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*The Essence of Accountability*  
And An Examination of The Practices of Ethiopian Television Newsroom

BY  
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THE ESSENCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY:  
AND AN EXAMINATION OF THE PRACTICES OF  
ETHIOPIAN TELEVISION NEWSROOM

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I, Daniel Bekele Yigzaw, hereby declare that this work has not previously been submitted for any requirements in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Declared by:

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Daniel Bekele Yigzaw

Date: ----- July, 2008

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines whether Ethiopian Television's current system of accountability encourages the ethical practice of journalism. It explores newsroom practices by highlighting journalism as a profession and examining journalistic ethical standards in general and journalistic responsibility and accountability in specific. It evaluates ETV's editorial policy, noting to whom its journalists are accountable, examining gaps between newsroom policy and practices regarding accountability and gauging whether editorial policy encourages accountability. This study also reveals the newsroom's institutional accountability rather than the journalists' individual values. It also documents ETV shortfalls and omissions regarding accountability and suggests newsroom procedures to encourage it.

# CHAPTER ONE

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Ethiopian Television, founded in 1965, is Ethiopia's only television station. Owned and run by the government as a *de facto* monopoly, ETV aims to inform, educate and entertain its audiences (Establishment Proclamation No. 114/1995). It currently broadcasts from noon to midnight each weekday and from 8 a.m. to midnight each weekend. ETV's main output is news, but its programs also include information, education and entertainment in Amharic, English, Oromiffa, Tigringa and Somali. Its broadcasts currently reach about half of the country's geographical area (Ethiopian Television's Strategic Plan for 2004-2007)

All Ethiopian media – print and broadcast, whether owned privately or by the state – outline their basic daily practices in an editorial policy. Other state-owned media – Ethiopian Radio, Ethiopian Television Agency, Ethiopian News Agency, Ethiopian Press Agency – rely on a comprehensive editorial policy that includes a code of conduct and a statement of ethical principles. So does ETV. Encouraging ethical journalism is one of the aims of ETV's editorial policy. Sparrow (1960) says that “such institutional codes give journalists a sense of support and prescription for their duties” (1960:131) David and Mitchell (1992) note that a “concern for ethical behaviour is the starting point of good journalism.” And accountability, according to Forbes (2005), is one of journalism's basic ethical principles (2005:47).

The booklet with ETV's editorial policy makes limited reference to “accountability.” The preamble (2005) states only that “the newsroom is accountable for its practices and should receive and handle public complaints properly” (2005:71). In view of this, this research aims to probe ETVs notion of accountability and how it is implemented.

## 1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Over the decades, despite changes of rulers and ruling philosophies, Ethiopia's only television station has always been owned and operated by the state. This monopoly has, no doubt, affected how and what various stakeholders think about the station's credibility, trustworthiness, responsibility and accountability.

This thesis will examine how ETV's journalists themselves understand and practice accountability: Who is accountable to whom? What are they accountable for? To whom are they accountable: the owner (the government), the station (the media organization that employs them), the viewers (the public at large) or to the profession (themselves and their colleagues)?

As a public entity, ETV has an obligation to serve the public. One theory regarding news practice is that of social responsibility, which evolved in the United States as a result of the William Hutchins Commission in 1947. This theory suggests that journalists must be responsible—accountable—to their audience and to the public at large (A Free and Responsible Press, 1947). The theory, evolved in a democratic setting that protects freedom of the press, suggests that media, as a consequence of their privileged position, should protect the rights of its citizens – even against government abuse, if necessary. The theory also says that media have the responsibility to evaluate their content and its impact on society (1947:18-19).

Any discussion of global media must focus on, at minimum, two themes: freedom and responsibility. A free and independent press is of great importance and essential to proper journalism and progressive and vital society. In many countries, the four theories concept is well entrenched: the authoritarian, the libertarian, the Soviet and social responsibility theories proposed by the Hutchins Commission in 1947. The commission on freedom of the press, which formulated the social responsibility theory, called the media to provide:

- Information,
- Truth,

- Accuracy,
- Objectivity, and
- Balance.

Social responsibility's goal is for media to provide "a reflection of diversity of society as well as access to various points of view" (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956:93).

The "social responsibility theory," set out as one of the 'four theories of the press' (later expanded by Dennis McQuail) and incorporated into the practice of "normative journalism" in most democratic countries. This describes what role journalism "ought to play" (1997:515) in a democratic society – or it could be viewed as a point of view – stand (norm) from which to critique media practice anywhere in the world in the world, including Ethiopia, regardless of the kind of rule. Self-regulation is part of the social responsibility approach to news because it is based on the (liberal) premise that government intervention will restrain the media. Rather, the media must behave as a "fourth estate," maintaining independence from the state. The idea of "professionalism" in journalism allows journalists to argue for their independence, noting how they are governed by their own codes of practice (in what is called professional practice) and they do not need the government to regulate them. The social responsibility theory supports both developmental and public journalism. However, even that framework expresses "dissatisfaction with the interpretation of functions by some media owners and operators and with the way the press has carried them out" (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956, 74).

So the social responsibility theory is a possible basis for encouraging ethical journalism since it emphasizes how journalists must be responsible to their audience and to the public at large (A free and responsible press, 1947). The theory identifies media institutions with goals to safeguard citizens "rights." The theory says that media have the responsibility to evaluate content presented to the public and its impact and repercussions on society (1947, 18-19). Additionally, the same theory emphasizes the responsibility of journalists and suggests that responsibility is related to accountability.

To this end, Bertrand suggests that “placing mechanisms to promote media accountability is different from journalistic censorship and self-censorship, considering censorship as prohibition and self-censorship an omission” (1997:143). In light of this view, this research attempts to examine what factors are at play when it comes to ensuring accountability in ETV’s newsroom. Although censorship is prohibited by law (Article 3, Ethiopian Press Law; 1992:31) and by the constitution in Ethiopia, the practices of ETV’s newsroom need to be investigated whether the newsroom practices the anti-censorship notion of the law and constitution of the nation.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This research raises the following questions:

- Does the ETV’s current system of accountability encourage ethical journalism?
- Does the editorial policy identify to whom the journalists and the newsroom are accountable?
- Are there the gaps between the editorial policy and practices of the newsroom with regard to accountability? If so, what are they?
- To what extent does ETV’s editorial policy encourage ethical journalism with regards to accountability?

### **1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

#### **1.4.1 GENERAL ONJECTIVE**

This research examines the perceptions and attitudes of ETV’s newsroom and journalists regarding accountability.

## **1.4.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

This research explores these newsroom issues:

- Has ETV established any mechanism to ensure accountability?
- What, if anything, prevents ETV journalists from being accountability?

## **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The research will potentially have the following impact:

- To make ETV aware that it may be accountable to viewers and the public at large.
- To encourage ETV to abide by those standards that, in practice, it holds others.
- To enable ETV to establish a system that invites dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
- To serve as a source for further studies.

