

Background

To understand any political communications, one must seek to consider multiple dimensions like culture, politics, economy, and technology (Hyden and Leslie, 2002). On the basis of Graber's (2004:45) conviction contextual factors make the political communication different in several environments. Accordingly Graber's suggestion brings to our attention the idea that political communication studies must begin with observing how people are communicating in their context so as to come up with appropriate analysis.

In African culture Radio Trottoir and other informal media have a more significant utilization and role in political communication than the mainstream media, which might not hold true for the Western world (Hyden and Leslie, 2002:24). This peculiar characteristic emanates from the tradition which is dominantly oral and the relative weakness of the formal media. Some scholars argue in favor of these media, by explaining that political development in the continent should get its foundation from such informal means of communication, which are interactive, have dialogue and mass participation.

Many believe that the mainstream media in Africa are not the free actors (mediators) of political communication; rather, they are instruments of the officials' propaganda. Having this in their minds, people try to create their own communication space in authoritarian environments (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1997, Hyden and Leslie, 2002, Spitulnik, 2002, Fekade, 2006). One of these communication spheres can appear in forms of 'radio trottoir' (sidewalk radio).

Furthermore, Spitulnik (2002:179) explains vividly that 'radio trottoir' as alternative media are a "... crucial part of civil society and the public sphere, understood most broadly, as the arena where citizens and citizen-based associations discuss state authority, political accountability, and representation." Likewise, Hyden and Leslie (2002) confirm that, studying political communication in Africa based on the formal (mainstream) media loses its

luster unless it includes a look at the alternative media like ‘radio trottoir’ component.

Mainstream Media in Ethiopia

The mainstream media of Ethiopia as mediators of political communication is not an exception in any way from the media of most African countries. Much research has evidenced that, throughout history, the mainstream media have not been free public arena specifically when it comes to political matters (Aadland and Fackler, 2009). Aadland and Fackler (ibid), in line with this, say the following about the situation in the media:

It is fair to say that while the makeup of Ethiopia's government has frequently changed during the twentieth century, the printing press's function, as well as that of radio, television, and news agencies, has remained the same: to serve the government in power. Media have consistently and primarily promoted government policy and activities. Consequently, Ethiopia has little or no indigenous tradition of thinking about the press as a free commercial enterprise, or as a watchdog or critic of the government.

The inefficiency of the media has been observed not only in the government owned but also with the so called ‘independent’ media. Since the state owned media are mouthpieces of the governors, the privates’ failed to serve the people because of internal (i.e. being sensational, partisan, ‘polarized’ and so on) (Shimelis, 2006) and external factors (i.e. systematic government repression, censorships) (Aadland and Fackler, 2009 and Yetenayet, 2008).

Apart from the inefficiency of the media, there are not enough media in Ethiopia unlike other African countries even currently. There is only a handful of broadcast and a bit more print media in current Ethiopia (Aadland and Fackler, 2009).

‘Radio Trottoir’ in African Political Communication History

In Africa cases 'Radio Trottoir' can be a communication media which can appear in traditional or modern form and modes. This includes funny stories, folk music, poems, graffiti, and other verbal genres which are transmitted via underground cassettes, web pages, mobile phones and the like medium. These communications are also identified by the names: informal media, small media, alternative media, minor media, personal media, popular media, community media, folk media, traditional media and so on in different literatures while they share many common features.

Whatever the case is, as Finnegan (1970) describes 'radio trottoir' (she calls it folklore or folk media) can take the place of the press in a non-literate society. Though the medium and its utilization in the political process are not recent phenomena in Africa, the form and the content differ from time to time and from one political system to another. Finnegan adds that the ongoing relation between traditional political communication and the modern culture in Africa is being adapted to particular political circumstances.

In history, for example, in South Africa anti-apartheid movements, several political protests which had wide circulation were expressed through forms of 'radio trottoir.' Cultural songs were one of the widely used forms during the movements (Finnegan, 1970). Some religious verses even express political aspirations and ideals of the time that are not easily communicated through other media.

To show the role these media have in history, Finnegan (1970) states the following:

Poetry [one form of 'Radio Trottoir'] can also be used to pressurize those in authority or to comment on local politics. Songs of insult, challenge, or satirical comment also have a long history, and can function not only on a personal level but also as politically effective weapons.

The innocuous nature of 'radio trottoir' communication, as Finnegan (1970) argues, gives them an advantage over other formal political communication media. Based on her description, this was particularly true in Africa during the early nationalist movements.

The wider usage of 'radio trottoir' in form of political songs was gaining acceptance from African political parties as well in the 1970's; thus, based on Finnegan's (1970) observations, they were using the songs for political communication, propaganda, political pressure and education purposes. Apart from their oral forms the 'radio trottoir' messages also were appearing in print and written forms. The media were served as powerful and flexible weapons in many political communication activities.

In colonial situations, where authorities mostly could not speak local languages, these media were utilized with great advantage. For example, in Somalia love songs have been used for political message transmission. Using the language hurdle, the people even were able to perform these opposition songs publicly and on colonizer's controlled radio stations.

