

THE GUERRILLA IN TOWN: INFLUENCES ON CONTENT PRODUCTION IN EXILE

MEDIA

A Thesis presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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DECEMBER 2020

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled:

THE GUERRILLA IN TOWN: INFLUENCES ON CONTENT PRODUCTION IN
EXILED MEDIA

Presented by Edom Gelan a candidate for degree of Master of arts, and hereby certify that in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my gratitude to my research advisor Dr. Fritz Cropp for all his guidance without his continuous support and direction this would have been impossible. I am grateful for all the support he gave me before and during my research.

My sincerer thanks to Professor Kathy Kiely, Dr. Benjamin Warner, and Professor Jason Mclure for volunteering to be in my research committee and for giving me feedbacks that strengthen my research.

Last I want to thank all the journalism faculty members for all the support I have been offered and I am forever grateful.

THE GUERRILLA IN TOWN: INFLUENCES ON CONTENT PRODUCTION IN EXILED MEDIA

Abstract

On 21 June 2011 Reeyot Alemu was detained by the Federal Police and later was charged with terrorism and sentenced for five years. Her detention is one of the several incidents in Ethiopia that illustrate how journalists function in their daily routine ever since the Ethiopian People Democratic Revolutionary Front party took power in 1991. Her detention generated waves of protest among press freedom advocates and human rights groups. She was freed after four years of imprisonment. Just like many journalists before her, Reeyot fled her country and join Ethiopian exiled media institution. Ethiopia has vibrant exiled media organizations working from Europe and North America. This study examines factors that influence content creation on mass media especially in Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio (ESAT) and Oromia Media Network (OMN). Findings show even if governmental pressure impacts all exiled media at the same time the content production process both in ESAT and OMN take sharp edge on ideological lineage. In addition, both institutions depend on anonymous reporters or stringers while leveraging on their media content credibility. The result suggests that influences that shape exiled media content production also impacted the Ethiopian media culture.

Introduction

Ethiopia has more private owned television stations broadcast outside of the country than those based inside the country. Most of these television and radio stations based outside of the country are forced into exile because of their critical coverage of the leading political party, Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic front (EPRDF). Ethiopian journalists are also among the highest in number to be forced out of their home country following critical coverage of their government. For more than three decades Ethiopian journalists have been facing hardship in their country to perform their daily duties. The government in power since 1991, Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has detained, harassed, and forced journalists to flee their country until April 2018. After Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took power, as a result of nationwide protest, he welcomed exiled journalists, political opponents, and dissidents who were forced to flee their countries due to government pressure. Many Ethiopian journalists experienced harassment, detention, imprisonment, torture and even death under the leadership of EPRDF. At their destination in a foreign land some of them established exiled media organizations broadcasting from abroad into their homeland. Their broadcasts, which citizens were banned to watch by the parliament, attract viewers as an alternative media source. Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio (ESAT) and Oromia Media Network (OMN) are among the major exiled political television stations.

In power, the late Meles Zenawi, who ruled the EPRDF party for seventeen years, compared Voice of America (VOA), Amharic Service with broadcasts in Rwanda that enflamed genocide in the mid 1990's (BBC, 2010). The government jammed the two prominent television stations that broadcast through satellite from the United States and Europe. Many exiled Ethiopian media organizations which report on political issues including Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio

(ESAT) accused the ruling party of jamming transmission (ECADF, 2011). Oromia Media Network (OMN) also reported that its service including its website was jammed inside Ethiopia (Department of State, 2016).

Despite inserting the Freedom of Expression provisions in its 1995 constitution, the ruling party, EPRDF, controlled exiled media by blocking and jamming until 2018. Moreover, journalists in the country live in fear while exercising their rights (Mulatu, 2017). Jammed 15 times in only two years, OMN plays central role in disseminating information throughout the Oromia region during the Oromo Protest that started April 2014 (Human Rights Watch, 2016). In addition, it becomes one of among many reasons that led to instigate reform within the leading EPRDF party which brought new restructured leadership including the prime minister Abiy Ahemd. Playing a significant role in home politics, ESAT covered the anti-government protest from the beginning to the end despite blockages and other forms of interferences by government (Freedom House, 2016). Labeling their media content as inflammatory and a call for violence, the Ethiopian government charged both ESAT and OMN television stations in a court of law citing Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (Merera and et.al, 2017).

In exile journalists create a mechanism to connect to their audience through different television channels, shortwave radio, and internet radio. By examining different diaspora-based websites, Skjerdal (2011) questions journalists' professional integrity and journalistic ideals but Ethiopian exiled television and radio stations have not been examined in terms of their content formation so far. While the new leadership of EPRDF government opens its' door to exiled journalists to come home and work, much has been left in the details. Operating nationwide electronic media remains under government restriction. Thus, much of exiled journalists now have reporters working from Ethiopia on the ground, and heavily continue operational from abroad.

This research aims to look deeper into these exiled media organizations from two perspectives; individual journalists and media organizations, generating results on how Ethiopian exiled television and radio stations produce content far from home. In-depth knowledge of how the exiled media and media professionals undertake their routines will shed light on how exiled media organizations produce alternative media content. The exiled media organizations have a wide variety of audiences in their home country as they used satellite stations to broadcast all over the country. In addition, their unique way of speaking to power in direct controversies oftentimes produces forced replies from the government. Some of the critical exiled media's content production set the tone in the political arena that forces not only the government but also citizens to react and have an open exchange in the political dialogue.

Additionally, it seeks to investigate whether there is a need for reevaluation of the standard journalistic paradigm and value application in exiled media. Because there are limited media organizations operating independently inside the country, especially television and radio stations, the exiled television and radio stations continue to be the voice of dissent in the country. Furthermore, their reporting procedures far from home follow different operational mechanisms which need to be investigated more fully.

Thus, employing Shoemaker & Reese (2014) hierarchy of influences model, specifically employing organizational and individual levels of analysis, the purpose of this interview-based study is to explore and analyze how exiled media organizations and journalists produce content by examining their news gathering routines.

The literature review will discuss the experience of different countries' exiled media journalists, professional values, and adherence for truth followed by in-depth interviews with Ethiopian exiled journalists' experience of producing content while being far away from home.

Literature review

Exiled media

There are several ways on how researchers identify exiled media based on the idea of truth and motivation, O'Loughlin & Schafraad (2016) classified exiled journalists in four dimensions: *the idealists* who are driven by the concept of democracy and its trappings; *the pragmatists* who see the truth in more pragmatic light; *the dialogists*, journalists driven to improve the lives of their people; and *the activists* motivated by societal change. Similarly, Ethiopian exiled media organizations identify themselves as the representatives of the people by providing counter information. In addition, they critique the mainstream media operated by Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government administration.

Examining the media work of Syrian diaspora activists, Anden- Papadopoulos & Pantti (2013) distilled three main functions of exiled media: creating communication by linking the voice inside the country to the rest of the world; collaborating with other international journalists; and translating a message to the foreign public, all of which might not fit in Shapiro's (2014) functional definition of journalism as "that involved in an independent pursuit of accurate information about current or recent events and its original presentation for public edification" (p.7).

