

# Ethiopia's Media & Perpetual Political Change : Search for framework during a transition



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## Presentation Content



**Background**



**Indicators from  
Hierarchy of  
Influences**



**Indicators from  
four dimensions  
of variation**



**Transitional  
Journalism?**





## The imperial (1900-1974)

- Beginning of 20th C. - first News Paper in Ethiopian script and Language
- By the elites and to the elites - illiteracy
- Other languages predate
- The 1935 Occupation
  - Arm of propaganda by Italians – radio and News Papers- against the liberation movements
  - Liberation forces
    - using newspapers *Bandirachin*- as a counter propaganda
    - Destroying the radio infrastructure
- After liberation
  - Press products some still in circulation
  - The ENA- wire service -1943
  - Radio resumed
  - TV with OAU- 1963
- Institutionalised control and monitoring of the media via Press & Information Bureau



## The Military (1974-1991)

- Enjoyed freedom at the beginning
  - Citizens freely expressing opinion via media and among themselves
- 1975 decree
  - Press related activities to be by the government
  - Nationalized all including postal and telecom businesses
  - All media outlets under the Press Division of the MOI
  - Government's organ
- Expulsion of former journalists





## **EPRDF** Pseudo-plural (1991-2018)

- A plan of nation building based on ethnic identity- 9 regions + 2- the nation has over 80
  - their own constitution, police force, choose own working language, full rights to self-determination including the right to secede from the federation
  - devolving of state power to newly designed regions along ethno-linguistic lines but not that significant when it comes to the media until recently
- For the first time in 1992 adopted a media law that officially banned censorship in the country- media space opening
  - took steps of firing most of the journalists from the preceding regime and employed new ones
    - Founders of the private press
  - 270 newspapers and 121 magazines in circulation during the first two years of the transition (1991-1993)



## **EPRDF** Pseudo-plural (1991-2018)

- The relation between the private media and the government antagonistic for the whole period of EPRDF's leadership
  - Government using the press law to threaten journalists
- 2005 Elections
  - Another wave of media freedom & vibrance
    - Cut short after controversial election results
      - Crackdown on journalists- prison and fleeing
      - Anti-terrorism law -
- Private involvement only for print
  - 13 years after – Radio- 2006
  - 23 years after Television- 2016





## EPRDF Pseudo-plural (1991-2018)

- Regional state owned media houses
  - Under the guidance of the center
  - Using TV infrastructure from the center since 2005
  - Eventually started to own studio and transmission
  - Emulating the federal media institutions – content & structure
  - Running & circulation of private papers (**never**)
- Introduction of the internet
  - 2000 provision to individuals
  - Stringent control- monopoly
- laws – Anti-terrorism law
- Fleeing Journalists + audience to the outside
  - 163 until 2016
  - VOA, DW and diaspora media outlets via net



## The Incumbent – post 2018

- Liberalization of media
  - Freeing of journalists
  - Diaspora media moved in – as is the case with dissidents
  - New media outlets in all sectors
  - Audiences repatriation
- Ethnic based media
- Polarization along ethnic lines





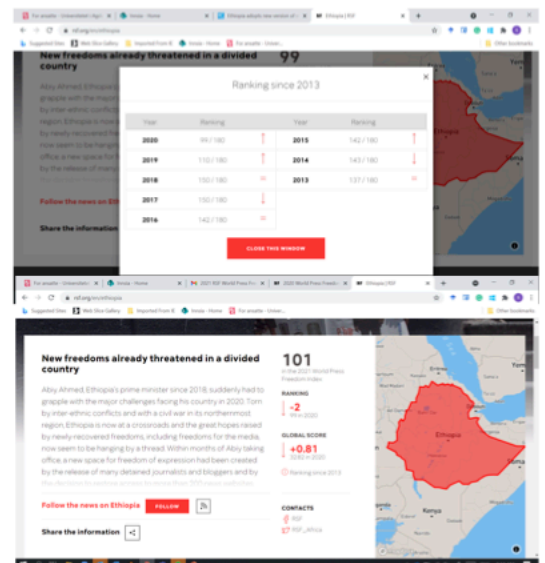
## The Incumbent – post 2018

- The media predominantly is ethnic affiliated though the degree of manifestation varies :
  - Ethnicized openly
    - Private / group
  - Pan-Ethiopian
    - private/group
  - Federal government
    - Public?
  - Regional Government