This chapter has drawn general and specific objectives. Finally it has mentioned how significant the study could be. The following chapter presents the review of related literature.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **2.1 Journalism as profession**

Almost all journalists claim journalism is a profession, and indeed one of the most public of professions. At least five criteria are often cited to distinguish professions such as medicine and law. Two are relevant for purposes of this study: “the acceptance of ethical standards higher than those expected of other members of society... (and) ... the monitoring and enforcement of ethical standards” (Stichler 1992:40). Though the idea of professionalism in journalism can be vague and contradictory (Meadows, 2001a:73), journalists will likely agree that “being a member of any profession commits one to ethical obligations that are different than those that apply to non-professionals.” Allison (1986:15) and others will likely see journalists as professionals if society sees the media profession as indispensable. As Allison suggests, journalism has a chance of being accepted as a profession if, for example, it is one “guaranteeing life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (1986:15). Allison (1986) notes that a fundamental question in professional ethics is whether professionals must follow different ethical standards and obligations than those non-professionals. According to Allison, it has been argued that being a member of a profession commits one to ethical obligations that are different from those which apply to non-professionals (1986:15).

Schultz (1998) notes how ethical standards may help to legitimize journalism:

The historical notion of the Fourth Estate has facilitated legitimization of journalism as a profession and helped journalists and media corporations to collectively resist any moves towards state regulation to encourage ethical journalism. It has helped journalism legitimize “the profession” which oversees accountability.  
(1998:22)

Schultz further notes that the journalism would benefit from the understandings that have informed other areas of professional ethics. So, too, would the wider society.

After all, not only is the ethical dimension of fundamental importance to the moral legitimacy of journalism, but also journalists and journalism continues to be of fundamental importance to contemporary life:

At the level of the city, state or nation the best of the news media is able to explain us to ourselves, highlight our shortcomings and provide the insights that enable new solutions to emerge. (Schultz, 1998:7)

The Australian Journalists Association's code of ethics(1996) notes that "the code describes the roles performed by journalists to identify what is journalism and uses implicit contractarian arguments to legitimize authority to report and provide information to society"(1996:1).

According to Schultz, the media that use their role as society's watchdog and source of "truthful" information to gain legitimacy and authority. In relation to what Schultz notes, Black (1997) says the majority of codes see the ethical journalist as a member of a professional community (1997: v).

The dominant view of journalism as a profession, bound by a commitment to social responsibilities approach to journalism ethics where individuals rely on responsibility for ethical decision-making. Professional organizations set minimum standards of conduct to encourage professional accountability. In this regard, McQuail notes that individuals' concepts of their relationship with society will affect their ethical viewpoint. Someone who views himself as an autonomous individual will view this responsibility very differently from a person who sees himself as a member of a professional or social community (1997:515).

## 2.2 Codes of Conduct/ Ethics

Public enlightenment underpins justice and democracy and the duty of the journalist is to help the public reach those goals by seeking the truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996). Conscientious journalists strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. While it is recognized that journalists should be independent and play a role in encouraging the free flow of information in society, they also have an obligation to work in the public interest (Forbes, 2005:47). The values of good journalism are generally codified in professional codes of ethics. The majority of codes see the ethical journalist as a member of a professional community (Black, 1997: v).

Grassian (1992) defines ethics as “the philosophical study of morality -- of right conduct, moral character, obligation and responsibility, social justice and the nature of the good life” (1992:3). Petrick and Quinn (1997) also emphasize the need for a systematic approach of ethics. They see ethics as “the systematic attempt to make sense of individual, group, organization, professional social market and global moral experience in such a way as to determine the desirable, prioritized ends that are pursuing, the right rules, and obligations that deserve development in life and to act accordingly” (1997:42). They add the organizational framework, seeing ethics as a “systematic attempt to make sense of moral experience to ... prioritize ends that are worth pursuing, the right rules, and obligations that ought to govern human conduct” (1997:42). And ethical concern leads the media or the media practitioner to seek the *summum bonum*, or the “highest good” in professional practice, thereby heightening self-respect and public credibility and respect (David and Mitchell, 1992: 2).

If journalists believe they have special ethical duties as professionals, then journalism as a profession would likely design and enforce codes of ethics/conduct. (This study notes that international media groups often use these terms interchangeably, while media house in Ethiopia may separate the terms.) Koehn sees professional ethics/codes as ‘an institutionalized expression of prevailing public morality’ (Koehn, 1994:150). And, to Sparrow (1960) says, “such institutional codes give journalists a sense of support and prescription for their duties” (1960:131).

Most international media organizations develop codes of ethics. To Forbes, “the values of good journalism are generally codified in professional codes of ethics, building a relationship of trust with the public at large that defines journalistic integrity and credibility (Forbes, 2005:47). Consider, for example, codes from the most prominent organizations. The Society of Professional Journalists includes the following principles in its 1996 update; “seek the truth and report it, minimize harm, be accountable, act independently.” And Forbes states that the same principles (Forbes, 2005:47) the code of the British Broadcasting Corporation, approved in 2005 that these principles as part of its editorial values and standards. And, as if to validate its own task and other similar codes. The Australian Journalists Association’s code of ethics (1996) notes how “the code describes the roles performed by journalists to identify what is journalism and uses implicit contrarian arguments to legitimize authority to report and provide information to society” (1996:1). As Sparrow (1960) says, a code helps to bring about “integrity and fair play” and ensures journalists’ role as society’s spokespersons (1960:131).

“Adherence to a code ...,” Belsey and Chadwick note, “shows a collective public commitment to acknowledged ethical principles and standards “(1995:467). In doing this, codes can serve a number of functions including

1. Protection for a number of constituencies. First, codes benefit readers or views by upholding standards of accuracy, fairness and impartiality. Second, codes protect sources by maintaining the principle of confidentiality. Third, codes can protect those in the news through provisions concerning harassment, privacy, use of discriminatory language and intrusion into those suffering grief or shock. Codes can also benefit journalists by protecting them from pressures to behave unethically. Finally, codes can protect particularly vulnerable members of society, such as children, the mentally ill and members of minority groups.
2. Education by setting out core values and principles, codes can provide an educational function for reporters and create a climate of acceptable behavior.
3. Public relations. By articulating occupational ideals and forbidding practices that have become publicly unacceptable, codes can provide useful public relations function.
4. Damage limitation. Codes can function as an exercise in damage control, warding off threats of more onerous obligations'' (1995, 467).

Chadwick and Mullaly (1997) suggest that professional rules set out in journalism's codes uphold and encourage ethical journalism (1997:17).

For Claude-Jean Bertrand (1947) the purpose of "instituting professional ethics is to keep the public trust to defend it from threats of the constituted powers and the consumers market" (1947:143).

Cambell (2004) states that, in terms of journalism, codes of practice have also reflected attempts to develop professional standards and ideas of practice such as the principles of objectivity (2004:38). Ethical practice may be treated as a way of keeping the audience interactive. If the audience is interactive there will be no protest or a problem because the mechanism gives an opportunity to have a say (Meyer, 1991: vii). Meyer notes "If there is one consistent motive in the way that the people in the news business approach ethical

problems, it is a desire to please. So ethics is treated not as a striving towards integrity, but as a public relations problem" (1991: Vii).

According to Hodges, ethics are broader than responsibility and accountability. Ethics affect how people view right and wrong, good and bad, what is responsible and the effectiveness of accountability. Responsibility and accountability are part of the ethical decision-making framework but they are not definitive of what is ethical; however they promote ethical behavior (186:14). This statement makes it clear that responsibilities principally refer to prior or established obligations and accountability to a subsequent process of measuring performance against the standard stated or implied in the obligation.