In analyzing an organizational structural set up for Venezuelan journalists in South Florida, Shumow (2014) illustrates three models of immigrant journalism: *Oppositional* those who keep audience back home by pursuing their firm opposition journalism work even while losing advertisements, *Market-driven/hybrid model* those trying to adjust their connection back home while recognizing the need to serve the immigrant community attempting to adjust to life abroad;

and *Immigrant/ Community*, a model serving the Venezuelan immigrant community by covering local events. This illustrates the fact that exiled media concepts are often understood through ‘local’ and personal experience (O’Loughlin, & Schafraad, 2016).

Interpretative journalism

Politically motivated charges and possible imprisonment prior to elections prompted journalists to flee into exile (Freedom House, 2016). Most of them are symbolic representatives of journalism institutions which no longer exist as a result of government continuous harassment. “The Ethiopian journalists in exile are diverse, some were among the most respected group of journalists and writers” (Skjerdal, 2010 p.47). Upholding normative models of journalism (Skjerdal, 2011) and at the same time negotiating journalistic values (Deuze, 2005), the journalists in exile are caught between two worlds (O’Loughlin, & Schafraad, 2016). Further, from far they navigate through their own unique circumstance and traverse within the homeland media landscape to create rare shades of influence.

Alternative media mainly used by activist groups to organize and inform social movements are unique by content, channel, source, or journalistic value (Rauch, 2007). Ethiopian journalists who end up in exile practice within the realm of alternative media, typically targeting social mission to disseminate information, practice professional responsibility, and challenge the status quo. In his analysis *Journalists or activists? Self-identity in the Ethiopian diaspora online community*, Skjerdal, 2011 suggested that Ethiopian exiled journalists working in different parts of the world and having been part of the critical private press should be understood in line with the specific conditions of their homeland. In 1993, determining what journalists do, Barbie Zelizer proposed viewing journalists as a member of an interpretative community generating

collective interpretations of key events. Revising Zelizer interpretative communities under rapid technological transformation (Hutchins & Boyle 2017) underscores journalists' pressure because of reinforcing changes in the digital technologies, journalistic routines and institutional relations. Making their significant professional difference by providing context, judgment and narrative power (Coddington, 2014), journalists alienate themselves from information gatherers. In creating new modes of news gathering that are responsive to modes of technology and demand, Zelizer reaffirms that journalists are retaining collective and authoritative voice in a continually evolving information environment.

Content

Journalists tend to assign significance to the issues that are important to them in their daily work (Peiser, 2000) thus contributing and influencing media content creation. Even though he noted that the private press in Ethiopia is affected by harmful reactions from the authorities, Skjerdal (2010) again questions if Ethiopian exiled journalists' professional objectivity leaned to activism. On the one hand Ethiopian journalists working in the state media highlight to Skjerdal that objectivity is their central journalistic value, but on the other hand they pronounce that they are in less than conducive conditions to practice journalistic autonomy (2013). Not only do editors and journalists exclude some critical issues from their stories due to fear of government officials, but they also self-censor (Mulatu, 2017). Though scholars like Skjerdal researched Ethiopian diaspora media's ethical dilemmas and how they perceive themselves, O'Loughlin, & Schafraad (2016) assure that little to no research exists on the norms and professional practices of journalists producing content in exile or even about the organization they function in. They also suggest deeper inquiry on "content analysis of journalists' work to investigate how their strongly expressed ideas translate into practice" is necessary. (O'Loughlin, & Schafraad, 2016, p. 63).

Correspondingly, after detailed scrutiny of the exiled Ethiopian media and media professionals, Skjerdal (2011) questions the professional value of the traditional journalism paradigm in these circumstances. “They may not belong to established media houses, they have not been educated as journalists, they are rarely members of a professional media organization, and their main occupation is something else than the media venture, and so forth. Yet they are occupied with something that looks like journalism” (p.728).

Journalistic culture defined in different contexts results in a distinct future based on the professional frames examined in addition to the historical context and space. Individual professional choice, and institutional and cultural context mold the journalism practice in different ways. To explicate the culture of journalism from three essential constituents -- institutional, epistemology, and ethical ideology -- Thomas Hanitzsch proposed a theoretical foundation basing the three perspectives applications difference all over the world which makes the definition of journalism culture amorphous. The proposed theoretical foundation by Hanitzsch looks at the culture of news production and clarifies how journalism lacks clear-cut definitions that include worldwide application. Thus, he further classifies the three constituents and forces us to look at the seven-dimensional space of journalism culture (2007).

1. *Interventional*: - the extent journalist promotes certain values or those who detach themselves as neutral.
2. *Power distances*: - confrontational form of journalism and those who keep loyal to power.
3. *Market orientalism*: - citizen based or for-profit oriented consumer driven.

4. *Objectivism*: - those journalists who believe that they are reporting things “as it is” and those they acknowledge that there is no absolute truth.

5. *Empiricism*: - those preferring to present facts and empirical data or choose analytical or neutral approach of reporting.

6. *Relativism*: - seeing the journalism in a contextual situation and those who prefer a universal moral approach

7. *Idealism*: - outcomes should be obtained with the “right” action following universal moral rules.

This way of looking journalism culture invites to look deeper into the particulars of how exiled Ethiopian media organization and journalists produce content while residing far away from home.

Journalist routine and practice

Studying Ethiopian government-owned media organization routines, Skjerdal (2013) noted the editorial direction in the state media plays a key role in setting the news agenda. All topics covered emanate from the editorial meetings reporters follow protocol news format, “a practice which in several ways contradicts conventional journalistic criteria. It lets the source decide the news focus instead of the media outlet. It diminishes the critical role of the journalist. And it shifts the nature of news from being an account of the unexpected to becoming a recitation of the predictable” (p. 217). On the other hand, stating its low performance in quality journalism, Melisew, (2013) argues the Ethiopian private print media struggles with both internal and external challenges. Low professionalization within the private media hinders journalists from

maintaining an accountable journalism and at the same time lack of access to government-held information leads journalists working in the private media to the so-called “well informed sources.”

Thus, it is important to understand the mechanisms and ways of Ethiopian exiled journalists and exiled media organization content production in a theoretical framework. The Hierarchical influence model (Shoemaker & Reese 2014) examines five levels of influence on media content creation. Social systems, social institutions, media organization, routine practices, and individuals. Shoemaker & Reese 2014 model "takes into account the multiple forces that simultaneously impinge on media and suggests how influence at one level may interact with that at another" (p.1). Rather than studying the impact of media content on the audience, the hierarchal influence model explores how media content creation is affected by media, culture, institution, individual and other organizations.

Individual level of influence - journalist personal preference and choice that impact the creation of media content. *Media routine practices* - these are professional practices and work processes that are followed by media organizations comprising audiences, organization and supplies of content. *Media organization* - occupational role, organizational policy and educational practices including revenue generating mechanisms are included in this category as levels of influence. *Social institutions* - media organizations are part of the larger social institutions functioning together within media systems. Other institutions also contribute their share of influence on media content creation. Finally, *the social system* – the all-encompassing ideological forces that influence the overall social system. Looking at two different perspectives, individual level and organizational level, factors that might influence media content and journalism practice in different ways depend on a variety of circumstances. This research paper will study the role of

Ethiopian exiled media organizations and individual journalists' in content formation using Shoemaker & Reese 2014 hierarchy of influence model. This review of literature leads us to two important questions:

RQ1). How do norms of professional practice within Ethiopian exiled media organizations shape media Ethiopian media culture?