Similar things happen in East Africa during the independence struggle. The Kenyan Mau Mau movement songs of the 1950's are also among these effective political communications via 'radio trottoir'. The Mau Mau movement was banned by the rulers of the time. However, using the songs of the people, leaders of the movement were able to carry out active and widespread propaganda among the Kenyan masses.

'Radio Trottoir' in Ethiopia

According to the well known Ethiopian folklorist Fekade Azeze (2006: 149), 'radio trottoir' are the communication spheres most Ethiopians use to express their view on any matter. Except for a few educated members of the

community, the masses, either in urban or rural settings, usually express themselves in different forms of 'radio trottoir'. The folk forms are one of the most popular 'radio trottoir' modes of expression. Since the mode of communication favors interpersonal, group and cultural ways of communications, it is among the highly valued and accepted method (Teshager, 2006, Gulilat, 2006, Getachew, 2006).

Utilization of the folk and other traditional ways as one way of political communication has a very long history in Ethiopia. The oral poetries, jokes, idiomatic expressions, anecdotes, nick names and so on is often used by the masses for political expression. These 'radio trottoir' communications have been taken as more reliable sources of information than the mainstream media as well. The transmission in these channels is quite faster and easier than the products of the press in most cases. In addition, the 'radio trottoir' communication is improving through time because of infrastructural improvements and technological advancements in the nation (Fekade, 2006).

Similarly with other African countries, the 'radio trottoir' communication spaces serve to express what cannot be said directly about the political system in Ethiopia. Thus it is possible to say they are real public arena that the citizens use to exchange information, to comment, to criticize, to warn the state in power and sometimes to mobilize the masses.

Many former emperors recognized the potential of these spheres to find out the real feelings of the mass, so, as Fekade (2006) describes, they used to ask what has been communicated in 'radio trottoir'. Fekade (2006:149) states the traditional experiences in the following way:

In the olden days, emperors, kings, governors, and local officials reportedly used to ask 'irräñña mīn alä?' (meaning, "what do shepherds say?"). If there are things that have gone wrong in the community, if there are prophecies of what is to come, critical and prophetic views are said to be expressed in the songs of young shepherds. Oral tradition has it that Menelik benefited a lot from the views, criticisms

and warnings of these shepherds. Thus, it could be said that there was a tradition of governance in Ethiopia which always gave room and paid attention to these voices.

In the tradition it was well-known that the shepherds' songs were an accurate expression of their communities' views. As result, some pervious leaders has got information about the system and used to shape the political system. From few leaders who have benefited from it Emperor Menelik II can be mentioned as an example.

Contrarily, the modern political systems in Ethiopia do not seem to give adequate room for 'radio trottoir' communication, though it no doubt contributes a lot to the political development of the country.

What should be taken into consideration is that the Ethiopian tradition of secrecy (Fekade, 2006), especially on political issues, usually leads them to communicate politics informally. Political discussion in Ethiopia has not taken place in an open public arena for several reasons throughout history. This previous history still has an influence on the political discussion sphere. Therefore, by considering this communication culture of Ethiopians, giving attention to the 'radio trottoir' is very useful.

Generally, as Fekade (2006) describes, in the tradition 'radio trottoir' are very important way of expressions. Ethiopians also used to express their opinion, support, disagreements, dissatisfactions, frustrations, and so on via these media throughout history. Therefore for a better understanding of the different dimensions of the political communication process in the country it is crucial medium to be researched very well.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study is to explore 'radio trottoir' political communications that have been done in Addis Ababa since 2005 to 2011.

Based on this major objective, the following are specific objectives of the study:

- To identify and categorize the messages transmitted via the alternative media based on their major themes;
- To analyze the nature and tones of these messages;
- To examine the sources of the messages;
- To explore the channels and networks utilized in the communication media, and;
- To identify the forms of the messages.

To achieve these objectives, the study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the major themes of alternative media messages?
2. What types of message are communicated and what is the nature and tone of the messages?
3. Who are the major sources and participants of the political messages?
5. How do the communications take place, with what channels and networks?
6. What are the forms of the messages and how are they expressed?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study aims at exploring how political communication takes place in 'radio trottoir' and analyzes the elements in the process qualitatively. So, it explains how the messages are communicated in the sphere together with their nature. Identifying the network, channel and forms utilized in the communication sphere is also a center of attention.

The scope is limited to analyzing local and purely political issues in the arena. Though both national and international political issues are discussed in the

media, non-local political issues discussed in the media are outside of the scope of this research.

Messages exchanged after 2005 are the focus of the study. Though the study was intended at the beginning to study the messages circulated since 1991, during data collection it became almost impossible to find informants who memorize enough messages communicated in all these years. In addition it was also hard to get records and other secondary sources that documented the messages. Since most of the 'radio trottoir' messages in focus have been transmitted orally, they are gone from the minds of the communicators. So the research is forced to limit itself to the time that is fresh in people's memories: 2005 to present.