### **2.3 Media responsibility and Accountability.**

McQuail (1997) notes ,the concept of responsibility is complicated by different kinds of obligations and “alternative ways” of attributing responsibility to the media, for example, the occupational task being performed, the legal obligations, the positive tasks assigned by contractual agreements and the implied obligations through social compact (1997:515). McQuail notes that an individual’s concept of her or his relationship with society will affect her or his ethical viewpoint. Someone who views himself as an autonomous individual will view this responsibility very differently from a person who sees himself or herself as a member of a professional or social community. However, such a concept raises a question, what responsibilities do the media have?

Drawing on Hodges’ work, McQuail draws the distinction between ‘responsibility’ and ‘accountability’. Responsibility relates to the question: “what social needs should we expect journalists to respond”; accountability responds to the question “how might society call on journalists to account for their performance of the responsibility given them” (Hodges, 186:14).In line with this, Sanders (2003) says being responsible is taking charge of behavior and giving reasons for actions. If moral choices cannot be

explained, or cannot give reasons for what we do, we might be considered intellectually or morally deficient (Sanders, 2003: 150).

Despite the overlap with responsibility it is possible to offer a distinct definition of accountability, although several different paths for realizing it in practice are available. Pritchard defines media accountability: Media accountability is the process by which media organizations may be expected or obliged to render an account of their activities to their constituents” (2000:2). He adds an account is “an explanation or justification of a media worker’s or media organizations conduct” (2000:2).

While there are distinctions between responsibility and ethics (responsibility is a dimension of ethics—ethics is a broader category of behavior), there are also distinctions between responsibility and accountability. Hodges explains that responsibility is “defining proper conduct”, and accountability is concerned with “compelling proper conduct” (1986:14). According to Hodges, ethics are broader than responsibility and accountability. Ethics affect how people view right and wrong, good and bad, what is responsible and the effectiveness of accountability. Responsibility and accountability are part of the ethical decision-making framework but they are not definitive of what is ethical; however they promote ethical behavior (1986:14). This statement makes it clear that responsibilities principally refer to prior or established obligations and accountability to a subsequent process of measuring performance against the standard stated or implied in the obligation.

Forbes (2005) identifies accountability as one of the basic ethical principles (2005:47). Petrick and Quinn (1997) see ethics as “the systematic attempt to make sense of moral experience to determine the desirable, prioritize ends that are worth pursuing, the right rules, and obligations that ought to govern human conduct”( 1997:42). Journalistic ethics conflate a number of concepts. For instance, Grassian (1992) defines ethics as “the philosophical study of morality- of right conduct, moral character, obligation and responsibility, social justice and the nature of the good” (1992:3). As we see, ethics is partially defined by notions of responsibility and obligation

In elaborating the concept of accountability, McQuail suggests it can take three forms: legal, social, or moral. In other words, the media can be held legally accountable, or socially accountable, or morally accountable to their social responsibilities. He also suggests that the mechanisms of accountability can either be “liability for harm causes” or “answerability for quality of performance” (1997:519).

McQuail argues that the rationale for media accountability is not media control, but rather to secure three conditions necessary for the media to fulfill their role in a democracy: media freedom, limiting potential harm the media might cause, and promoting “positive benefits from media to society” (1997:525). And he argues that this can best be achieved by the media’s self-regulation, minimizing state intervention, and having an array of “overlapping and even conflicting forms of accountability” (1997:526).

Addressing accountability McQuail (2004) notes:

The question is intended to cover the content of possible obligations in general terms. The issue on which the media might be called to account can be considered as having a more private or more public character. But there is another dimension, which relates to their positive or negative character. The media are expected both to provide certain benefits for society, and also to avoid various kinds of harm that are not always the reverse of the benefits. It is the public and collective issue according to which media may be called to account that are most relevant” (2004:9-10).

Retief, J. (2002) says media have such enormous influence practicing journalism responsibly and accountably is important. Media acting irresponsibly means:

- People are unnecessarily harmed
- Media lose credibility
- Media diminish their vital role as watchdog.
- Democracy suffers. (2002, 5)

With this regard, media organizations should be responsible, and journalists should be accountable. According to Hamelinic (1995), responsibility refers to professional attitudes towards colleagues, sources and clients. It also assumes that media institutions

and their practitioners will be accountable for their actions and decisions. (1995:449). Sanders (2003) also says being responsible is taking charge of behavior and giving reasons for actions (Sanders, 2003:150). But, as McQuail (1997) notes, the concept of responsibility is complicated by different kinds of obligations and “alternative ways” of attributing responsibility to the media; for example, the occupational tasks being performed, the legal obligations, the positive tasks assigned by contractual agreements and the implied obligations through social compact (1997:515). McQuail defines such obligations as “either assigned, contracted, self-imposed or denied” (1997:519). Sanders (2003) seems to agree that journalists should be responsible and therefore be accountable, (2003:150). But, to Hodges (1986) “responsibility has to do with defining proper conduct; accountability with compelling it” (Hodges 1986:14).

Despite a philosophical overlap with responsibility, accountability can be distinctly defined. To Pritchard, media accountability is “the process by which media organizations may be expected or obliged to render an account of their activities to their constituents” (2000:2). Such an account is “an explanation or justification of a media worker’s or a media organizations conduct” (2000:2). To Bertrand, media accountability is “a non-governmental means of inducing media, and journalists to respect the ethical rules set by the profession” (1996, 67).

Identifying exactly to whom journalists must account can also be tricky. Pritchard (2001) suggests media organizations may be expected or obliged to render an account of their activities to their constituents (2001:2). To Frost (2000), however, “Journalists’ obligation to choose how they perform their duty may depend on whom they feels most loyalty towards: viewers, readers, employees” (2000:61). As McQuail notes, “the lines of accountability can have different strengths and directions in different cases. ... It is these public and collective issues according to which media may be called to account that are most relevant. This varies according to the medium, but all media may depend on their audiences, their owners, shareholders and, major clients. (2004:10). As Carey (1987) explains, journalists “do not enjoy anything like the doctor-patient or lawyer-client relationship with members of the public as represented by their sources or their

audience. While journalists might respond that their clients are the public, this concept is not as vividly particular as a person in trouble: a defendant in the dock, a patient on the operating table, a sinner in morale confusion” (Carey, 1987:46). In fact, “the public is not part of the working culture of a journalist; someone is out there, unidentified, someone who shows up in a letter to the editor, who may even call once or twice, but is not the vivid, continuous, understandable presence that the client is to the other profession. (Carey, 1987:46). Many media analysts say a journalist’s accountability ideally extends beyond the public. To Chadwick and Mullaly (1997), journalists should be substantially autonomous agents, accountable to themselves, rather than to the state or economic institutions that support them (1997:17).

Pritchard (2002:2) suggests practical ways for media to be accountable;

- Providing information, reporting about performance and publishing audience research;
- Making voluntary responses to claims and complaints, in the form of apologies or explanations;
- Following formal processes of self-regulation, involving some independent adjudication;
- Involving legal action in the courts;
- Submitting to the judgment of the market, at the hands of audience or advertisers and public review, criticism and debate.