RQ2). How do Ethiopian exiled journalists perform journalistic professions while in exile?

Methods

Exiled journalists, editors, and reporters from ESAT and OMN were interviewed to ascertain their deeper experiences for the research questions. Most of them have more than two years of involvement in their respective organization working as exiled journalists. As OMN started late in early 2014, ESAT's journalists in general have more years of working experience (Ednalkachew, 2018). Ethiopia's broadcast history has ultimately been redefined by the coming of ESAT into the public arena in the spring of 2010.

To offer a deeper understanding on how Ethiopian exiled journalists formulate their content daily, this research looked deeper into both ESAT and OMN content production processes. The way they gather information from afar, how they perform their daily journalism routine and the means they use to distribute their news content all will be examined.

ESAT and OMN are nonprofit media organizations run by journalists who are mainly forced to flee their country for fear of harassment, imprisonment from EPRDF government who, in the last three decades, jailed more than two dozen journalists and were responsible for the killing of one, Abay Hailu (CPJ, 1998).

After interviewing nine Ethiopian diaspora website editors, Skjerdal concluded that the editors believe journalism should be impartial, independent and ethically coherent. However, he said, "the media sphere was inflicted with activism, favoritism, challenge objectivity norms, journalistic autonomy and traditional demarcations between content producers and audiences." (Skjerdal, 2011 p.740). Adding to what has been found by previous research, this study sought to understand additional ways of news media content formation from afar while in exile.

“The goal of qualitative research is to understand how participants perceive their own reality” (Galvan, 2014, p.58). By making use of qualitative research methods, this research investigates journalists’ experience under real-world conditions, represents ideas of participants, covers contextual conditions, provides insight into existing concepts and uses multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2010). In addition to ESAT and OMN full time reporters and editors, the two media organizations mainly use a community of activists, academicians, and political leaders who flee into exile because of persecution as a source for their content production. This is especially used to underscore contextual analysis in their news.

Interviews with the reporters and editors is the research conducting mechanism as it “generates data which give an authentic insight into people’s experiences” (Silverman, 1993, p.91).

Sampling Strategy

Two significant television and radio stations which are mostly operated by exiled Ethiopian journalists and activists but based their main operation in the United States and broadcast to Ethiopia are in the research sample. These are Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio (ESAT) and Oromia Media Network (OMN). Though their main offices are in Virginia and Minnesota respectively, ESAT has offices in London and Amsterdam while OMN has an office in Cairo, after new policy change both television stations are now opened offices in Addis Abeba. There are other television stations broadcasting their programs from abroad to Ethiopia, however, ESTA and OMN remain to be the only television stations which focus on reporting political news and analysis daily. In-depth interviews are conducted with journalists working as reporters, editors, and program producers from each of the exiled media organizations, making the total number of interviewee eleven.

For the interview sample, a combination of convenience and purposive sampling is employed. Purposive sampling is used, when selecting individuals from media organizations considering the potential sources of important information (Galvan, 2014), and convenience at the same time purposive sampling when selecting individual journalists amongst the ones working in the same media organization. One selecting mechanism applied for this research was from the list of exiled journalist who used to work as a journalist back home and again worked in an exiled media in ESAT or OMN. The other list is from journalists currently working in the exiled media organization but not forced to exile from their homeland.

Interviews are conducted by audio and video Skype. Because the journalists interviewed can be identified or narrow downed, the interviewee names are withheld for confidentiality and safety reasons. Institutional Review Board (IRB) certification was obtained prior to the interviews.

Rationale of method selection

The Internet and new ways of communication, especially information communication technology, have increased the influence of exiled groups' political involvement both at home and outside when independent media were not allowed to function in their home country (Kalathil, 2002). Examining how journalists in exile undertake their routine in content production is one of the paramount issues in this research. How exiled media organizations function on a daily basis, emphasizing what they perform and how they execute their professional role will be the target of the research objective. The research uncovers what makes the exile media different in addition to inspecting their daily goals by looking into their sources,

way of communication inside the media organization, professional configuration, and the mechanisms they install in attaining their professional missions and targets.

The hierarchy of influence model by Shoemaker and Reese (2014) defines media content as the message that constitutes the symbolic environment. Then they employ the hierarchy of influence model at a different level to analyze the influence of individuals, societal, occupational, institutional and cultural context while forming media content. Thus, engaging Shoemaker & Reese (2014) hierarchy of influences model, specifically employing organizational and individual levels of analysis, the purpose of this interview-based study is to explore and analyze how exiled media institutions and individual journalists from these institutions, form media content by examining their news gathering routines.

The restrictive environment at home has led to the emergence of different media outside of the mainland Ethiopia (Skjerdal, 2013). Journalists forced into exile created many channels to connect with their audience far from home. With the force of social media and satellite transmission, they manage to reach audiences who have no other choices than the government-owned media. The content they produce mostly from anonymous sources were labeled as violent and a call for terror by the ruling government (EPRDF). Additionally, the exiled media organizations including the many media managers were charged by the government citing anti-terrorism proclamation and citizens were banned to watch the exiled television stations programs in 2016 (Addis Fortune, 2016). This study, by employing in-depth interviews, investigates Ethiopian exiled media organizations and journalists' media content creation role.

Coding Procedures & Data Analysis

To have a concrete concept and themes, the interviews are conducted and organized having basic structure and guiding notions. The interview is led in two main divisions. Journalistic routine on one side and media organizations and journalistic professions on the other. In those two divisions the interview questions have a concepts and framework on how they undertake their daily routines and their professionalism. Mainly it has a focus on preset codes. “A code in qualitative inquiry is the most often word short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence- capturing, and /or evocative attribute for a portion of language” (Saldana, 2009, p.3).

The codes include journalistic routine, journalist’s profile, working environment, professional value, daily work narration, professional integrity, organizational set up, the double face of journalist / activist, independence, political affiliation, and audience. Coding is not a sheer connection of words rather it is the transformation of ideas linking together (Richards & Morse, 2009). Emergent new codes after the interview are considered for significant independence from the preset codes. After analyzing the data within the framework, it is analyzed by observing the similarity and variance of interviewees in the same organization, exiled journalists plus the general journalism paradigm in individual level and organizational level of journalists’ role.

Findings

RQ1). How do norms and professional practices within Ethiopian exiled media organizations shape media culture?

1. Social system

The Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) continues to limit freedom of expression year after year along with consolidating power in every part of the government after every election since its coming to power in 1991. The party won two consecutive elections in 2010 and 2015 by almost 99 percent resulting in fewer and limited alternative political voices in the country. As many journalists were sent to prison or forced to exile, the media sphere remains dominated by the government-owned Ethiopian Broadcast Corporation (EBC) which runs the national television and radio. Many privately operated media organizations were not given a chance to function as a group or as institutions. Their mere existence was a threat and EPRDF government broke down all the private media sphere one by one (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

For this study, an exiled journalist explaining why he is working in a media organization from abroad said “we were having no choice” (Interview 8) Most of the diaspora media journalists were put in jail, persecuted, or faced regular harassment from government operatives, which led to large number of Ethiopian professional journalists exiled all over the world.