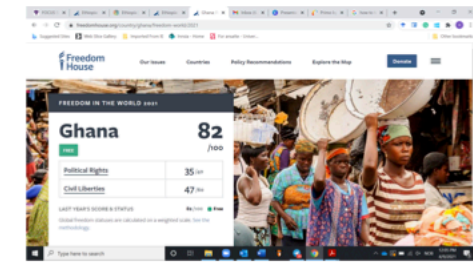
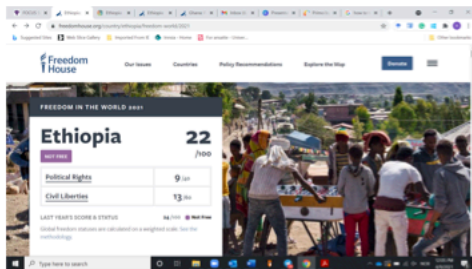
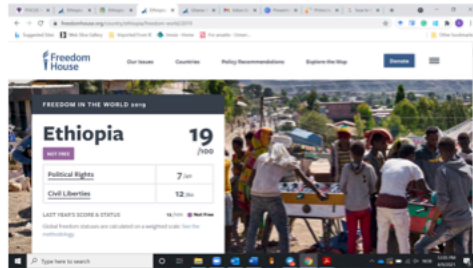
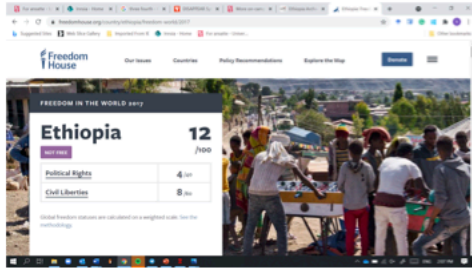
## The Incumbent – post 2018

- Media policy given priority- august 2020- ‘ensure national policy and values’
- But the hate speech & Disinformation law came out fast
- Media law reform has been lagging behind – in February parliament approved the new media law
  - Decriminalization of defamation
- Access to information (ATI) law still not on table
- Anti-terror law revised →
  - ‘encouraging terrorism’ → ‘incitement’
- 





## The Post-2018- what is New?



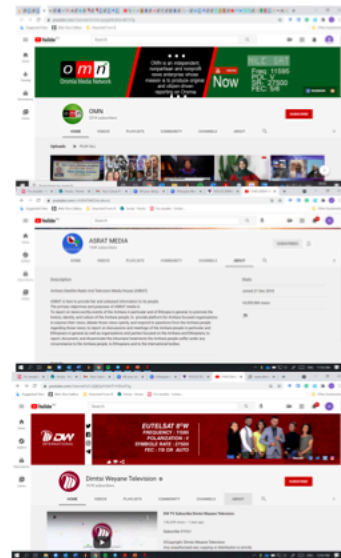
## Post-2018- what is perpetuating?

- Federal state media outlets still under the state/party
- Monopoly of telecom- sole provider of internet
- Internet shutdowns- Access Now 2019 report among the top six worst internet shutdown offenders
- Incidents of attack and detention of journalists
- budding of exile journalism- ethnicity
  - So, a repeat of transition period media freedom trends?

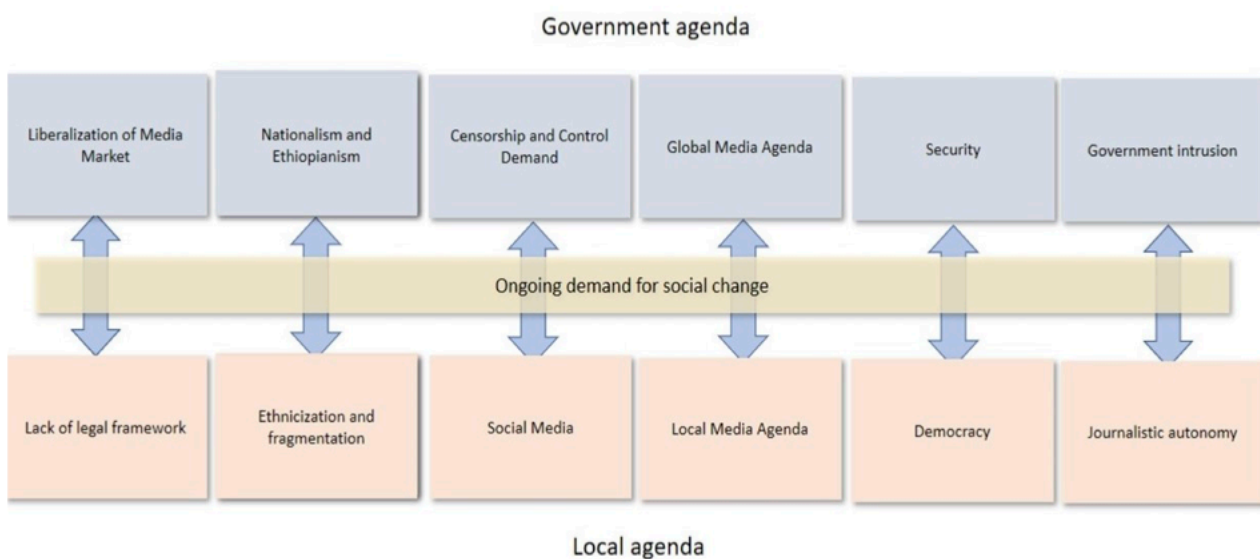


## Ethnification of media at home and abroad

- Flourishing of ethnic-based media at the beginning
- Declaration of media's stand/affiliation
- Is vanishing/dwindling of ethnic-based media outlets
  - a self-withdrawal or
  - a dismissal?
- How is the position of the regional media outlets?