Methodology

Since the aim of this study is to analyze political communication in 'radio trottoir', a qualitative research design is employed to achieve the goal (Creswell 2007). To explore what the messages are, their nature, and participants together with the channels and networks employed within the cultural context in detail, the study makes use of qualitative design. Graber (2004) in support of this says that the qualitative method can help to interpret political messages, and if it is done systematically it may be useful and accurate.

Among the various qualitative research designs, content analysis is selected and utilized for this study. Content analysis in general (either qualitative or quantitative) is the most hallowed and widely used method in political communication research to analyze media messages. Specifically, the qualitative content analysis is often used whenever there is a need for detailed understanding of media messages and the way they are communicated in a specific context (Graber, 2004:46).

Sources

It was important to incorporate various voices in this study. To this effect, the selection of respondents of diversified age group, sex and educational background was necessitated. Accordingly, among the 21 key informants, there are 12 men and 9 women, of whom 4 are high school graduates (grade 12), 3 are collage students, 8 are diploma or bachelor degree holders and the rest are post graduates. With regard to their age groups, there are 2 teenagers under 18, 14 youths between 18-35 and 5 adults above 35. All the informants are residents of Addis Ababa and use 'radio trottoir' for political communication.

Data collection methods

Because of the constraints of resources and difficulty of accessing handy data, this research has not attempted the gathering of all 'radio trottoir' messages that have political contents. Rather, the study is limited to collecting messages in the forms of jokes, folk music, puns, and oral poems. Among these, messages in electronic form that have been exchanged by subscribers of mobile phones through their Bluetooth, infrared¹ and short text messages (SMS) were collected. In addition to these, there appeared to be messages in audio, messages communicated/ performed in oral and written forms in different gatherings and public squares of Addis Ababa which are collected through participant observations and interviews.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is the main data collecting method in this study. To understand the communication process of the 'radio trottoir' within its natural contexts, direct observation was made in many occasions of social gatherings where the data collection was possible. In this regard, the 2009 Ethiopian Great Run, football games fields in different villages, and leisure time friendly gatherings and entertainments in local refreshment centers such as cafes and

¹ Bluetooth and infrared are features enable to transfer data wirelessly from one phone to another in the 2.4 GHz unlicensed band, with a range of 10- 100 meters and by pointing infrared ports of the phones in straight line connectivity respectively

tearooms were found to be convenient and safe settings for the data collection through participant observations.

Many jokes and folk poems are thus collected with participant observation. To this end, note taking was utilized since informants didn't allow recording of their voices for safety reasons except the mobile text and audio messages. With the consent of informants, the data collected were presented anonymously.

Interview

To collect the political messages and have a clear understanding of how they are communicated, interviews were also employed in this study. The interviewing is used for collecting political messages as they naturally appeared in various contexts. The meaning of the messages (interpretations) and other information related to the process were also asked for and noted during the interview sessions, which hopefully helps to minimize over reading and subjectivity of the researcher's interpretation. To this end, informants, who were engaged in the friendly and relaxed interaction during the above mentioned occasions, were asked about the nature and contextual meanings of the political messages expressed in the jokes, songs and oral poetry communicated therein. In addition, information about the sources of the messages, the channels and networks were collected using such interviews on different occasions.

Data Presentation and Interpretation

The messages selected for the purpose of this study are those related to political issues communicated via alternative small media in Addis Ababa since 2005. When it comes to the arena of political communication, one of the major contemporary issues of the 21st century is thought to be democratic principles. Accordingly the presentation and interpretation of such messages may be of paramount importance for the wellbeing of all mankind in the contemporary world.

The political messages that circulated in the 'radio trottoir' in Addis Ababa since 2005 appeared in different forms. Among others, however, only some folk forms are in focus of this study. The folklores that carried out modern political messages are exchanged on different social occasions and in diverse forms. Since it is difficult to incorporate all political messages conveyed in these media in a study of limited space, making selection and analysis of representative samples may be inevitable. For the purpose of this study, therefore, only sample texts of jokes, folk songs and oral poems that are performed in Amharic and English were selected and analyzed.

As indicated above, the messages were exchanged in different social occasions, including the 2009 Great Run, sport events, and friendly gatherings in coffee houses and tearooms. In these and such like contexts, men and women of varied age groups, educational backgrounds, socio-cultural and political networks exchange political messages via words of mouth, print and electronic channels (for example, mobile phone). Some of these are examined in this study.

The examination focuses on the major political issues raised in the 'radio trottoir' and on how people communicate them in the sphere to shed light on this under researched area of communication study.

One more methodological note is in order before proceeding to the analysis and presentation of the data. The 'radio trottoir' political communications are indirect ways of communicating with someone in power and often involve sensitive political contents that are typically communicated secretly and within closely related social groups and networks of trust. In such situations, to access information one has to win consent and confidence of the interactants. Correspondingly, the researcher made the informants' anonyms mainly for security reasons.

Key Findings of the Research

Based on the analyzed and interpreted data, the major political themes posed in the 'radio trottoir' messages about politics are elections, governance, rights to life, political parties and the mainstream media. From these, messages that deal with elections make up the lions' share. Out of 88 messages selected for this study, there are about 36 stories that raise elections as their major theme. Governance is the second most-widely discussed agenda item in the alternative media, with 29 stories. Rights to life, mainstream media and political parties with their leaders are also among the most important issues to be communicated in the media with 11, 7 and 5 stories respectively. This implies that in the public sphere, issues related to elections and governance are considered as the most important issues. This could have some signal for the state in power about the focus of public discontent about political issues.