In exile the journalists created different channels to connect with their home audience and readers. In the early times they were using different newspapers and FM radio programs for their local audiences based in North America or Europe, then the internet changed everything. The local connection that started with personal blogs and small media groups turned into virtual satellite television and radio. An exiled journalist who worked for both ESAT and OMN said

“First, I used to contribute in a small exiled magazine called ‘Nafkot’ that is how I start to write from abroad. Then for another website ‘Ethiopia Today’ which was based in Norway” (Interview 7).

The Ethiopian exiled media functions in a unique situation. Pushed out from their homeland, the journalists find themselves inside a dynamic and politically eager community. A program producer said:

“In ESAT and OMN you would see different hands influencing the way how content is produced, for example in ESAT you have board members involved in Ginbot 7 political party and in OMN even if you do not see the hands of any political party as direct involvement, you would find the voice of Oromo conservatives involving indirectly” (Interview 7).

The diaspora community organized as chapters in North America and Europe provide all the support and assistance they need to function as media organization and to serve as alternative information providers in their home origin and beyond.

“The nature of our media is struggle. It is distinct, our audience knows that, and they accept some of our flaws that come with it.” said an editor of ESAT. The production of content by both ESAT and OMN comes because of being pushed into an exiled journalistic workspace and time. Similarly, OMN journalist said, “Our journalism crushes the correct journalism principles, you might observe when it fails to adhere for balance of news as it is resistance media” (Interview 7).

The content produced from afar is targeted not only to inform and interact with local communities but to mobilize and demand change within Ethiopia by infiltrating the system from afar.

Television media organization in Ethiopia are dominated by government control, Freedom House, (2020). Journalists who as well used to work for government-controlled national media explain the lack of journalists' independence while producing content, "One journalist will report news or mostly comes from the Wala Information Agency and we translate the news report into a different language, you cannot even call it journalism, the editorial controls the narrative"(Interview 5) by homogenizing the local media sphere, the government forces Ethiopian journalists, politicians and activists to go beyond the national boundary to exercise their rights and expose government corruption, human rights violations and abuse through the means not under the control of the Ethiopian government by becoming exiled (Interview 8).

The totality of the content production from afar is mainly influenced by the fact the government of Ethiopia uses ideological policy to limit the proliferation of independent media and dominate the narrative of one-party ideology. A journalist who used to work for Ethiopia Broadcast Cooperation (EBC), a television station run and controlled by government, who then works for OMN said "Ethiopian Television has a problem, the editors write what they want. Not what you reported to them. You bring the information, but it will not be edited as you saw it in the ground"(Interview 5) In this way government regulates media and serves the interest of the leading party while simultaneously opposing exiled media organizations like of ESAT and OMN in their daily news reporting, thus, the media environment often leans toward the government (Freedom House, 2019). Further, their focus is primarily to advance government's perspective, political and ideological stances.

Following the establishment and success of ESAT as an independent media outlet from abroad, many other media organizations follow its step. Both government-controlled exiled propaganda media and different entertainment media have flourished within a few years. ESAT's editor and

producer who is interviewed for this research sees this as an illustration of how they were able to impact and force the government to come all the way to their battle ground (Interview 8).

Furthermore, the editor said “the birth of our studio-based current affairs analysis media format was initiated because of our structural limitation in producing content from afar, now even homegrown media organizations are following our footsteps which I am not fond of”

2. *Social institutions*

· *Social media*

The soul of ESAT and OMN is social media. In all their work social media plays a significant role. Based in North America and Europe, social media gave them easy, quick, and personalized access to their audience and information about Ethiopia in real time. Without social media platforms, their reporting, engaging, and exchanging information with local audiences will be limited or hindered (Endalkachew, 2018).

“If I receive information about the imprisonment of somebody or any killings following some protest, I go through my Facebook contacts and ask them to verify for me or to give me phone numbers where I would get detailed information ”

said OMN program producer (Interview 5). The use of social media in ESAT and OMN has different layers. Journalists who cover stories depend on social media to get a lead on their story. Communication with stringers and sources on the ground are performed using social media. Photos and videos for stories are sent mainly using social media platforms. And finally, audiences’ and followers’ feedback are collected using the social media platforms which then journalists work on follow up stories (Endalkachew, 2018).

“Every night before bed, I always check my Facebook if there is anything new, when I wake up, I check my social media. In exiled media most of our work depends on social media, it is the most important thing” (Interview 10)

Together with using social media as a tool to collect information, they also employ it for some level of reporting by reaching out to different local sources on the ground. “All our news is social media- driven, we want to engage and dominate the social media narratives” said an OMN journalist (Interview 9). OMN has stringers all over Oromia region. These are paid stringers who do not have any journalism training. They record what is happening in their respective area and send information, pictures and videos using social media, mainly Facebook, “they are more of an activist than stringer, we just call them stringers” said an OMN journalist(Interview 5). In addition, audiences are highly encouraged to engage and send their voice message to produce content on matters concerning their specific area.

As Facebook remains as the dominant social media sphere in Ethiopia according to Global Stat Counter (2020), ESAT and OMN use Facebook as their main channel of communication and connection. Together with YouTube, they use the platforms for updates and continuous posts including live streaming for daily programs. They contact individuals from social media to share tips and information from different locations. Besides, producing social media driven content, ESAT and OMN also immerse their way of production by responding to what has been circulated via social media platforms (Interview 1, 2,4,5,9 &10). “Sometimes our followers give us their response the minute we post our content in our social media platforms” said journalist from ESAT (Interview 4).

While this gives them the ability to engage the subject from an authoritative perspective, it also makes them a medium which follows the itinerary of social media platforms. “Especially I follow my Facebook feed for ‘What is new?’ then, I call my informants to verify on the ground” ESAT’s reporter said (Interview 10). “Because we are far when we post our content after verification some of our followers’ comment on our social post saying, ‘why are you telling us what we already know’” (Interview 4). This primarily shows how the diaspora media in some ways is inadequate in playing its role of agenda setting.

“I can say all Qeerros (bachelor in Afaan Oromo language) are good reporter for Oromia Media Network, they were our reporters about what is happening in Ethiopia” said program producer in OMN (Interview 1). The International Telecommunication Union states that only 24% of the general population have access to internet in 2019, those who can send information using social media to ESAT and OMN has also an advantage to influence the production of the media content.

RQ2). How do Ethiopian exiled journalists perform journalistic professions while in exile?

3. Media organization –

· Media organization and ideology

According to the hierarchy of influence model by Shoemaker & Reese 2014, when producing media content one level of analysis might have influence over the others in different circumstances. As explained by ESAT’s reporter, “For me it is more of an instrument of struggle than media. The public is oppressed and silenced; we want to be that voice of the struggle. Hopefully one day it will be more of a media than an instrument” (Interview 10). Given EPRDF’s government authoritarian leadership for more than three decades, the exiled media

organizations operate in an emergency mode to liberate the public from government run propaganda media (Interview 6,7 &10).

