

CPJ: BLACK MARKETER OF FREEDOM

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Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), in its newest survey released a month or so ago, has declared that worldwide a total of 201 journalists are arrested in 2013, of which 34 are in Africa. According to CPJ, Ethiopia is ranked as the second worst Journalist jailer in the northeastern Africa. The New York based CPJ has ranked Ethiopia as the second jailer, next to Eritrea and followed by Egypt.

CPJ's Horn Africa representative, Tom Rhodes, said in Eritrea 22 journalists are imprisoned and none of them were charged or brought before a court. Rhodes, based in Nairobi, said "Eritrea, Ethiopia and Egypt have the highest number of imprisoned journalists on African continent. He further noted "the three countries are also on the worldwide top-ten list of worst journalist jailers."

"I think they have been on this list year-in, year-out simply because of governments' lack of tolerance towards any kind of criticism. Every time a reporter reports something critically, they throw them in jail," he said. And continued saying "the Horn is particularly problematic because the governments there do not tolerate dissent. The government [here] insists these reporters are imprisoned for violations of anti-terrorism law, not because of their reporting."

This substandard or messed up statement issued by CPJ has unscrupulous character that would make it difficult to any meaningful argument or rendition. You can ask as many questions as you like; they will remain unanswered. However, it will definitely serve the nasty interest of CPJ.

Putting the aside the argument over the veracity of facts; I would rather wish to challenge CPJ's statement based on the merit it intends to purport. Here, the crux of the matter does the Ethiopian government has imprisoned journalists; journalists as are not above the law. Rather, why and how these journalists are imprisoned. The crucial point of concern is whether or not the Ethiopian government imprisoned these journalists without charge and without taking

them before the court of law. CPJ does not duel on the merit of the issue; it has simply alleged that the Ethiopian government has arrested journalist for “lack of tolerance towards any kind of criticism.” It further added that “the anti-terrorism law is often misused to silence the Media.”

This flimsy and skillfully designed indictment is maliciously stitched from two leaves -facts and lies. We know that many global rights groups, including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Amnesty International, have been very critical of the Ethiopian government, much to the ratification of the Charity and Civil Society and anti-terrorism laws. Thus, CPJ’s Tom Rhodes alleged “it is often misused to silence the Media.”

They have this terrific expertise to weaver such falsely attractive statements. Above all, they have the skill to painlessly put down their poor and weak prey using their global network. Like a Weaver Bird, they are endowed with a supreme dexterity of stitching the leaves of fact and fiction, so as to weave trappings to be hanged onto the dry twigs of freedom. In fact, CPJ is always stalking freedom and journalism. Its intention is not promoting freedom, but fanning flames of hatred and instigating chaos. It weaves fact and fiction using highly provocative language, hence making arguments more intense.

I think that CPJ is the modern-day equivalent of the ancient Roman Praetorian Guards. It wanted to expand its power until it becomes a dominant political force in the third world countries. It is a counter-example to the organizations that have vowed to work for the realization of an unfettered press freedom.

CPJ’s commitment to democracy is superficial, at best, when we consider its role in addressing problems related with professional journalism. Much often, its statements are disservice to the professional conduct of journalism and the cause of press freedom. Looking at its track records one can easily understand and conclude that CPJ always chooses to follow poorly designed strategy for the promotion of press freedom in Africa or Latin America.

The recent -rather stale- demonization of CPJ is just one among its intermittent character assassination ventures on Ethiopian government. It always issue ideologically tailored statements and routinely murders freedom wherever it may find it; at the corner of every

street and in all corners of the globe. It is an impossible foe of freedom. Yet, it has never done talking about freedom of expression and journalists.

SIMLY IDEOLOGY

For ideological reasons, CPJ and its allies are always ready to stifle the poor third world governments who show the courage to go according the dictates the objective reality and their conscience. Then, these governments will be target of their nasty condemnation. Various international organizations from the West will pick-up every opportunity to shower criticisms on these states. Those who refused to bow their head to the order of the 'colonial masters' are bound to suffer and endure the belittling media campaigns.

The malignant purpose they are advancing is clear. They would incessantly barrage these ideologically detested and disfavored third world countries with a view of weakening their legitimacy and eventually reduce them to lowly status where they would become amenable to dictates of their western ex-colonial masters. As the state's policies push more people into poverty, the state increasingly calls upon the army and militarized police forces to repress the so-called dangerous classes. The goal is to shift the attentions of these states to the issues of survival. When burdened with a survival strategy, then not only individual officials or heads of the governments but also the entire governing elites would gradually become less accountable. This in turn would aggravate the grievances of citizens and make it difficult for the governments to respond to the demands of their people. Finally the government and its leaders would lose legitimacy.