4.2.1. Themes of the 'Radio Trottoir' Messages

As one form of media, alternative small media have different agendas to set in their communication spheres. Precisely, politics is one of the major agendas. In a way that is appropriate to this presupposition, it is common to observe the widespread circulation of several political messages in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, with the aid of the available 'radio trottoir' domain. Democratic issues as the main agendas of current communication media discourse are also immensely conversed in the 'radio trottoir'.

Election politics is the most dominant theme in many of the 'radio trottoir' stories, and it entertains several issues which focus on the pre and post election situations surrounding the 2005 and 2010 national elections in Ethiopia. In the pre election messages: criticism on inefficiency and the lack adequate candidates, unfair competition, defective promises by political parties on election campaigns, and the promotion or opposition to political parties in the election are discussed frequently. In addition, the public's enthusiasm to vote using their democratic rights is highly reflected, especially in the May

2005 national election. The following 'radio trottoir' poem reflected the optimistic view of jobless if they vote for party other than the ruling party.

*Let it be in unison when we arise to vote for CUD
Because all the jobless will be engaged on work*

Some other messages also reflected their opposition for the ruling party by mentioning its wrong doings in the following song.

*Such as these [EPRDF] who never believed in the Country's development,
And who never take pride in the nation's flag,
who never cared about the citizens' dignity,
Begged to be voted not being so ashamed at all?*

The ruling party, EPRDF blamed by some part of the society for not giving the required value to the nation's flag. "In the Ethiopians culture the flag of the nation mean a lot for the people, it is pride, grace, symbol of identity and unity, something the people give their life . . .", as one of the informant describes. So the people with such position look intolerant and consider it as not keeping the dignity of the citizens'. As it is reflected in the song, respect to the flag and citizens as very important requirement rulers expected to hold. People in the group seem to be say, it is not appropriate to vote for the one who didn't respect the flag of the nation; rather to feel ashamed if it wishes to be elected.

However, there are also messages that illustrate the skeptical position of some part of the society, which forecasted the elections' futility. The individuals who holds cynic look by forecasting the unfairness of the election express their idea in stories like below.

Joke: *Two friends are chatting. In the middle one asked the other:
A: whom do you think will win in the coming election? **B:** which election?
A: Is there any other election than the coming national election? **B:** Oh, are you saying the training **A:** what are you talking about? **B:** I mean, I don't even consider it as election since there is no enough and strong opposition parties to compete with the ruling party.*

The election criticized in the joke for its inefficiency and lack of enough and adequate competition. To describe the situation the criticizer portray the

election as training which takes place without opponents before the actual competitions takes place.

In the post election period, on the other hand, the topics of discussion were predominantly about the lack of rationality in the two elections. The major themes incorporated in the stories revolve around the unfair voting procedures observed, the corruption of the people's vote by the ruling party, the exaggerated percentage of election winning results, and the improper post election crises management intervention by the government. In many of the stories, the critics on the ruling party which won in most part of the nation are very out lauded. In addition, and National Board of Election and other observers were under this criticism. Here are few stories to illustrate the idea.

It was an election Campaign: *A man died and his soul was taken to God. When he reached there, he was told to visit both heaven and hell so that he could decide where to spend his eternity. Therefore it was arranged for the man to visit hell first. The moment he approached to gate, the Devil gave him a warm welcome and took him inside. There, he saw all his old friends gathering, drinking, playing pools. Seating and spending a very pleasant time. In his next visit, he went to heaven. He was shocked to see the people there praying, praising God, asking for a blessing... all day long. He then reached to a conclusion to join hell where he thought he would find some fun. As of his agreement, he was taken to hell the next day. This time the Devil was naked and very scary. He hit him with a strong rope and threw him inside. Half of the body of his friends' was in fire and they were suffering a lot with all their satanic rites. He asked what has happened to the fun he saw the other day and was told that it was an election campaign.*

The sharp criticism in this humors story revealed how political parties cheated voters with false promises.

Already corrected *There was a man who voted for CUD by mistake while his intent had been voting for EPRDF. It's a pity that he realized his mistake the moment he reached home. Accordingly so as to correct his mistake went back to the polling station immediately. Thus he explained his mistake to the observers in charge of the election and demanded to be allowed to correct it. To this they replied, "Don't worry, we've already corrected it!"*

At a reflection of the society, this story show how people think about the drama behind the curtain to misuse public voices takes palace. This can imply, though we voted for the party we are supporting; it will be changed and browbeaten by the ruling party. The critics in the joke also directed to the observers whom normally expected to be independent. People exchange such kind of jocks in different social gatherings, like bars and commented on the topic in different ways. So they build up some kind of judgments about the election and its result.