To these, Bertand adds using evaluation, monitoring, education, feedback and communication are means of exercising accountability. He suggests in-house ombudsman, external fact-checking organization and letters-to-the-editor page. All these, he says, will media institutions to nurture the culture of accountability. (1996, 67)

Some international media organizations codify the practice of accountability. For example, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) states in its editorial policy:

- We are free from obligation to any interest group and committed to the public's right to know.
- We foster open dialogue with our views and listeners, as we are accountable to the public for our reports.
- The SABC strives to deal professionals prompt and effectively with policy and program queries (SABC, 2004)

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) follows strict enforcement procedures. For example, BBC editorial guidelines (2005) note that BBC is “accountable to its audience, admits mistakes and encourages a culture of willingness to learn from them” (2005:158). Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) suggests that media:

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
- Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others. (SPJ, 1996)

Almost any of the means of accountability, McQuail says, may have a controlling effect although accountability is clearly not the same as control. Unlike control, accountability takes place after the event. But anticipation of accountability may potentially inhibit action and thus be designed as a method of control. However, accountability does not necessarily diminish the freedom of a journalist (2004:26). McQuail (2004:26-27). McQuail insists that the rationale for media accountability is not media control, but rather fulfillment of the media’s role in a democracy, limiting potential harm the media might cause, and promoting “positive benefits from media to society” (1997:525). This, he says, can best be achieved by media self-regulation, minimizing state intervention and encouraging “overlapping and even conflicting forms of accountability” (1997:526).

McQuail suggests that accountability is important “to maintain order and security, respect public moral, advance cultural quality, serve needs of government and the justice system, provide “public sphere” benefits, and uphold human rights and international obligations. (2004:10)

## **2.4 ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THEORY**

Mason (2000, 3) relates accountability to the social responsibility theory. That theory, he says, “gives rise to concepts such as public good, public interest, and public accountability. Journalism derives legitimacy from the implied contract to perform journalism with a sense of responsibility; hence, a responsible journalist must be accountable” (Mason 2000:3). Limitations on journalistic freedom, he says, are justified to ensure public accountability because there is “an implied contract between the public and the media evidenced by the existence of special privileges conveyed to the media” (Mason 2000:3). He explains that “a society dependent upon the media for its information will demand a degree of accountability from its practices far beyond the minimum requirements” (Mason 2000:3).

The “Social responsibility theory” is one of the ‘four theories of the press’ and incorporated to the practices of journalists. The theory describes what should be the role of journalists regarding to the society and self-regulation falls to the scope of the social responsibility approach. The social responsibility model involved a number of ways in which the state could attempt to play a role in attempting to ensure that newsroom fulfilled their social obligations. Whilst at the same time trying to retain the independence of journalists and freedom of speech, one response has been to draw up codes of practice. The theory has a major premise: freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press, which enjoys a privileged position..., is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society.

The six functions are:

1. Serving the political system by providing information, discussion and debate on public affairs.
2. Enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self-government.
3. Safeguarding the rights of the individual by serving as a watchdog against government.
4. Servicing the economic system primarily by bringing together the buyers and sellers of goods and services through the medium of advertising.
5. Providing entertainment.
6. Maintaining its own financial self sufficiency so as to be free from the pressures of special interests.

The social responsibility theory asserts that the press has been deficient in performing the first three tasks. It also says that the fourth should not take “precedence over such other functions as promoting the democratic processes or enlightening the public”- something that both developmental journalism and public journalism would agree on. It asserts that the fifth function should relate to “good entertainment. With regard to the sixth function, it “would exempt certain individual media from having to earn their way in the market place” (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956, 74).

The social responsibility theory differs from the libertarian theory on the nature of expression as well: the latter considers this a natural right while the other considers it a moral right rather than an absolute right. Both developmental journalism and public journalism would tend to agree on freedom of expression as a moral right. However, there is a criticism in the validity of development journalism that the role of the mass media in such cases is to support authority and highlight the achievements of the government, and not to challenge or criticize it, because alternative to a stable government would be chaos (Hatchin, 1987). With regard to this, Tartarian (1978) notes that, the problem is not with the utilization of communication for the purpose of development, but, rather, with the control of the mass media by government by the name of development. The justification offered for government intervention and control of the

mass media, that many young nations are not yet strong enough to withstand the controversy and confrontations produced by a free media (1978: 215).

As members of society, journalists have assumed position of power by being conduits of information and they facilitate public participation at a civic and political level. Technological and social developments mean that public participation has changed from interactive to a mediated participation. The public has no real control over the media agenda, because journalists identify what they want (Schultz, 1998:156). This consideration emphasizes that journalists and their media organizations should be accountable. However, the type of accountability should encourage ethical Journalism.

Gillmor (2002) identifies accountability with the very existence of the media, with the ultimate accountability to the public. For him, he notes, if media are not accountable, they will die; however, if they are accountable, they will survive (Gillmor, 2002:7). This is ultimate accountability, he says, "in harmony with the spirit of individualism, democracy and freedom" (Gillmor, 2002:5).

Media's role as society's watchdog, exposing corruption and ill-doings for the public good, raises the question of how sound the media's own practices are. Indeed, their all pervasiveness and apparent power have placed the spotlight on the journalists themselves (O'Neill, 2002:167). O'Neill adds that those who act as a kind of contemporary priesthood have seemed at times to respect no higher authority than themselves, believing that they are accountable to no one (2002,167) This shows that they have power without responsibility. So, what moral codes govern the behavior of journalists in practice? Who is guarding the guardian? How do people in journalism approach ethics (Sanders, 2003: 29-30)?

Frost (2000, 26-27) states that in countries where media are strictly controlled by government, only good news about the government can be disseminated. There is no public interest defense to obtaining information in strictly controlled media and therefore, no excuse to do so (2000, 26-27). He adds that any pressure may damage citizens' ability

to have access to a wide range of views (2000:28). In order to avoid the pressure and its consequence, Sourdin (2002) says the concept of ethics has contributed to the media industry's developing a framework that relies heavily on an institutionally based self-regulatory system (2002:45).

In this regard, Kruger (2004, 12) notes that journalists should explain their work if the audience complains about their work. This can be done by handling readers' letters, published corrections and following a system of self-regulation (2004:12). Of which, Gillmor calls as voluntary self-regulatory systems (2002:5).

To sum up this chapter the following quotation is taken from the Australian Press Council (APC) Code of Ethics that states the responsibility and accountability of journalists

The Australian Press Council Code of Ethics (APC, 1991) states.

Respect for truth and the public's right to information are fundamental principles of journalism. Journalists describe society to it self. They convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give a practical form to freedom of expression. Many journalists work in private enterprise, but all have these responsibilities. They scrutinize power, but also exercise it, and should be accountable. Accountability engenders trust. Without trust, journalists do not fulfill their public responsibilities. (APC, 199:1)

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 RESEARCH METHODS**

This researcher used qualitative research methods to collect data. Kruger (2003) notes that such methods create openness and allow subjects to discuss pertinent issues, clarifying ambiguity or confusion (2003:18-19). He cites (2003) the advantages of qualitative over quantities research, noting “it certainly seems reasonable to suggest that one may have a better understanding of community members’ situation by reading a descriptive passage than just looking at demographic statistics” (2003:18-19). This researcher conducted the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion, acting as interviewer and moderator.