As the common good is threatened and the country is drowned into a state of emergency, the government could argue that a national Armageddon is underway and finally politicians will get pretext to take off some hooks. Things would go from bad to worse. Under such circumstances, the neo-liberal agencies can manage to dictate terms of the game. When people go hungry and jobless; then, as a matter of course, there will be a situation where the government becomes

unable to ensure the respect of human rights and sooner or later it will degenerate to abuse of human rights. This is calculated move designed by the neo-liberal agencies like the CPJ.

In the name of press freedom, democracy and human rights they have been vilifying almost the whole of humanity. These international organizations, sham from beginning to end, are 'a walking lies' -borrowing the phrase of the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre. They are, in fact, not promoting freedom but are echoing the voice and guarding the interests of their neo-liberal funders. Therefore, CPJ is a hired 'kinglet' of our western oligarchs.

They often prefer to clothe the falsity of their commitment with high sounding words that are apt to conceal the naked truths or their malicious motives. They wanted us to buy their trash and to love their artificial truths, not less than mothers are loved. They wanted us to be faithful to their neo-liberal commandments.

But we have painstakingly found the neo-liberal path to be a dead end and are forced to look for an alternative route of development. Hence, we defined a new beginning and opted to follow a path charted based on the enlightened judgments of our specific objective realities to realize fast and sustainable economic development that would create doors of opportunities for ever citizens to benefit from the national cake. Hence, they always accuse us of being defiant to their creed.

The end of the Cold War presented the West with a new foreign policy opportunity in the third world. The west no longer needs to militarize to stop communism. It thus began to focus more on superficial task of promoting economic and political freedom as an excuse to flex its muscles and dictate its wish on the poor third world states; and CPJ serves this end.

"Neo-liberalizing" social spaces and relations is the top most agenda of the West in the post - Cold War era. Human rights and freedom of expression became the dominant political theme in the globe. Then, international NGOs like CPJ began to focus on "Neo-liberalization" of social spaces and relations. It serves as a tool to punish defector from "neoliberal" moral ethos and agendas.

There are policing practices undertaken by such international organizations like the CPJ. These policing practices are integral to the contemporary global governance and implicate power in all its forms. Using all coercive power at their disposal, they are undertaking the policing practices at global level through institutional, structural, and productive forms of power.

We must understand neo-liberalism as a form of dynamic power, a power that is intimately linked to the ongoing processes of capitalist restructuring. It takes a lot of power to produce and maintain a neoliberal world. Neoliberal discourses of the world politics, with their characteristic emphases on free trade and free markets, flexible labor and competitiveness, privatization and commoditization, are organized around “achievement of market utopia on the world scale.”

Out of the contested processes through which neo-liberalization takes place, (practices of privatization and commoditization), there emerges a new structure of global governance. This structure is nowhere more apparent than in contemporary practices of rights groups. We always recognize that this neoliberal policing involves the efforts of governments, international non-governmental organizations, multi and transnational corporations, global markets, and the global mass media. The concentrated effort of international or transnational institutions is the locus of global governance.

Many academic and regimes analysts, democratic or liberal theorists of “governance without government” as well have acknowledged this fact. These policing measures are undertaken by a wide range of agents, including international organizations and individuals citizens and multinational corporations across borders.

As we can obviously see now neo-liberalism has increased social and economic insecurity for millions of the world’s people. The impoverishment and dislocation that has result from neo-liberalism lead to social unrest of various kinds, including protest, criminal entrepreneurship, and migration. Many of the everyday threats are associated with neoliberal policies of the powerful.

Thus in Africa, as states are increasingly shun the priority agendas of the nation (or nation-building projects) and made effort to attend to the claims of global creditors, they fail to deal with the demands of the ordinary people for decent jobs, health care, education, and a range of other services, crisis will ensue and threaten the domestic legitimacy of the state.

Again, this would aggravate the grievances of citizens and make it difficult for governments to respond to the demands of their people. Leaders lose legitimacy. As the common good is threatened and as the country is drawn into a state of emergency, they can manage to dictate the terms of the game. People will go hungry and jobless; then, as a matter of course, there will be a situation where the government would be unable to ensure the respect of human rights and will so much less potent to degenerate to abuse it.

As they have managed to shift the attention of the state to strive for survival strategy or burdened with pressing security concerns. Then not only individual officials or heads of the governments but the entire governing elites would gradually become less accountable. Because the government can argue that a national Armageddon is underway, finally, politicians will have every reason to take off the hook.