In the messages that deal with governance: public administration, government activities, policies and their implementations are the foremost themes discussed in the alternative media. Most stories that gave attention to the government and its governance as a theme, posed opinions related to the problems of good governance. The specific problems raised are: the government's weakness due to a lack of sincerity on some issues and a disinclination to have democratic power promotion, acting responsibly to save the public from economic crises and hunger, maintaining the sovereignty of the country, internal instability, unnecessary interference on other countries affair, deception with the international community, violation of individual rights and uneven management.

Interview with the Prime Minister with BBC journalist

Journalist: *honored Prime Minister Meles, how do you look at the inflation in the Country?***PM:** *In principle, I glance at it sideways (in hatred). Ministers and their young followers are busy chewing **chat**, making **du'a** (supplication in search of what they want Allah grant them) in order to make the economic crisis futile. **Journalist:** *Is this not contradicting your pledge that you endeavor to feed the nation thrice a day?* **PM:** *It's not contradicting! No matter how it seems impossible to feed the nation thrice a day, since we have set a strategy which lets the nation to starve thrice a day and get away with it sitting idle in contemplation, talking. It's could not be beyond our control at all. As far as it happens to be not an obstacle to the development, the hunger of the nation can never be our adversary. To your amazement, it has enabled us to rescue our nation from anti-health factors such as obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes that are affecting the international community.**

Journalist: *It's being heard that you will resign by the following election. **PM:** who said so? Me?* **Journalist:** *yes, you said so. **PM:** out of Meles, such a thing*

has never come out. It is unfortunate that I don't have any competing antagonist to takeover my position. Consequently you find them calumniating me.

Journalist: *But we have once witnessed, in the presence of foreign journalists as well, and took your word for it. **PM:** why do you talk nonsense? Has BBC ever recruited Amharic or Tigrigna speaking journalists? Do you hear me? Let alone leaving such a hot seat, a comfortable throne, see for yourself how much it's difficult to leave the seat of your **bercha** (chat ceremony) by just chewing a bundle of **beleche** (special type of chat).*

Government's lack of responsiveness for the economic crises, and disinclination to have democratic power promotion, dictatorship, and deception articulated as major themes in the above story. Part of the society, who believes in the rulers' irresponsible actions to solve their problems, accused the leaders. In that the PM perceived as he tries to give futile solution for the food insecurity. The governors' actions are taken as effortless contemplation, which looks like *chewing chat* and *making du'a* without doing anything. The PM pledge, in the parliament, to endeavor feeding the nation thrice a day, is presented in the story as it is to mean starving thrice a day. Denying such realities also expressed in the joke by reworking the PM speech on the economic crises. During that speech, he said that the inflations are not beyond control. Following that, the joker said the crises are not beyond control and hinder the nation's development, to mean the fact about adversary of the nation's are denied. The justification of the PM on the issue, even pictured as is mocking since it says the hunger can rescue the people from anti-health factors.

Having such things in mind, the communicators in the sphere label the current government in Ethiopia as decayed, as it appear in the following story.

There is only one decayed government we all know: *A student, who suspected as active participant in the students' movement, was caught to be punished and whipped too much. The student could never know the reason for being penalized and asked "why are you punishing me, What wrong have I committed?" the officer replied "you were convicted of defamation for you were observed talking 'it is such a decayed government'" The student replied "but, have I said whether it is this or that government?" the officer responded, "oh! Better find another reason. There exists only one decayed government. You know this and I know this as well" and went on whipping.*

The ironic expression in the story try to tell there is immense good governance problems currently. As it is revealed in the message, the current regime perceived by some as it is has perished governance. In addition the story presented the decadence of the administration is known by everyone in the system including officials themselves. There is also an issue of lack of freedom to hold and express any idea without restriction in the story. Many more stories deal with the problems with governance.

*What did Dergue (the former ruling party) say?
No way to compromise on the sovereignty of my Country
Better to die than letting others take way a plot of land
What did Melese (the PM) say?
You can take the whole portion of the land
You can also take the port if you wish
But no surrender when it comes to my power*

The opinion the above folksong also contained, criticize the existing governments for lack of maintaining the sovereignty of the country. The message might come out from groups which have compliant on *Bademe's* land and port *Aseb's* belongingness to Eretria. Since the places were Ethiopia's territories previously, these people condemn the rulers not to keep that. In the poem, securing the power is presented as the sole concern of the government. The regime criticized for its stumpy concern for the port and the boarder land of Ethiopia which even reserved by the pervious dictator rule, Derge.