Inside the workflow of ESAT and OMN different levels of pressure and influence are exhibited based on organization's policy and ideology. The two exiled media ESAT and OMN have different ideological stances, if not opposite. While "ESAT strongly identifies itself with the [Pan-] Ethiopian nationalism", (Mesfin, 2019. p.50), program producer of OMN said "OMN strive to be the voice of the grass roots, the voice of the Oromo people" (Interview9). Their unifying theme in exiled remain in disavowing the moral and political legitimacy of the EPRDF government. Understanding and interpretation of Ethiopia's political and cultural history, the present political landscape ideology, and how the political structure should be in the future are among the many issues that show their point of divergence, Endalkachew (2018).

· OMN

The Oromo Media Network "unabashedly and proudly offers a uniquely Oromo perspective" according to the Network mission in its website 2019. For this research OMN journalist said, "The main agenda for Oromia media network is the Oromo people" (Interview 9) the network desires to be the voice of the Oromo by bringing under- reported stories using Afaan Oromo language from Oromia. Some of OMN journalists explain that before working in OMN they have experience of working as an activists for the Oromo people rather than being journalists. "Because of our political movement in the diaspora we wanted to contribute, to see change" said a journalist/ activist who worked in OMN as a program producer (Interview 9).

The main Oromo activist and now Oromo politician behind OMN is Jawar Mohammed, the executive director of OMN. A producer for OMN said "Jawar is OMN and OMN is Jawar, he is

an effective cash cow and he became such a big persona which cannot be avoided by anything possible as far as news collection goes”(Interview 9). Jawar is the face of OMN mainly for his involvement in Oromo politics and his capacity to energize the diaspora community and raise money. When in 2017 Endalkachew interviewed Jawar for his research titled Diaspora media, local politics: Journalism and the politics of homeland among the Ethiopian opposition in the United States, Jawar said he get political updates form every part of the country through his personal social media account which OMN base to produce its news media content (Endalkachew, 2018).

OMN mainly runs its television program to be the voice of the Oromo people in Ethiopia. A reporter and program producer commented in their content:

“when we say we are the voice of the grass roots, we created unrealistic hopes and hypes and we neglect the voice of the minority who are living inside Oromia, and not much critical input as to how to implement” (Interview 9)

The way OMN choose to advocate for Oromo people in Ethiopia, comes with an unintended consequence of alienating the non-Oromo who currently reside in the region.

On one hand, in terms of bringing different opinions into OMN content production, the journalists list the restrictions government put on them. As a program producer from OMN said,

“No government official is willing to participate in our media because they do not want to give OMN legitimacy. In that sense OMN has the same sources who have the same psychological make up”(Interview 9).

On the other hand, journalist continued to explain the content production as different and unique “This is a resistance media, you might not see the journalistic balance here, this is a media born out of oppression”(Interview 9). However, some journalists also feel they could lose all their bargaining professional integrity for the sake of providing information which might not even fit in their own journalistic boundary (Interview 5). A content editor who used to work in OMN said “we can’t make everything a propaganda tool in lieu of advocating freedom for all” (Interview 7). In many ways as OMN presents itself as the representative of the Oromo people, journalists who gave interviews for this research and a program producer for OMN argue “in subtle ways you will find the influence of individual’s interest in the content production” (Interview 7).

· ESAT

ESAT, in its website describe itself as nonprofit and independent organization based in Washington D.C., Amsterdam and London (UK). Mesfin, in his research Political parallelism in diaspora-based transitional media -The case of Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio, showed the connection between the political party Ginbot 7 or G7 also known as Movement for Justice, Freedom and Democracy and ESAT (2019). However not all journalists who work in ESAT agree on this.

“I was working in ESAT to fight the regime with my journalism, responding to a call for my country. I was not a spokesperson, nor I was in any way a voice for any political organization.” a program producer of ESAT (Interview 6) said during the research interview.

Showing the twist between ESAT and Ginbot 7 Mesfin describe it as:

“The most unifying ideological orientation that attracts people to ESAT falls under the “Ethiopian nationalism” space. ESAT promotes the establishment of “united and democratic Ethiopia,” emphasizes the shared identity and history of Ethiopians in contradiction to ethnic-nationalist ethos. This ideological orientation is the core of ESAT’s identity, as much as that of the now officially defunct *Ginbot 7*.”

In May 7, 2019 Ginbot 7 in its general assembly formally announced its tie and affiliation with ESAT and dissolved itself, yet some journalists feel differently:

“I was contacted to contribute with my profession to challenge authoritarian regime, I did not have any political ideology and never work for any political party. I considered it as an assassination and that is the reason, I left ESAT.” (Interview 6).

In addition, (interview 2, 3 and 4) who have worked in ESAT for more than half a decade said they do not know or understand the corroborated connection between ESAT the media organization mainly working to achieve the goal of Ginbot 7 as a political party.

Nevertheless, other journalist who used to work for ESAT have different opinion about the relationship between Ginbot 7 and its influence in the journalism content. “Board members of ESAT were also members of Ginbot 7, so ESAT is an organization which have more political influence” said (Interview 7). Similarly, Mesfin confirms political parallelism in ESAT in five indicators: ownership, organizational connections, party or ideological loyalty, media personnel’s political involvement, and journalists’ role orientation (2019).

- Agenda setting role

The EPRDF government has its own control over public media, and the free press face continuous intimidation and harassment, Freedom House (2011). Far from Ethiopia, OMN and

ESAT are there to give the exact opposite of what the government media is trying to do. OMN reporter (Interview 9) said for this research “we are trailblazers of freedom, trying to bring the Oromo issues which have been neglected for so long. It is a media funded by the public and is born out of their own struggle.” This comment suggests that OMN role is to make Oromo voice is heard in a public sphere where most media is controlled by the EPRDF.

Framing what OMN is trying to do in its media content, the program producer of OMN said (Interview 9) “By continuously and stubbornly defying EPRDF’s narrative we spin the attention of the audience to question the status quo.” This idea is also shared by ESAT journalist “Just like guerrilla fighters we are always ready to strike an alternative perspective and halt government daily propaganda since we are dealing with an undemocratic and authoritarian regime in power for almost three decades” (Interview 6).

In the same manner OMN journalist commented “We are fighting for regime change. Most of us joined OMN by way of our activism for the Oromo question, hence we are trained journalists but experienced activists in setting the Oromo agenda.” (Interview 1).

Their agenda setting role include in calling upon citizens to go out in the street and protest, they give examples on how other nations were able to accomplish resisting their government “I like to do stories where people demand their rights and stories when they express their ideas freely” (Interview 10). In addition, they engage, evoke, and encourage their audiences to stand up in different forms of resistance against the EPRDF.

“When the late prime minister died, ESAT was the first to release the information early on and all eyes were on us. Finally, the party announced that it was true, I was pleased because we gain

and maintain legitimacy” (Interview 10). ESAT and OMN agenda setting roles go beyond refuting government policy. By penetrating the EPRDF party structure, they expose hidden information, corruption and manage to create fear and panic within the party structure. OMN producer said (Interview 5) “From our management we will be given numbers to call and receive information. Our informants were mostly from Oromia, but they are everywhere and some of them move here and there. We were not told who they are.” Their media content not only interrogates the party power structure but also portrays a distinct agenda away from mainstream media outlets by providing information which is not seen inside Ethiopia.