Based on purposive sampling, 24 reporters were selected and divided into four groups. Six editors from the Ethiopian Television newsroom were also interviewed. This sampling method helped to identify those with long and rich experience and to obtain detailed data. This researcher believes his own experience as an editor at Ethiopian Radio enabled him to use this sampling technique well. Selecting appropriate informants /interviewees presupposes that the researcher has knowledge of the situation to be researched/investigated (Flick and Steinke, Von Kardorff, 2004, 169).

#### **3.2 SAMPLING**

In qualitative research, sampling can occur at several stages, both while collecting data and while interpreting and reporting on it. The key sampling method in collecting such data is purposive or strategic sampling (Hancock, Windridge and Ockleford, 2007:21). This research employs purposive sampling a form of non-probability sampling often used to select interviewees.

Milles and Haberman (1944) say this sampling technique permits the selection of interviewees whose qualities or experience allow them an understanding of the phenomena in question and are, therefore, valuable. This is considered purposive sampling's strength (1944:224).

According to Morse (1994:228), purposive sampling helps to find those interviewees /informants who

- have available knowledge and experience that the researchers/ investigators need;
- are capable of reflection;
- are articulate;
- have time to be interviewed;
- are willing to take part in the research/ investigation.

### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION**

In-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions supplied the data. The interviewees are all editors, including one editor-in-chief, with a median nine years of journalism experience. All are graduates of tertiary institutions either with a diploma, first degree or master's degree. Among the editors, only one interviewee with diploma graduated from a journalism school. The editors did not have additional professional or ethical training. They became editors after serving at different journalistic levels. The interviews did not include women because the ETV newsroom has no female editors.

Focus group discussions were also used to collect data. Twenty-four participants were divided into four groups of six reporters each. This included eight female. The average age of the reporters is 26, with median two years of journalism experience. All are graduates of tertiary institutions with a first degree. Although most had taken some courses in journalism, they say all journalists, entering the profession, should have additional professional training that includes journalistic ethics.

As Rees notes, "Qualitative research involves broadly stated questions about human experiences and realities, studied through sustained contact with people in their natural

environments, generating rich descriptive data that helps us to understand their experiences and attitudes” (1996:375).

Focus groups and individual in-depth interviews are typically employed in qualitative inquiry. This allows a researcher to probe for more detail and ensures that participants are understanding and responding to questions as intended. Rees (1997) says the aim of qualitative research is to find out about people’s feelings, knowledge, awareness and experiences from their own point of view rather than from that of the researcher (1997:12).

### **3.4 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW**

The qualitative interview provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail. Kvale (1996) defines qualitative research interviews as “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations. The method enables the researcher to engage in dialogue, with the interviewee as the measuring instrument” (1996:21). It is not easy to conduct good qualitative research interviews. Hancock, Windridge and Ockleford (2007) note that a good interviewer needs to put an interviewee at ease, needs good listening skills and needs to be able to manage the interview situation so as to collect data that truly reflects the opinion and feeling of the interviewee concerning the chosen topic (2007:21).

The virtue of a qualitative interview is its openness. Apart from certain standard choices, this openness and the absence of a prescribed set of rules creates a variety of opportunities for the researcher. These opportunities demand more skills, knowledge and intuition from the interviewer compared to standardized social science methods (Kvale, 1996:84,105; Seidman, 1998:9-11).

The qualitative interview is flexible, dynamic non-directive, unstructured, non-standardized and open-ended. Taylor and Bogadan (1984:77) see the qualitative

interview as “repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words.” Qualitative interviews are particularly suitable for studying individuals’ understanding of their world, for describing their experiences and self-understanding, and for clarifying and elaborating their perspective of their world (Seidman, 1998:3-4). In light of this, this research attempts to explore how journalists in ETV’s newsroom understand their accountability.

### **3.5 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

A focus group is a group of interacting individuals with some common interest or characteristics brought together by a moderator who uses the group and its interaction as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990:12). Kruger (1998) defines a focus group as “a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (1998:47). This researcher believes that the method helps to gain information about the specific issue (accountability), using interaction to bring the researcher and group together and reach consensus on issues emanating from the interview.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that the group interview is essentially a qualitative data-gathering technique that finds the interviewees /moderator directing the interaction and inquiry in a structured or unstructured manner, depending on the interview's purpose.

In addition to individual qualitative interviews, the researcher also conducted four separate focus group discussions with six reporters each in the group. And the data collected will be used to corroborate outcomes of individual in-depth interviews in chapter four.

Hancock, Windridge and Ockleford (2007) note that a study using focus groups to collect data should include several groups, not just one, because any individual group is subject to internal or external factors of which the researcher may be unaware (2007:22-23). They add that the members of each group should also have something in common such as belonging to the same profession or working on the same team. In light of this, each group included six reporters. The researcher ensured that the members of the groups had similar experiences.

The researcher/moderator of the focus group discussion is expected to create a permissive and supportive environment that encourages different perceptions and points of view. The discussion was held outside of the workplace but in a place familiar enough so informants felt comfortable and relaxed. This avoided interruption and encourages participants to speak freely. Because reporters work in shifts, the discussion took place during their break time.

This method enabled the researcher to gather information on how groups of reporters think or feel about their accountability. It also enables one to evaluate existing ethical practices concerning accountability. Focus group discussion also takes advantage of group interaction, which is important to understand the group.

To conclude, this researcher used qualitative research methods (in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions) because they were helpful in investigating the topic from an insiders' point of view. The methods helped to gather data on what ETV journalists think about accountability and how they experience it.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed to be analyzed according to what media accountability is and to whom journalists are accountable with regard to actual practices of ETV's newsroom.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 DATA ANALYSIS**

The aim of self-regulation is not to encourage ethical practice, but to develop an efficient system of accountability to audiences. However, combining accountability and ethics focuses the ethical framework on rules and principles, rather than on the broader issues of reflective practice, which equips individuals with the intellectual skills to evaluate right action. This means ethics is viewed as rules to provide professional certainty and guarantee audience satisfaction. To ensure audience satisfaction, journalists should be substantially autonomous agents, while still being accountable to their public. Such a condition opts for a process of self-regulation, in which individual journalists delegate to self-regulatory bodies.

#### **Self-regulation**

The interviewees, including the newsroom's editor-in-chief, agree that ETV's newsroom partly regulates itself through, for example, that ETV has an editorial policy that sets out some rules about news selection and news programming. But the interviewees agree this does not mean that the ETV newsroom necessarily has complete enough self-regulatory mechanisms to avoid unnecessary problems. They add that the newsroom should have to do a lot of things towards self-regulation. The newsroom has a daily editorial conference, which usually focuses on what has been done that day and what was done the day before. Rather than collecting what has been done and trying to prevent possible problems, the conference focuses on day-to-day routine activities. They say it is difficult to say the newsroom is comfortably regulating itself. Except for the editor-in-chief, the editors complain that interference of the management and senior government officials makes it difficult for the newsroom to regulate itself, thereby making its independence questionable. They say that despite ETV's public service role, there is a tension in accountability and editorial independence, and this leads journalists to censor themselves.