Apart from the issues discussed above there are agendas like government's internal instability, deception with the international community, dictatorship, violation of citizens rights to work and live freely, and need of governmental transformation and so on in the spheres. Among these, the following audio messages exchanged through mobile phones using Bluetooth could be taken as an example. It is presented in culturally known blessing and curse (*mirikat ena ergeman*) form. The men who lead the ritual dictate the followers to say 'amen' to what they are saying. Though the message circulated originating from anonyms source, the opinion seems the idea of business men who expelled

from their trade. In the long curse verses many governance issues were raised and government is condemned for its wrongdoings in different areas. Just to look at some of the important stanzas:

<i>Say Amen to that</i>	
<i>Let EPRDF be poisoned.</i>	<i>Amen</i>
<i>Let its tongue that he uses to deceive foreigners,</i>	<i>“</i>
<i>Be tied and let it lose its tooth</i>	<i>”</i>
<i>So that the country finds its tranquility.</i>	<i>Amen.</i>
<i>As it expelled us out of the big mall, Merkato</i>	<i>“</i>
<i>And turned us to null, let EPRDF be zero</i>	<i>”</i>
<i>Even below that</i>	<i>“</i>
<i>And denied our right to work and live</i>	<i>”</i>
<i>Let EPRDF be dismantled.</i>	<i>Amen</i>
<i>Ye, patriots,</i>	<i>“</i>
<i>Unite to attack and overthrow the government</i>	<i>Amen. . . .</i>

It is common in the culture to curse opponent especially if the curser is powerless to attack the enemy in some way. Cursing can be taken as a weapon for the powerless. Accordingly these public as powerless entity, in comparison with armed power, used it to attack and show the opposition and challenge the government. In the story several curses pass on the government for its failure in different administration area like: deception, instability, not to keep every citizen’s right to work and live freely. Based on that, they pass their wishes for the government to be cracked and dismantled. The message also tries to instigate and encourage the people to remove the government from power.

In stories that converse about the government officials, on the other hand, opinions on authorities are reflected. Inefficiency of the security officers and some ministers' administration, and also critiques of some key authorities’ performances, are the most pronounced themes. On policies and their implementations messages about inconsistency and unsuitability for the civil servants are the major issues raised.

The other major themes of the messages on political parties also raise different agenda points to the discussion board of alternative media in Addis. There is a tendency to make many conversations on those few political parties and leaders which they perceived as important. EPRDF, CUD, UEDF, Medrek and their leaders gets much attention in these media. The CUD's and UEDF's key leaders are praised in the messages for their commitment to the country as it is perceived by those public. In contrast, some political leaders, EPRDF as a party and also CUD after the 2005 election crises are roundly blamed in the messages. The following folk music called *Menzuma* could be representative example to show the case under discussion.

The names of the citizens who stand for us during this challenge shall be admired and praised in history.

Praise to CUD's leader Hailu Shawel, who is firm and devoted to his goals.

Praise to Hibret's leader Merara Gudina, who innocently strives for the country's development.

Praise to Eng. Gizachew, who could not give up.

In spite of the hunger, thirst, jail and surrounding weapon, one who is not afraid of death in his young age, EPRDF's Cadre how are you Lidetu?

It's unlikely to find a man of his words in Lalibela (which is Ledetu's home land)

Praise to Dr. Yakob who left a huge income in western countries to stand for his country and his people.

Praise to Birhanu nega, a great person! There is no wealthy person who always speaks for poor and never be defeated by his enemies.

Praise to a charismatic person, Debebe Eshetu who made us all proud.

Praise to the only woman Birtukan Demeksa , who was so brave enough to resist all the ups and downs till being sentenced.

To all who have been challenged and struggled, History shall commemorate you forever

As you were victims of all the killings and injuries; as you died to bring about freedom to your people.

Inherently, *Menzuma* is a spiritual song carried out to praise religious figures. This structure seems to be employed for such purpose to implicate the importance of the parties and their leaders. It may also have an intention of making the mentioned individuals figures in history and give honor. The lead vocalist, as it is heard in the audio message, performed it by imitating typical

cultural *Menzuma* singers' vocal and raised issues related to the political parties.

In Human rights stories, violations against human life and the lack of freedom of expression are posed as most important themes. As is reflected in the messages, there are actions that are against the constitutionally granted rights of the citizens like working and living freely. Also, the public complains about the government and the security officials' denial of their right to hold and express opinions using any frontiers. There are several stories that criticize violation to citizens' right to life for ridiculous reasons similar to the following.

Journalist: *On different occasions, it's been common to hear that "bandits were killed for attempting to break a Bank." But, we have come to witness here is that there is no Bank at all in this area. Are you not contradicting with such news?* **Authority:** *not at all because our principle is to take necessary steps before any incident as a means of prevention. That is why we shot those bandits are shot before the installation of a new Bank on the area.*

As it is tried to be said through the response of the authority in the above joke, people punished for the offense didn't commit. Though the principle bylaw is that better to let ten criminals to escape than putting one innocent in trouble, the story exhibit the reverse is happening in Ethiopia. The sarcasm in the story illustrated citizens' right sullied even in situations they are living calmly. The context of the story can explain the strength of the violation.

There are also several stories that reflects holding and expressing opinion which opposes government authorities may lead someone to lose his/her life or at least to be threatened and terrified. Even if the opinion supported and applause by the society and it don't have any legal limitation, or harm on human dignity, it is limited by government officials, if it is antagonist to the authorities' idea and expectations. Some who suspect direct dialogue holding opponent idea may cause some harm express their fear in the stories like "You don't have a very long time to live" which reads as follow.