“I mainly focus on working about current affairs, it is mostly opinion based on facts, we pick current topics and analyze the facts from different angle” (Interview 4) said ESAT program producer. ESAT and OMN production of content illustrate what the government is doing, and most of their coverages are articulated by different activists, intellectuals, former political party leaders, and experts from the diaspora.

In their media presence both ESAT and OMN spin, shape, and take over government narratives that even force the government to decree the prohibition of watching ESAT and OMN inside Ethiopia (BBC, 2016). Moreover, their agenda is specific to their audience, “OMN is best in articulating the Oromo viewpoint, it is all about getting Oromia out into the world. The angle which we look into the news story is its relevance to the Oromo wider audience” OMN producer (Interview 9).

While most ESAT journalists consider themselves as activists for freedom and democracy, OMN journalists believe they are the voice of the grass root movement for the Oromo people (Interview 1,2,6,8,9 10 &11). “I can tell you with confidence that ESAT shaped the Ethiopian

political sphere, we have many audiences and followers. Our contribution is successful, and the public take our messages.” Program producer and Editor of ESAT (Interview 3). Since they are unable to set up a standard media organization at home their main agenda remains to set up a parallel antithesis of government media.

“Basing the truth and the information at our hand, we want to give full picture of what is happening around the struggle, we would highlight some of our news to make sense out of it and we want to show that the struggle towards change is hopeful”

said ESAT’s program producer and Editor (Interview 8).

4. *Media routine practices*

· *Content*

The media culture in Ethiopia has been influenced by two viewpoints, one leans to the government side praising its work and the other criticizing the government’s day to day policy and implementations (Gagliardone, 2014). “Government block all independent media outlets and even throw some of them to prison. So ESAT was the biggest weapon to combat that.” Said ESAT’s program producer (Interview 10). Again, he said the way how the government silence any kind of dissent should be challenged by media’s like ESAT. With a dichotomy of views inside the content they produce, both media companies controlled and operated by government and exiled media organizations can be identified based on their production of content.

Although some journalist believe that the journalist had enormous influence over the content production, this is not shared by all of them. When one of ESAT program producer said “I

believe in some of our production the journalist has influence its own sway to shape the content based on the specific program ” others in the same organization believe that the main influence over content comes in terms of who possesses the media company (Interview 7). Journalists working in both ESAT and OMN find themselves selecting their story coverage based on their organizational interest at the same time their personal choice (Interview 1,2,3,5,7,8,10).

In producing content, exiled media journalists function inside the newsroom just as the same as other professional news media, however the way they gather and collect information makes them distinct (Interview 5). Reporting in exiled media follows a non-orthodox journalistic routine. Their focus is more on what the news is meant to their audience than the news (Interview 8).

As exiled journalists unable to deliver reporting from the ground, they follow different routes including but not limited to employing social media users, friends, and families to get ground information (Interview 1, 5, 9, 10 &11). As a result, there are occasions that content is structured and packaged by paid reporters, informants or stringers infusing their own ideology and political stance (Interview 1, 5, 9, 10 &11).

Performing journalism production from a counterculture perspective, the content production speaks against the government narratives in all ways (Interview 8). To mitigate the influences of informants, the journalists present their news content as “he said, she said”, obviously demonstrating the minimal assurance on how the news is gathered from a firsthand point of view (Interview 5). The absence of structured content verification mechanism in both ESAT and OMN is indicated (Interview 1,2,5,9 &10).

Both ESAT and OMN employ their own verification mechanisms, checking facts by a second source, however since most of the sources are viewers or audiences from social media and

personal contact, they have undeniable influence in selecting the production of news content, (Interview 1,2,5,9,10 & 11) this makes ESAT and OMN journalist news gathering practice different from traditional reporting of news content.

“We have sources that send us information, they are anonymous and sometimes we do not know them,” said ESAT journalist (Interview 5). Different from traditional journalism values and practices, the two exiled news media organizations package and disseminate content that are influenced and affected by an individual journalist’s background and ideology in addition to the main agenda of their organization (Interview 4).

Furthermore, the difficulty to fact check on the ground(interview 1,2,5,9 &10), the journalists who are collaborating with their informants create content mostly with a limited number of authentic videos and on camera interviews (Interview 2). This is because ESAT and OMN are banned and labeled as an affiliate to parliament opposition political parties and sources within the community will not speak on camera fearing repercussions from the government (Interview 1,5,8 &10).

Paid stringers who have minimal responsibility in any kind of journalism routinely deliver tips and media content that basically undermine the work of OMN journalism practice along with the favored ideology of the media organizations (Interview 7&5), while some of them left the media organization for this reason others stayed. An Editor from ESAT commented “we want to break the monopoly power by the government media, we are the result of an oppression not an ideal journalism practitioner”

The struggle to dominate epistemic authority in the case of OMN (Interview8) and ESAT journalists (Interview 8) was undermined because of their unconventional way of knowledge

production, journalistic practices, norms, and news gathering routines. With little or no boundary between journalists and citizens (interview 1 &5) who select and gather information from the ground, the audiences are active generators of information who also have the power to make meaning and slightly shape the media narratives (Interview 1).

Both ESAT and OMN broadcast their programs for 24 hours from abroad, their main emphasis remains in giving extra background and circumstantial information and opinion, while also reporting (Interview 4,8&9). They base their media content mostly in analysis and discussion format. Thus, most of their content production lacks actual ground context (Interview 5&6).

As ESAT and OMN produce content from far, they affect public understanding of political movements without having a deeper social and relational perspective on what is happening in the local community in their day to day life (Interview 5). Producer of OMN (Interview 9) said for this research:

“We should have focused working on the community. We worked on how the community should / could bring change on politics, we should have worked on how our community can change itself into civility, on how it can be able to create dialog, conversation and on listening to one another. But we failed, and at the end we only taught them how to stand on one corner and oppose one another.”

Navigating in a new country and journalism practice culture, the exiled diaspora journalists draw new lessons on journalism production from their host country media practices in many sophisticated ways (Interview 3). The most significant is being able to be a voice for citizens who are unable to speak to power (Interview 10). Nevertheless, the content they produce and on

screen often depicts an image of liberator and savior, becoming transformative content which pushes audiences to take matters into their own hands (Interview 9).

5. *Individual level of influence –*

- Reporters, Grass root stringers, Informants

Both ESAT and OMN have reporters inside Ethiopia (Interview 1,5, & 10). Some of them are paid and accountable to their respective organizations however, they operate anonymously (Interview 5). They work underground reporting without identifying themselves as journalists. Some of the reporters are also stringers, reporting only about their specific area and are paid for their reporting (Interview 5). OMN has been using many stringers' tips during the Oromo Protest 2016 in different parts of Oromia region. They sent anonymous tips using social media platforms, mostly Facebook messenger, according to OMN Journalists (Interview1). Navigating the thin line between journalistic professional integrity and government sophisticated spying technologies are the daily routine for ESAT and OMN journalists and those reporters and stringers from home (Bill M., John S. & Sara M., 2015). At times stringers and reporters end up in jail and sentenced up to five years of prison time because of their involvement with exiled media organizations IMWF, (2013).