## **Accountability**

Bertrand says journalists should know about media accountability system and widen the public exposure on their works. A responsible journalist must be accountable to the society that is dependent on media for information (1997:23). The participants of the group discussions see the profession as “the agents of accountability” (Chadwick 1996:17) in which individual journalists share common goals and values. They reflect the modern liberal view of journalism and ethics. The respondents in the group discussions define accountability as “a medium which is responsible and accountable to the public” (group four of the group discussion). They add that media should bridge the gap between the public and government by implementing their watchdog role. However, they emphasize that ETV newsroom’s is not exercising this role. According to Mason, media practitioners must be accountable to their audience (2003:3). ETV’s editorial policy notes that “all individuals must do their duty based on the editorial policy” (12005:74). But there is no other policy or code other than the editorial policy, and this limits itself only to one article about accountability and responsibility. They respondents add that the editorial policy is copied from Western media, especially from the BBC, which is difficult to implement in Ethiopia, since the condition in West is not the same as in Ethiopia. In such a sense, they believe that the editorial policy has gaps. The gap in the editorial policy sometimes creates problems that are difficult to handle properly, or discharge their responsibility for example, the freedom of the media, the existence of self regulatory bodies, etc. Concerning accountability to the public, they say ideally the newsroom is accountable to the audience. But there is no mechanism to investigate what the public interest is and how to handle its complaints. This results in the audience some times not getting proper service from the newsroom.

The respondents in the group discussion agree that the newsroom is accountable to executives or government officials rather than to the public. Most of them say that the audience is mute as a result of the newsroom’s stand on accountability. It doesn’t speak clearly at all. The respondents add that “usually government officials speak thunderously

because they feel they own the newsroom and the medium as the whole. The newsroom is a propaganda tool of the government since the station is state-owned and the journalists are state-employed.” The newsroom is not accountable to the public or to its audience. They say, in general, not only the newsroom but also the station as a whole fails to advance the free flow of news and information. As the respondents see it, the situation results in information marginalization in a globalizing world.

The editors say that the “newsroom never promotes accountability to the audience.” One interviewee adds that it is difficult to say that the newsroom is fully practicing ethically. One of the editors suggests that the newsroom gives more attention to the government than to the public or audience and that it censors itself. It is, therefore, difficult to say that the newsroom is accountable to the audience.

With regard to accountability, respondents recommend the need for an effective editorial and managerial system to ensure accountability. ETV’s newsroom should abide by a standardized editorial policy that encourages ethical practice, and the newsroom should develop a separate code of journalistic ethics. However, they emphasize that the task of accountability to the public should not left to media practitioners alone. Instead, they suggest that the government and its officials should leave the newsroom editorially independent and should themselves be accountable to the public.

## **Transparency**

Concerning transparency, respondents say that in limited cases the newsroom is transparent. It receives news tips from different sources and tries to cover stories based on those tips. However, the reporters say they are “afraid of external and internal influence.” The public does not trust the newsroom and its journalists because it considers the newsroom to be the mouthpiece of the government. According to respondents, the promise of the newsroom for informing the public has gone largely unrealized. As the result, the public believes that there is a gap between the practices of the newsroom and their expectation “serving the public”. The internal influence comes

from editors, or gatekeepers, and the reporters themselves. Reporters say journalism and journalists are not free of political affiliation or loyalty to the ruling party. Editors are selected not for capacity or experience but for loyalty to the government or for membership in the ruling party. Reporters prefer to censor themselves so that they can escape accountability by omitting controversial issues from news stories. Such actions of reporters do not promote media accountability. However, Bertrand notes, mechanisms to promote media accountability are different from journalistic censorship and self-censorship, considering censorship as prohibition\_and self-censorship as omission (1997:23).

### **Public participation/feedback**

The current ethical environment of ETV has a crack that limits public participation in ethical discussions. However, different media organizations encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media. To ensure this, media organizations institutionalize a system to organize public grievances. For instance, the BBC's editorial policy guidelines states that the "BBC uses online presence to provide proper reporting to the public on complaints we have received and actions we have taken" (2005:158).

The editors agree that ETV's newsroom collects information, comments and complaints from the public through emails, postal messages and the telephone. These are the ways that the public gives its voice. However, there is no organized mechanism to analyze and use this information to improve day-to-day activities. The editors reply that it would be very difficult to say the audience has a voice in the newsroom even if there were a mechanism for collecting information from the public or audience.

One of the editors adds that journalists describe society to itself. They convey information, ideas and opinions, and have a privileged role as they can scrutinize power. However, he questions whether ETV is exercising this role to fulfill its obligations. He notes that, according to its owners (the state and the management) ETV is exercising "developmental journalism", however, the informant contrasts ETV with the independent

press, the state-controlled media, not only ETV but also Ethiopian radio, present an unrealistically positive and sanitized version of reality. Their news is filled with achievements, real and imaginary, of whichever government is in power, sermons of government functionaries an inauguration ceremony of development projects. Unpleasant realities that project the government in a bad light are either downplayed or ignored altogether. Because of the lack of credibility, ETV failed to fully utilize the tremendous potential of its role in raising the people's awareness of serious social, environmental and development problems facing the country.

### **Difficulties journalists face as 'civil servants'**

The integration of the public media into the civil service permits the government to impose certain restrictions on state-employed journalists that hinder their effective practice of the profession. Under such conditions, not only are journalists insufficiently remunerated as civil servants in the state-owned media, but also their practice is constantly impaired by political and administrative barriers deliberately set up by government. Thus, as one of the editors says, "state-employed journalists find it difficult to reconcile the government's expectations with their professional beliefs or with the expectations of the public."

Schultz (1998) notes that the media use their role as society's watchdog and source of truthful information to gain legitimacy or authority (1998:22). To this end, the informants say ETV newsroom is not free of government influence and, as a result, editors are restricted from practicing their profession effectively. They cannot help the public hold the government accountable. The informants add that the government appoints the chairperson of ETV's board and members of the board, including its general manager and deputy-general manager. Even the editor-in chief of the newsroom is an appointment held under the control of the prime minister's office. The editor-in-chief claims that he is not an appointee even if he believes – wouldn't he know if he's a party member? that he is a member of the ruling party. According to informants, most of the members and executives of ETV have no communication background. Most informants, except the

editor-in-chief of the newsroom, say that this creates a situation in which the board and the executives of ETV might feel beholden to the government that appointed to them. The situation creates a public perception of affiliation and undermines the independence, or the perception of independence, guaranteed under the proclamation protecting the freedom of the press.

One informant says that journalists can only be accountable to the public if they enjoy independence from financial and political pressures (if they are financially strong and free from political pressure). It is not underlined often enough that they cannot enjoy that independence without the support of the public, including masses of voters and consumers. There is no way the profession can obtain public support unless it listens to viewers and unless the newsroom listens and becomes accountable to viewers.

The editor-in-chief contradicts the editors, saying that the ETV newsroom listens and raises different public issues. It also sets agendas and raises issues among the public that are open to debate via ETV. And, he says, the newsroom also helps the public to develop awareness by producing news and news analysis, interviewing government officials and giving clear responses to the public's questions. However, the editor-in-chief says that the newsroom lacks professional capacity and professional training and faces some related problems and that editors are not qualified, that managers lacks media knowledge, etc. According to the editor-in-chief the problem stops the newsroom from performing effectively. Interference from senior government officials is high and inhibits journalists from practicing their profession effectively, making it difficult to meet public expectations.