You don't have a very long time to live: One government authority came to visit the community and delivered his speech. He had to explain all about the aim of the change introduced. One of the young attendants stood up and commented the authority's speech about change is nothing but a pretence that it's common to hear dictators spit out democratic words just like a parrot, though they don't realize it. He added that many leaders including this authority should give their positions to the one that gains the vote of the people. When he finished, the gathering showed its approval with applauses that could never be stopped. The authority had never expected such reaction and said for the young, "you speak very well. But you don't have a very long time to live" and evacuated immediately.

The mainstream media, with its political aspect, is also discussed and evaluated in the 'radio trottoir' political communication sphere. In the discussion, the main critiques are on the only TV channel in the country- Ethiopian Television lack of loyalty and faithfulness to the public on political matters. From the messages it is possible to learn that the mainstream media are not reliable sources of information on politics for people who communicate in the sphere.

The TV set shrank while ETV lied: A daughter sent her mother some money and told her to buy a 21-inch television. When the daughter returned to her country, she observed that it was 14-inches and asked her mother why she bought that. The mother replied, "My daughter I actually had been bought the one with 21 inches. However whenever I watch Ethiopian television transmission the TV set shrinks because of the lies they always broadcast. And after it happened repeatedly it appears to be this 14-inch size. Still, I'm glad you to see it at this size because it might disappear after a while because of the lies."

In the above jocular story, the lies of the government owned mainstream media overstated as it shrink the irrational entity- the TV set, let alone human being who can sense. The hyperbole gives power for the critique on ETV about its lack to pursue the truth.

Generally, in the sphere of the 'radio trottoir', many political agendas were entertained among consumers in Addis Ababa. From these, major political themes like elections and governance have been discussed widely since 2005.

Sources of the Messages

Sources in the media context can be individuals, groups or institutions that originate messages (Watson and Hill, 2000). Such sources in the 'radio trottoir' are not commonly locatable. As Spitulnick (2002) has noted, the messages are everywhere but their origin is nowhere. However, since most of the texts circulated are in the form of folklore and oral literature, they reflect communal thoughts, beliefs and worldviews of groups rather than that of individuals (Finnegan, 1970).

Identities of the sources of many of the political messages circulated in the 'radio trottoir' and shared among the people in Addis Ababa are generally unknown and kept anonymous to the public. What is important is that people know and use jokes and humorous tales as artistic means to playfully or jokingly comment on and express their views, understandings and value judgments (both positive and negative) of current political parties, issues, practices, activities and personalities in the country. In fact it does not matter whether or not they know who the originators of these popular narratives are. It is only in a few cases that the receivers or participants of the communication receive information from recognized sources. Even in that case they might not be able to identify the individual or group accountable for production and circulation of the stories. Rather one may make out only the closest guess.

Intractants impart messages that they received from someone without worrying much about the inventor of the messages. In this regard (i.e. acting as a transmitter as well as receiver without restrictions) it is possible to say that these communication media are freely participatory for everyone in the communication network regardless of sex, age and educational status.

The folk music produced in groups and performed on certain social occasions like the Great Run race is attributed simply to the public. Similarly, the oral poems that appeared in public spheres are considered as belongings of the community which reflect collective opinion and perception. Even the jokes that

are mainly heard from individual narrators also are not an exception from being considered as group expressions.

The word-of-mouth diffusion of most of the messages and their reproduction on certain sites make pointing out the sources unworkable in most cases. In electronic form messages, like the mobile phone SMS and Bluetooth messages, similar anonymity of the original sources observed.

This participatory nature of the alternative media can be an indicator of its potential to create a more participatory political arena which is indigenous. The trend in alternative media is to have public media which is not owned either by the government or by other big organizations.

Channels and Networks

According to Spitulnik (2002), the 'radio trottoir' communication modalities show new forms that blend mass and interpersonal (popular) media. Similarly, the communication channels and networks of the alternative media in Addis, it is observed that a variety of forms and ways are employed. The channels include word-of-mouth transmissions using traditional ways like communicating on different occasions and also mobile phone technologies like Bluetooth and short written texts. The networks among the communicators of media, on the other hand, are difficult to describe clearly, but as it is observed in different situations, are founded on already established networks of friendship, kinship, neighborhood, membership in a similar ethnic group, party, ideology, profession, religion, and so on. Above all, it is learned in this study that people in the sphere connect and communicate freely only with trusted members. The criteria to be considered a trusted member are unspoken, but are understood by the members.

Nature and Tones of the Messages

'Radio trottoir' messages in their nature could be informative, commentary and critical, mobilizing and also politically challenging (Sreberny-Mohammodi and

Mohammadi, 1997 and Spitulnick, 2002). The different nature of the messages is usually reflected in the messages' oppositional, supportive or neutral tones.

Different 'radio trottoir' messages in Addis Ababa demonstrated the different natures that range from sharing information to mobilizing and challenging the existing political system. The messages are treated based on the dominant nature they exhibit, since it is not plausible to organize them into one and only one category as if each showed only a single nature.

There are messages which have an informing nature about the main agenda of the time. The most important agenda addressed to the people through the messages that are produced and disseminated following the political heat. During election time, messages about the election and about some important topics converse highly. For example in the pre election periods of 2005 and 2010, the 'radio trottoir' keep educating the audiences about the political parties and the election process. After election follow informing what went wrong and right in the election.