Reporting for an exiled media organization has undeniable differences from the normal journalistic routine (Interview 5). “When you work for an exiled media, you cannot go to the ground and observe what happened. It is incredibly challenging” said program producer of OMN. Including the journalist, the sources might also be unidentified, the reporting gives more interpretation of what has happened in an incident with more contextual analysis than detailed

individual facts and figures (Interview 4 & 8). The reporters or stringers are sometimes known by the journalists or accredited through their active social media usage or complete strangers with anonymous tips (Interview 1, 2, 3, 7, 9,10 & 11). The anonymous tips will undergo a double layer of verification (Interview 9 &10). ESAT’s journalist said, “we mostly have so many stories to tell and we end up holding the story because the verification is so challenging and complicated to do it from afar in timely manner” (Interview 10).

Besides using local anonymous reporters, they also employ much of civil society organization and international media reports for deeper political analysis (Interview 8). For this research, the editor of ESAT said:

“we are the result of a silenced nation. The EPRDF government left us with no choice but to work from outside Ethiopia. Our platform takes a different path away from professional journalism routine but of a platform for struggle and change agents.”

His comment illustrates how deep political manipulation of the journalistic profession resulted in non-conformist sets of journalistic reporting routines. Similarly, there are journalist who feel they exiled media exaggerate some of the reports. Here is OMN program producer commenting (Interview 7):

“some of us think reporting what happened would suffice and others in the media said ‘we are in a war and we have to shoot what we have and inspire people to join us’ and finally I think the later wins.”

Moreover, the role of the stringers in content goes deep, OMN producer (Interview 5)

“because I ask a lot of question on how they get the information and force them to answer me, most of our stringers do not want me to take information. I believe they have power over the content and sometimes they pressure you if their stories are not aired.”

· Individuals

“Because I choose content of my own program, I see my personal influence in my programs and then the guests I brought into, in other formats especially on daily analysis, the journalist has the upper hand.” ESAT program producer (Interview 4). In ESAT and OMN journalists distinguish their work and role in the content production as a reporter, producer, editor, and administrator. Their roles and influence on content production shift through time and specific work assignments they hold over time because of limited staff members (Interview 2,7,9 &10). These shifts in individual’s responsibility also switch when interpreting content as their mandate in the organization changes (Interview 4).

“I am fighting the regime with my journalism, working journalism as a guerilla fighter, fighting repressive and corrupt authority” said program producer of ESAT (Interview 6). It is in many ways tricky to distinguish some of the roles played by individual journalists independently without their organizational overall philosophical approach in content production because the understanding of their role changes from one to another.

“there is no one in my story who influence me to change it in any direction. I can do whatever story I want to pursue, and if I feel uncomfortable, I will change it” said ESAT program Editor (Interview 3). Indicating that there was no organizational influence on how journalists do their stories however another producer said, “the main thing that keeps me in ESAT is my believe that I can employ it as a tool for my struggle” (Interview 10)

ESAT with a slogan of ‘an eye and ear of Ethiopians’ is not an ordinary media; it is a guerilla media working journalism in an irregular situation. Most of the journalists identify themselves as if their reality is a ‘battle’, and their content production is a form of struggle. (interview 2,6,8,10 &11) Similarly, OMN journalists said our main job is articulating the Oromo question, being a voice for the voiceless (Interview 1&9). A journalist’s motive and aspiration in joining the exiled media are also mainly motivated by the fact that the media is the only venue to combat the political structure and reach local allies within home (interview 2, 6, 8,10&11),

Discussion

Media content is subject to pressure in many forms and different levels according to Shoemaker & Reese (2014). The level of influence can vary depending on the media structure and format (Interview 4). This study attempts to narrow in on how exiled media content production is influenced by inside or outside forces. Producing journalistic content for home audience consumption while residing across the Atlantic makes the Ethiopian exiled media unique. In different contexts it has been shown in the findings how they produce their daily content and what influence the production of the news specifically in ESAT and OMN. Moreover, through the in-depth interviews with the journalists, this research uncovers how exiled media affect the Ethiopian media culture at home.

Individual, Reporters, and stringers

The main content for ESAT and OMN that will be aired to their respective audience comes from home (Interview 1,2,5,9 &10). The journalists working in the studio depend on those who send information, verify tips, and even record some audio-visual recordings. Reporters and stringers send information most of the time anonymously (Interview 1). The verification process is challenging because correspondence of the media content undertakes secretly. Infused with personal prejudice and favoritism, most of them fail to follow journalistic paradigm with the journalist in front of the screen forced to go through double layers of corroborations of facts (Interview 5). The stringers and informants in different parts of Ethiopia are not trained journalists but individuals who want to contribute to the media even though their action might backfire on their individual liberty (interview 1 &5). Moreover, as exiled medias are based outside of the country, stringers feel the need to send reports only to the extreme edge increasing its intense partiality as if adhering to balance the story would minimize its truthfulness. Applying Lee's

(2018) research findings, the elusiveness, fluidity, and flexibility of social media provide young people in Cambodia to validate their voice creating alliance throughout the world. This also is true to Ethiopian youth who were looking, and demanding coalition through assisting Ethiopian exiled media by providing inside information.

Reporters inside both ESAT and OMN are mostly forced exiled journalists or political refugees who want to see regime change in their home nation (Chalachew Tadesse, 2017). As ESAT journalists aligned themselves with Ethiopian nationalists (Interview 8), OMN journalists demanded more freedom for the Oromo ethnic group (Interview 9). The difference in ideology makeup of the media and individual journalists is also seen in their content production. The content they produce has an ideological reflection and reflect what they stand for, a medium for struggle or a voice for the voiceless.

The interpretation of journalistic routine when it comes to ESAT and OMN should be seen together with how the government limits their desire to function as journalists in their own home (Interview 8). In exiled they choose a different route to get back what is taken from them. As an editor of ESAT said “our journalism is a show of struggle to get back our own space”. Thus, content production is a form of unique routine that is impacted by how the journalist wants to implement it differently given their situation.

Moreover, individual journalists and opinion makers play a significant role in shaping the media’s rhetoric (Interview 4). The coming of social media platforms gives journalists the ability to connect and speak to their home audience, thus directly blurring individual brand and journalistic responsibility. As some of the individual’s journalists consider their efforts as sort of fighting and struggling for regime change, their mixed message and persona diverge from the

very idea of journalism they want to see in their native home (Interview 6,7 & 8). The image individual journalists, activists, stringers, and opinion makers generate for themselves in different social media cast shadows over the content they produce and the media institution they are affiliated with.

Examining the theoretical framework of hierarchical influence model in exiled media, individuals, reporters, and stringers vary in their influence level based on the final content. However, each of the stakeholders put their own shadow in selecting, forming, shaping, and disseminating each story in which they participate.

Social media

As in every media organization inside and outside of Ethiopia, the imminent existence of social media in general and specifically for ESAT and OMN disrupts the old way of functioning journalism (Interview 8, 5, & 9). The main editor for ESAT explains it saying “It gives us a wider and easily accessible voice at the same time we become followers, and it will take us time to come with evidence based news after it is broken in social media.” Reshaping their structural approach broadcasting from afar, both ESAT and OMN start to use social media extensively beyond engaging their audiences (Interview 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 & 11).