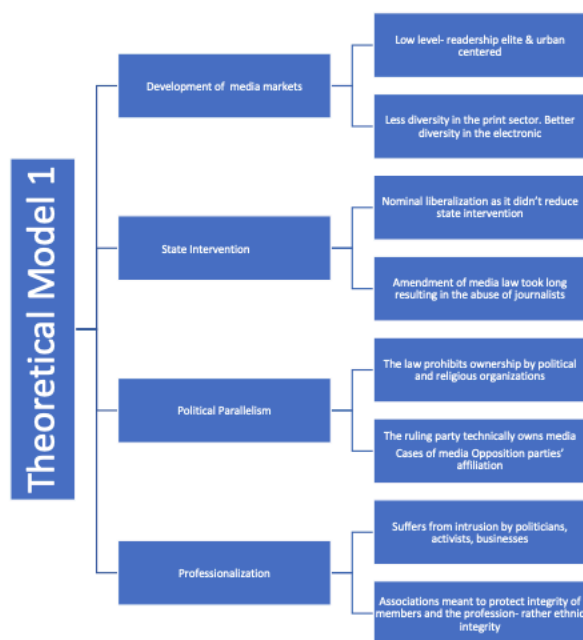
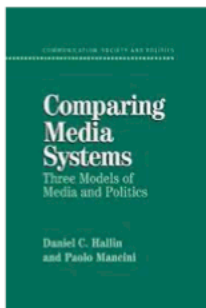


## Host of influences into the Ethiopian Media system



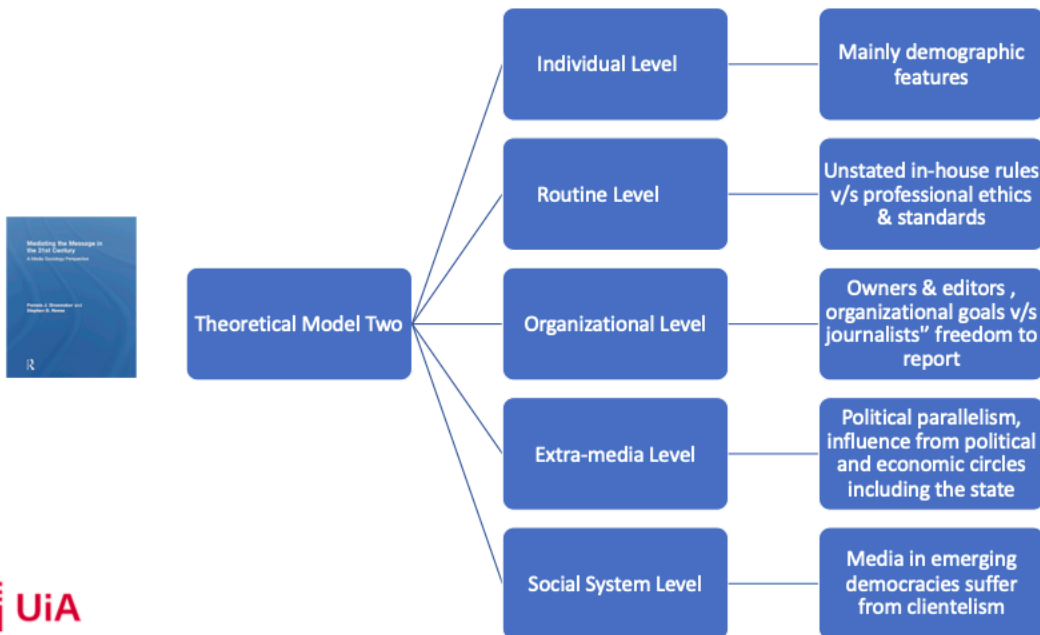
## Situating in a established model? Does it work?

## Studying current media trends/systems : A proposition





## Studying current media trends/systems : A proposition



## Does transitional Journalism explain the current Ethiopian media ?

- We have here (UiA) authorities in the study of transitional journalism. The study is more pertinent when
  - It refers to journalism that looks through the lenses of transitional justice
  - Investigating the role of journalism in post-conflict or transitional environment
- One of their studies found out that journalists attach higher value to promoting tolerance and cultural diversity
- The two issues missing in the Ethiopian situation
- <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/10-conflicts-watch-2021>

## Concluding Notes

- Relevance/inapplicability of frameworks in non-western settings a given reality. The need to cautiously look into the
- Political changes have strong impact on the media system as a result of the historical legacy of the media as a loyal servant to succeeding states
- The latest political reform
  - A repeat of transition period media freedom trends?
- We are in a transition where we see an unprecedented birth, expansion, demise and migration of local media owing to complex opportunities and challenges
- Why only the media is migrating so far?