The media effort to educate the audiences for making informed decisions is revealed. There are stories that are intended to instruct the public about whom they should vote for and the criteria they should consider before the election. The intentions in other after election stories, on the other hand, seem to inform about the mischief that happened during the election. In this regard it seems they are playing the surveillance role of media.

There are also several stories which try to keep the audiences updated with political information. Stories about different policies, crises, good governance issues, human rights and soon have predominantly informational natures. The messages include poignant stories which state owned media ignore or cover systematically like electric power failures in the country and the reason behind them.

Significant numbers of the messages also have a commenting or criticizing nature. Many of the messages mainly criticize the state in power. However opposition political parties and their leaders are not exempted from critics in the sphere. These critiques and comments on the government and the political system are presented in various forms that range from mere humorous comments to sharp insults and curses.

There are also messages of the 'radio trottoir' which have a challenging and mobilizing nature in the sphere. Especially some folk poems come into view with opposing tone. Also strong resistance voices heard in the verses that try to say 'enough to any uneven actions to democracy.' The folk songs projecting resistance against the government show the courage to be mobilized as well.

Another common nature of the messages in the 'radio trottoir' is the entertaining aspect of the stories. In many of the cases, the messages pass their intended purposes through stories that have some funny and amusing features.

To sum up, the 'radio trottoir' messages in Addis Ababa since 2005 have informative, commenting, criticizing, mobilizing and challenging natures. Regarding their tones, they dominantly exhibit opposition to the government in power and other political actors.

Forms of the Messages

The political messages that have circulated in Addis Ababa since 2005 via 'radio trottoir' have several forms. Among these, the majority appeared in folk or indigenous forms. These traditional ways of expression are employed for modern political messages transmission in the arena.

The most-employed forms of expression and those selected for this study can be categorized into two major folk genres. In the first category are the

narratives which appeared in the form of joke or humorous tale. In the second one, folk poems and songs are incorporated. In the second category, *Menezuma (Zakir)*, praise and curse verses (*mirikatina ergeman*), popular songs, verses in graffiti and couplets are included. As a general feature, all have entertaining elements for their audiences. In addition, the messages appear in a variety of forms including oral, print and electronic forms.

Conclusions

This research has attempted to analyze the ‘radio trottoir’ political communications that have been done in Addis Ababa since 2005, which address local political issues. To deal with this, the study employed a qualitative content analysis research technique and examined the messages based on their themes, nature, forms, sources and the network and channels they employed to communicate in detail. Based on the evaluation, the research arrived at the following conclusions.

The most discussed political topics in the ‘radio trottoir’ communication sphere of Addis Ababa since 2005 are elections and governance. Human rights, mainstream media and political parties are also among the important concerns of the public who are in the arena.

The messages with the above mentioned themes mostly exhibit opposition to the current political system. In doing that, the criticizing, mobilizing, challenging and informing nature of public opposition is reflected in the stories. In addition, the communication takes place ‘secretly’ within certain established networks. The channels utilized also vary from traditional oral form to new technologies like the mobile phone. However, in the communication media the sources of most messages circulated are not usually locatable. Though many people in Addis receive political messages from different individuals or groups,

they are not certain about the originators of the stories. Obscurity of information sources is a common feature for most stories.

Since in the 'radio trottoir' sphere most discussions are about perceived and/or real failures of the current political system, it can inform about the panorama of what went wrong in the city political arena. From these the government and different political actors can gain valuable information about the society's perceptions on different political affairs of the time. As has been mentioned several times, because of certain cultural and historical grounds, Ethiopians are accustomed to express their political views through alternative ways (Fekade, 2006). These 'radio trottoir', as one of alternative means of voice projection, could help to gain information about the public perception about the political system and its possible failures. This might also indicate what measures should be taken to correct it.

As many scholars agree (Hyden and Leslie, 2002, Graber, 2004), understanding political communications requires looking at it in the context in which it is working. Considering contextual factors like culture, politics, economy, technology and history are very important to have a proper analysis. Generally in Africa and specifically in Ethiopia, cultural and historical factors have made 'radio trottoir' consumption for political communication greater than the mainstream media - unlike in the western nations (Hyden and Leslie, 2002, Fekede, 2006). This peculiar characteristic comes out of the dominance of the oral tradition and the relative weakness of formal media institutions. So that as the scholars suggest and as it could be learned from this study, discussions in the 'radio trottoir' sphere contain information that is helpful in understanding public opinion about different political agendas. The gaps in communication and the practical problems in different areas of politics can be understood from such dialogue.

On the other hand, political development and participatory communication atmosphere in the country can get inspiration from this alternative

communication which is interactive; the public can have dialogue and can participate many.

Generally, it is an advantage for both scholars and government officials to give some attention to these media and the messages exchanged there. Taking this into account, this research investigated what has been said in the media and how it is said to contribute a little in the area. Further research might explore the effects of 'radio trottoir' on the politics of the country and other related issues, to take advantage of their utilization in the political development of the nation.