### **Mechanisms of accountability**

Media such as the British Broadcasting Corporation have an editorial unit to deal with complaints about any BBC service or product. The South African Broadcasting Corporation fosters open dialogue with viewers and listeners, making it accountable to the public. Other media provide media accountability by hiring an in-house ombudsman

or external fact-checkers or printing letters to the editor. However, informants note that the ETV newsroom has no editorial complaint unit, which is a major loophole. There is also no organized mechanism to collect complaints, even though the newsroom collects information from the public through telephone, mail and (rarely) email. However, there are no organized investigations. So, even if people send their complaints there is no analysis mechanism for a quick response, sometimes management gets the information and influences the newsroom. However, there is no as such organized mechanism.

According to informants, even if the newsroom has outlets to collect complaints from the public, it sometimes fails to announce problems. For instance, for a long time the newsroom's telephone, which is used to collect complaints and information, was not working properly, but it failed to inform the public of this. This shows negligence and irresponsibility of the newsroom.

Answerability relates to many issues and circumstances where claims or complaints are made against media. There is some difference between a model of accountability based on the idea of answerability, and one based on, liability. The former implies responsiveness to the views of all with legitimate interest in what the media do, whether as individuals affected or on behalf of society (McQuail, 2004:10). The liability model mainly arises where harm is alleged and the media are blamed for the consequence of the harm. However, the blame must come from failure of quality of content or service. In this regard; informants say that the complaint or grievance handling of ETV's newsroom is discouraging. They add that they hold out little hope that the newsroom will become more responsible and accountable. They argue that the newsroom runs its activities depending on "ones will or through officials pressure."

### **'Quality' of newsroom journalism inhibits public right to know**

Journalists should know the general interest in media accountability and widen the public exposure to correction. However, the respondents say that most of the reporters in the newsroom are hostile to media accountability, saying that it is a controlling mechanism

that limits their freedom. But some respondents deflect such hostility, saying the newsroom reporters undermine the public's right to know. Reporters consider the audience as receptive, and the newsroom has no input for its improvement. These respondents add that ETV's news stories lack research and background because it has no means of encouraging specialized or better reporting. These reporters in the newsroom call themselves "literate daily laborers" meaning that news usually come from external agencies like Ethiopian News Agency, Walta Information Centre and Regional information bureaus where "editors" distribute to reporters to read- this is the true manifestation of the newsroom and their work.

Some respondents answered directly how they correct mistakes, noting there is no way to correct mistakes unless executives or government officials take particular interest. This response complements that of the editors, which is "there is no any mechanism established to correct mistakes."

### **Media monitoring systems**

The Society of Professional Journalists, based in the United States, says journalists should clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct (1996:1). However, the informants are not confident to say that inviting dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct and explain news coverage is practical in ETV's newsroom. They add there is no such information and there is no room in the newsroom to make direct contact with the public. However, they say it is very important to the newsroom and the station at large to have a dialogue with the public. They say inviting such dialogue helps to collect information and suggestions so as to improve performance. It also ensures accountability to the public.

Journalists seem especially vulnerable to criticism and thus cautious of public discussion of their calling, in general, and their ethics, in particular. But journalists should expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media. Concerning the monitoring of their ethical practices, informants say that ETV newsroom has no system to do so. Instead the newsroom usually focuses on what the process is rather than if and how the process is

carried out ethically and professionally. Five or six years ago, they note, some articles concerning ethics were attached to the editorial policy, but they are not confident that many of the journalists know about these articles. According to the informants, there has been an effort to compile a code of ethics in the last two years; however, it still is not been published or distributed. They are afraid to say whether journalists are aware of a code of ethics. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about monitoring ethical practices of the journalists. However, sometimes issues raises ethical issues, such as rumors about bribes, accepting external accommodations and transport facilities, etc. In general, they say that ETV newsroom has no organized mechanisms to monitor ethical practices.

A media accountability system is a non-government means of inducing media and journalists to respect the ethical rules set by the profession. A typical media accountability system consists of three mechanisms: external, internal and corporative. Press councils are also part of the external mechanisms, effective instruments for mediating the public-media relationship and monitoring and providing reparation in cases of press mistakes. The existence of press council restrains possible offenders and help to make reparation for and conclude media users' complaints.

All the informants explain that they have never heard of a media accountability system in Ethiopia. The rift between private Ethiopian media and state-owned media hinders such discussions, they add. The informants also say there is no strong journalists' association and no media conference organized in Ethiopia. One informant strongly accuses the government of not encouraging the formation of press councils. A press council, he says, is potentially one of the best media accountability systems. And, he adds, a press council could help training journalists and conduct research on how media actually function, including what influence they have, what citizens need from them, etc. The government discourages the formation of press councils to limit the freedom and editorial independence of the media. The informants also note that no press law has clearly developed in the country.

The informants believe that admitting mistakes is very important and has great advantage to the newsroom. They mention the following:

- increases credibility;
- encourages ethical practices;
- enhances accountability;
- shows respect for the public;
- encourages the public to be a source;
- helps not to make the same mistake, and
- helps to learn more from mistakes made.

Participants in group discussions also say that credibility is based on accuracy and admitting mistakes. The informants note that there will be a lot of mistakes but to avoid repeating mistakes the newsroom tries to discuss them in an editorial conference. However, one of the informants complains that the newsroom gives priority to the technical mistakes rather than content ones. He adds that the newsroom never examines news critically. The editorial meeting is very weak, never acknowledging or even realizing that the consequence of mistakes is socially damaging. According to the informant, the newsroom usually relies on a one-man decision-maker: the deputy general manager. The informant recommends that to prevent mistakes, the newsroom must plan works to minimize possible mistakes or harm. It should list possible problems and find possible solutions to them in conference.

With regard to complaints handling, the informants agree that it is very weak and not bound by time. They add the newsroom has no organized complaints investigation system. But there is a swift response whenever the management or government officials interfere. Sparrow (1960) notes that encouraging ethical journalism is one of the aims of an editorial policy. He also adds one of the major aims of an editorial policy is providing ethical guidance (1960:131). However, the informants say that not even the editors, let alone the reporters, know and practice ETV's editorial policy. They add most of the editors read the editorial policy when they took the entrance exam to join as journalists. In regard to this, Elgar notes that "anyone who is working in the newsroom knows that

the code of ethics is generally put up on the wall. There is a lack of culture where it's actually talked about or discussed" (1947:43). The informants believe that there is an effort by the management to give at least an introduction to new journalists to be aware of the editorial policy. But they cannot confidently say the newsroom editors are well aware of the editorial policy of ETV.

According to informants, the newsroom has many problems. The main ones noted are:

- low-level knowledge of editors and reporters;
- weak sources of information;
- failure to keep up with the digital technology;
- lack of communication background among managers;
- lack of continuous professional training;
- lack of professional manpower, so journalists join the field without basic journalism knowledge,
- high turnover, and
- economic pressure that leads to bribe and other unethical practices.

Members of the group discussions say formal journalism training is a recent phenomenon in Ethiopia. However, they point out, limited professional experience and training are commonly identified as barriers to newsroom credibility. They add that they are poorly trained and often blamed for misuse of the medium. Audience perception also undermines the journalists and costs their credibility. They suggest that the audience perceives ETV journalists as the right arm of the government and thus do not even watch ETV news. The respondents add that those who are responsible for training new journalists are themselves are sometimes unqualified to teach journalistic practices.

