radio programs producer	Ethiopia
6	Lydia	Diploma in journalism MA in Journalism and communication	Radio, Newspaper (both state and privately-owned)	12 years	Radio program producer	USA
7	Adam	BSc in information science	Privately-owned newspaper	8 years	Editor in chief	Ethiopia
8	Hunegnaw	BSc in information science	Privately-owned newspaper	8 years	Columnist	Ethiopia
9	Gelila	BA in English language and literature	Privately owned newspaper	3 years	Reporter	Ethiopia
10	Kemal	BA language and literature MA in documentary production	Television	22 years	Private media owner (TV and Radio documentaries production house)	Ethiopia

Appendix III-Analysis framework

Respondents	1st order category	2nd order category	Domaine
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	the root of authoritarianism, a domination of one person, sameness is the norm, no room for dialogue, shame to compromise, my idea is the best and you have to follow it, individuality at stake (domination on one's thinking and choice in life), encouraging dependency of women, conformity or rejection-alien to indifference, source of inequality through the assignment of superior/inferior status, conflicting values (individual freedom as a taboo vs rebelling against the establishment makes one hero), the birth place of fear, confusion, manipulation, lie, anger, and rebelling.	A. The home	Domain I: A/ understanding socio-cultural values and norms B/ the role of those socio-cultural assumptions in shaping journalism practice.
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	Exclusion, being silenced, secrecy, left in the dark, no chance to involve in dialogue, not taken seriously or good enough, complacency to domination	B. What does a child know?	
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Seniority as a license to dominate juniors, being disregarded or not taken seriously due to gender and age (being female and/ or young), undermining the capacity/strength of women. superiors assuming paternal supervision, conformity to tradition and safeguarding the dominant culture/thinking/discourse, no space for plurality of ideas, individuality at stake, difference in privilege based on age, gender, ethnicity, education, network, closeness to authorities, seniority, and political affiliation.	C. hierarchy at work place: mirroring the home	
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	fearful, lack of confidence and self-doubt, fear to express one's idea, fear to challenge authorities, less sensitivity regarding access to information, going extra miles to proving oneself, fear of the consequences of one's action, unable to stand for one's truth	D. The fear factor	
2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10	Sameness is preferred over individuality, no room for differences, absence of negotiation and dialogue, hierarchy and domination, pressure to confirm	A. The home effect (the impact of being silenced, secrecy and not taken seriously)	Domain II: the contribution of socio-cultural assumptions on the practice of freedom of speech

2	But never perceive socio-cultural aspect as a significant problem before	B. on the significance of the influence of socio-cultural assumptions	
1,3,6,7,8,10	have negative effect but not as bad as the influence of the political system		
4,5,9	It is significant and media has to play a role to change those values		
1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	absence of trust with each other among journalists, unwillingness to recognize one another- ego hindering working together, absence of negotiation, the culture of enmity between political parties reflected in the media, perceiving others as a threat, viewing only the right not the duty aspect of freedom	C. Journalists are not exceptional: (failure to build a collective identity)	
1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Self-empowerment, self-assertion, standing for one's truth, a tool to fighting injustice, a way to equality and socio-political change, voice to the voiceless, out of respect for human beings, trust on good intentions of human nature, individual birth right with core values of liberty, equality, coexistence, a corner stone for democratic culture, a sign of social development, starts at home.		D. why freedom of speech?
3,6,7,8	we challenged the political system and create awareness on others that it is possible to do it.	E-my contribution	
8	I wrote an article about the negative influence of feudal culture on individual freedom		
10	At home I am conscious about raising my children in equality and with freedom (to change the tradition), and I am promoting minority voices (that of the Muslims society) in the media.		
4	I was making sure to avoid presentations that shows partiality		
2, 5	Promoting media plurality through making sure the voice of women and children are heard		
1, 6	could have done more: by being a voice to the public, for journalists who were facing pressure from the government		

1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10	through keeping the political system in check, struggle with the government, individual liberalism is the way, cultural revolution.	F-How can this change?	
2, 5, 6, 8, 10	A change in traditional values and norms focusing on the tradition of child upbringing		
2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10	Mass awakening through the expansion of mass literacy, enlighten the public with modern ideas using the media		
4,6,8	Journalists need to be more aware of the socio-cultural aspects and their influences		
7	economic growth and modern way of life-urbanization		

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