Understanding its distinctive nature to mobilize information from different parts of the country, ESAT initially utilized social media to get information from individual sources to produce news content (Interview 10). OMN expanded its use of social media especially during the Oromo protest (Interview 9). News content was made instantly as they were sent to the station from all over the Oromia region. The uniqueness of its live social media broadcast and campaign resulted in to live televised consumption for home television audiences.

The exchange of information tapping on social media platforms from home enabled an easy flow of information and tips exchange for ESAT and OMN with limited restrictions from the government. The audio-visual presentation of media content enhances extensively while at the same time its main challenge and constraint in the content verification process are mentioned as impediments to narrow its flaws from afar. As Rohman 2019, concluded the persistent connection and participation of employing social media after the conclusion of social movements, similarly Ethiopian exiled media societies, conversations continue to remain in the political sphere mainly utilizing various social media tools and platforms.

Media format (party), Institutional and government

Ownership of the media organization and structure in ESAT and OMN are an emblematic representation of how news content is produced in an anomalous way from a journalism paradigm (Interview 6). The very existence of the media content production on its own is constantly in a dilemma with journalistic endeavor and at the same time sharply diverges (Interview 7). Examining Shoemaker and Reess's level of influence specifically on an organizational level, both media organizations draw distinct lines on how they stand in making media content based on their individual organization's aim in advancing their political agenda. Both medias start out to be a media company which can provide information but end up prioritizing the advancement of their partisan agenda in the media content first there by serving their political wing (Interview 6).

The Ethiopian diaspora that support both ESAT are less interested in the media journalism content production work than the political linkage or affiliation they lean on to advance their cause (Mesfin, 2019). Moreover, the greatest challenge and influence in shaping the content

production process comes from the Ethiopian government, by denying them space, and further charging both media institution with anti- terrorism law (Human Rights Watch, 2017). With its decision to eliminate all press institutions inside the country, the proliferation of diaspora media with different array of interest groups becomes second nature. The influence in content production not only starts when the institution or individual journalists flee their country, but keeps adding up in each level of content production.

Inside Ethiopia, television stations are predominantly controlled by regional and state governments with some private television stations affiliated with government officials which only work on infotainment productions. However, the content production style of exiled media, and way of choosing content focus influence local media to respond to the content and entirely shift how content is formulated in Ethiopian local media conversation (Endalkachew, 2018).

Coming from the many conversations from exiled media organizations is the shift on how the political agenda is shaped. As the exiled media gives voice for those dominant in the social media platforms, individuals and group activists concerns are prevalent and are echoed back to the local media spheres inside Ethiopia, having started their inception in exiled media (Interview 5). The dialogue easily drifts among government, citizens, exiled media, and social media, instantly restructuring the position of Ethiopian media culture and its content production format.

Under normal circumstances the hierarchal influence model examines content in five levels. However, in the Ethiopian exiled media, space is something that has to be considered for analysis as it has its own level of pressure over content production. While residing in other countries journalists are working without having seen the actual context on the ground. That has been a key point made by the journalists. The eyes and ears of the journalists are covered in

some form for privacy and safety concerns. That is a unique level of analysis in exiled media to be investigated besides those listed by Shoemaker and Reese 2014.

The government intervention and relationship with exiled media is distinctive when viewed through the prism of the hierarchical influence model. It acts as moderator and at the same time an actor which hinders their very existence inside and outside of the country. Not only does it influence the way content is produced but happened to be the very cause for exiled media operating in a refugee status. Outside of their home country, they remain to do their work even after paying personal and professional sacrifice (Interview 7). Forced out of their country, the context Ethiopian exiled media found themselves in and by itself could be examined in a distinctive outlook in hierarchical influence model on how that plays a part in content production. Thus, the exiled media use of journalistic routines in their own terms, defining what makes their media exceptional in content production is another way that exiled media breaks the norm of analyzing influence on media content creation.

Now ubiquitous social media platforms play significant influence in almost all media content creation when it comes to ESAT and OMN. Their extraordinary utilization of social media platforms is differently experienced and has impacted ESAT and OMN that calls for a rare look in the hierarchal influence model.

The work of exiled journalists from afar does not necessarily follow a path in which the media perform under normal conditions (Interview 5). In general, they target their news content mostly focusing on political issues and exposing government misdeeds, provide wider contextual analysis and set their own agenda for the public forum (Interview 8). Being targeted, most

journalists focus on freedom of the press and freedom of expression, pursuing their media agenda while exposing government unconstitutional acts (Interview 10).

The content creation approach and method introduced by exiled media's like ESAT and OMN are highly impacted by the fact their media companies are not allowed to operate from home, hindering the media to have less firsthand stories to put into their content. However, some of their influential approaches were implemented by homegrown media organizations following their exiled popularity (Interview 8). Moreover, some government regulated home media organization are responding and counter reacting to the exiled media agenda which informs how the exiled media in its own space from afar alters the media culture of producing contents inside Ethiopia.

Limitations

For this study journalists from ESAT and OMN were interviewed. While interviewing for this research, journalists discussed the role played by stringers from different points of view.

Stringers inside Ethiopia have their own role to play in the production of content. In looking at how content is produced, this research would have been enriched if it included stringers based inside Ethiopia who can share their point of view while collecting facts and story. It would be beneficial if future study could look deep into their experience. The fact that stringers played significant roles in the content production revealed itself during interviews of the research.

Analysis that compares the production of content inside Ethiopia and the exiled media would give a wider perspective since the government pressure has its own part in producing content in both conditions differently.

Conclusion

In exile Reeyot Alemu sustained her journalism work. Though in the beginning of 2018 the new administration invites exiled individuals and journalists to come home and participate in the democratization process, the freedom of doing critical journalism remains at the mercy of government. Journalists are facing harassment and detention. Thus, the exiled media organizations and individuals continued to play critical role in Ethiopian media sphere. This research paper investigates what influence content formation in exiled media employing hierarchy of influences model. Individuals who work in the organizations exert their own understanding of their content especially in exiled media organization reporters or stringers who send reporting from home play significant role in shaping the narratives of the story and directing its impact. As ESAT and OMN journalist were unable to be in the spot, most of their production depend on assistance form reports on the ground, their way of finding context in the story were through their unidentified stringers which shadow its trustworthiness. Beside individual leadership, political influence and the desire of the media organization shook content production process. More than boosting capacities of exiled media, social media platforms sway their content creation mechanize mainly by forcing their production format to respond for what has been surfaced in the online arena. With instant access to audience, the content production format entirely renovated and narrow the time gap. This research also covered the two organizations, ESAT and OMN organizational and ideological inclination influenced by ethno/nationalism views affecting their content formation. In exile ESAT and OMN play the double role of struggling for media freedom following unfamiliar way of journalism routine and pursuing political agenda. Finally, the findings suggest that the ESAT and OMN's content production culture transcend space and create new ways of journalism routine.

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Appendices

Interview 1 OMN Producer

Interview 2 ESAT Visual Editor

Interview 3 ESAT Producer and Editor

Interview 4 ESAT Producer

Interview 5 OMN and ESAT Producer

Interview 6 ESAT Program Producer

Interview 7 OMN and ESAT Producer

Interview 8 ESAT Editor and Producer

Interview 9 OMN Producer and Editor

Interview 10 ESAT Producer

Interview 11 ESAT Visual Editor