The respondents suggest that the challenges of African media are the battle over editorial control and independence, ownership, political education and cultural imperialism (Carver, 1995: 71). With regard to this, since Ethiopia is one of these African countries, they say the newsroom faces different kinds of government control including editorial control, self-censorship and underdeveloped infrastructure.

## 4.2 FINDINGS

The researcher gathered data through individual in-depth interview and group discussion with ETV newsroom's editors and reporters respectively, and found the following:

- ETV newsroom has no editorial complaint unit.
- The journalists in the newsroom are less aware of accountability.
- Journalists do not know specifically to whom they are accountable.
- The station has no other codified ethics guidelines other than the editorial policy to handle complaints.
- The newsroom has not institutionalized how to handle complaints.
- The newsroom does not regulate itself and is not free from executives and government officials' interference.
- The newsroom never plays its watchdog role. It is not independent.
- The newsroom uses outlets such as telephone, postal service and sometimes email to collect information and complaints from audience; however, it fails to investigate these in coming complaints
- There is no room in the newsroom to make direct contact with the public and it never invites dialogue with the public on its staff conduct.
- Journalists do not practice their profession based on professional or ethical guidance, and fail to meet public expectations.
- ETV has no separate code of ethics, but some ethical issues attach to the editorial policy, including
- No a system of monitoring ethical practice of its journalists.
- No independent media accountability system, no press council and free professional journalists' associations in the country.
- Weak compliant investigation mechanisms.
- Newsroom editorial meeting (unwritten) used to prevent and correct mistakes
- Newsroom and journalists unaware of its own editorial policy.
- Newsroom priority for management interference in responding to complaints.

- No continuous professional or ethical training.
- Strongest claims to accountability come from those whom the newsroom/station depends on, usually the government/ state.
- Newsroom public service unit fails to fulfill its responsibility.
- Newsroom is highly centralized and reporters are discouraged from adding information.
- ETV's editorial policy limited or inattentive to accountability.
- Newsroom self-censorship.
- Mute audience and public.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

In this thesis, I have attempted to probe the ethics and system of accountability in the country's one television newsroom, Ethiopian Television. I have focused on how the newsroom's editors and reporters understand accountability, especially their perception about whom they are accountable to, general conditions of media accountability through press councils and professional associations, and specific conditions of ETV accountability, including what if any newsroom mechanisms to ensure responses to the public. The thesis does not consider journalistic ethics as a whole; it focuses only on the accountability process that may encourage ethical journalism. It limits itself to accountability, according to journalism principles of duty.

In many professional practices, obligations are accepted, typically accompanied by defined forms for the performance of accountability. However, it is difficult to say if there is freedom of choice, since accountability is not available. Typically, the newsroom delays or ignores a response to the public's complaints. So existing conditions are not conducive accountability. The station is state-owned and thus makes meaningful dialogue with its audience or public difficult.

ETV is a public service broadcasting institution, but it is difficult to say if it serves the public or is accountable to it. McQuail (2004) notes in this regard, "One of the purposes of accountability is improving communicative relations and quality of content and service. Accountability could have a controlling effect even though accountability is not control" (2004:25-26). Accountability deals with an explanation or justification of actions and is associated with freedom. McQuail (2004: 32). However, ETV's newsroom does not have freedom to choose to whom it is accountable because the power in ETV is centralized.

ETV's editorial policy does not clearly address to whom its journalists and the newsroom or the station at large are accountable. Senior editors and editors advise reporters to practice journalism ethically, but some newsroom editors are part of the management team that gives priority to the ideology of the management who get their position by appointment. This climate, in the station and the country at large, makes journalistic practices of ETV vulnerable to being affected by the institutional ideology of owners and executive bodies. So from this, I argue that political influences on the newsroom and the station at large are affecting the independence of journalists. However, Schultz (1998) notes that journalists and media organizations who employ them should be accountable to the general public that has no real control over the media agenda (1998:156).

The public has no way to affect the newsroom's journalistic practices and conduct, and thus encourage moves towards a legalistic, duty-oriented approach (duties to the government). This means that ethical practices of journalism should be determined according to a code of practice. However, ETV's newsroom has no contact with the public that creates and promotes an awareness of accountability among staff and helps them identify to whom they are accountable.

In addition, the thesis realizes that the newsroom takes the position of backward or traditional communication way of transmitter that is one-way, not interactive and without establishing a channel to handle feedback or complaints. Thus, complaints from the public about unethical journalism or a breach of an ethical code are likely to be ignored. The newsroom also fails to involve the public actively in journalistic practices, seeing them only as consumers of news. This shows that the newsroom has no a chance of accepting external evaluation. However, such external and independent evaluation would help to achieve media accountability.

Due to lack of management emphasis, the newsroom fails to cope with new digital technology and falls into the digital divide. This hinders access to the internet and ensures an information gap with the global world. As a result, the public is limited to local information, delivered by the newsroom, and fails to have a voice through the

technology. Coping with the digital technology is difficult because of the government's long process of procurement systems.

In general, I agree with what Schultz (1998:156) says, that media dominated by the state is unacceptable. So, too, is an industry completely free of professional or some other form of public accountability. Accountability is necessary, but especially accountability that encourages ethical journalism.

***NOTE***

The appendices of this thesis consist of anonymous key informants. The names of the key informants have been removed from this thesis for security reasons.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Interview Guidelines for Individual In-depth Interview

1. Does the newsroom you are working for regulate itself?
  - If yes how? \_\_\_\_\_
  - If no, why does it not? \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. How do you demonstrate your accountability?
  - First to your staff. \_\_\_\_\_ And then,
  - To your audience. \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Does the public have a voice in your newsroom?
  - If yes, how? \_\_\_\_\_
  - If no, why not? \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Does Ethiopian Television help the public hold government accountable? And does the newsroom exercises this role?
  
5. Does ETV newsroom have an editorial complaint unit? If yes how does it function?
  
6. How does the newsroom gather complaints from viewers and analyze for improvement?
  
7. How and how often does ETV newsroom invite dialogue with the public?
  
8. What systems does ETV have to monitor ethical practices of its journalists?
  
9. Do you know any media accountability system for Ethiopian media?
  
10. Who ensures complaints are properly handled?
  
11. Is the public aware of your efforts for error correction?
  
12. What is the importance of admitting mistakes?
  
13. How do you prevent mistakes from happening?
  
14. How quick is the newsroom to respond to complaints?
  
15. What methods does ETV use to handle complaints?

16. Does the editorial policy well known by the editors?

## APPENDIX 2.

### Guidelines for group discussions with reporters

1. What does media accountability mean to you?
2. In your view, do you say that the newsroom's activities are transparent? What are your reasons? Please explain.
3. What are the steps you follow in correcting mistakes?
4. What is the importance of admitting mistakes?
5. How do you prevent mistakes from happening in your reports?
6. Who decides what actions to be taken if audiences are not happy with the media corrections?
7. Do you have any training in journalistic ethics?

If yes, do you think that has helped you in your journalistic work? How?

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If no, do you think it affects your journalistic work?

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