This fact make difficult for the Ethiopian government to follow the economic policies prescribed by international financial institutes. It rather followed policies that would benefit the people of Ethiopia and improve their living conditions. The Ethiopian government is committed to invest all its energy for the advancement of the nation's health care system and access to education with a view to realize faster economic development and entrenched democracy.

The Ethiopian government has a strong commitment and belief that the dependable means of ensuring the country's national security is not to have highly trained soldiers and armoring its defense forces with modern weaponry, but the respect of human and democratic rights its citizens. It also strives to ensure fast and sustainable economic and social development. It has, therefore, designed and implemented a pro-poor economic policy that would enable it to register a double digit economic growth for almost a decade now, and is dubbed as the "African lion."

EPRDF, unlike the liberation movements in Chile, Brazil and Argentina, has shown its allegiance to the peasant even after it seizes power in 1991. The continued allegiance to this broadest Ethiopian peasant was a political and economic stands of the EPRDF that has required the highest price. It has made the bitterest sacrifice in its fight against the coordinated program and policy erosion of the financial barons and political giants of the west. Resisting the most serious and dangerous pressures of these policing agencies of the global governance, EPRDF has managed to register successive economic growth rate. The high-growth trajectory of the last eight years has been acknowledged as a broad-based economic boom; with the services and the industrial sectors growing at the highest rates. This momentum will also continue in the future.

EPRDF has daunting diplomatic showdown with the giant international donors and financial institutions and the seemingly invincible policing agent of the West –AI, HRW and CPJ their likes. The much contested “Ethiopic” path of development has won the acceptance of the members of the G8, G20 and other global partnerships. Ethiopia has evidently won the attractions of European investment particularly the Turkish, Italian, and French companies which helps Ethiopia to stay as one of the top ten fast growing economy of the world.

Meles Zenawi has defeated first rate economists at the IMF and the World Bank, and other international bureaucrats who used to scoff at him as “stubborn and guerrilla-day minded leader.” He had gradually become a prominent figure on various international forums and also recognized as a “world class mind” that has rebelliously advanced his “unusual policies” amidst the fast blowing wind of neo-liberalism. Meles was frequently accused by IMF officials for his poor commitment for structural reform. Nonetheless, we have been making commendable effort to eject ourselves from the swamps of poverty that we are currently plunged into.

In fact, we have unmistakably identified poverty to be the imminent threats of our national security and the fragile democratic system we are battling to entrench. We have also unmistakably recognized that poverty is the main culprit that predisposed us to be an easy prey to the malicious terrorist assaults. This is the analysis that has enlightened and guided the effort we made in all sectors of our endeavor.

Democracy, for the Ethiopian government, is a “make or break” issue or a matter of life and death. Our commitment to democracy and human rights does not spring from our interest to appease western donors, but a keen concern to see a better Ethiopia that accommodates its diversity.

When we are telling them the facts and truths of our life, CPJ and other rights groups would often find it unpleasant and are reluctant to listen to our voice. We have repeatedly and languishingly tried to communicate our position, they do not listen. They are never done talking about freedom. Yet they murder freedom everywhere they find it. At the corner of every one of our streets, in all corners of the globe and for long time they have stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of freedom. They are black marketers of freedom. When we are fed up and say something in a worn out voice, they will find it contemptuous and react saying “who dares to speak thus?”

We are telling them the facts of our life. It is a truth that we are convinced of in the marrow of our bones. When we say we are done for it is not an emotional talk but a talk burning with fury. See for yourselves the truth that stood naked in your face.

During the colonial era, we Africans were forced to be faithful to the dictates of our colonial masters. So far, we have listened to them with unbelievable patience. Now, we are done with that; Oops, but they are not. And they are telling us often times, if their instructions are not carried out to the letters, then our countries will go to pieces, our existence will vanish and our democracies and economies will end up bankrupted. They voice a threat that will always be followed up by a piece of advice that is muddled by a colonial attitude. But now, they should understand that a new generation has come on the scene.

AFRICA’S NEW GENERATION

Now Africa finds itself, and speaks to itself through the voice of its new generation. Now, we are neither speaking of you, nor to you. We do not waste our time arguing and condemning you

-be it CPJ, HRW and AI or other international organizations. We may speak to our brothers in the third World. We speak to the people who are living on part of the globe where the people are forced to live in a constant menace of the western tacit aggression. And here we are simply indicating the complex play of the new global affairs and the bluffing game of the neo-liberals coached with the well-known colonial mentality.

Beggaring the Ethiopian government is a finely developed art of the CPJ and other international organizations who sustain themselves with the alms from the multinational corporations. The recently held international media conference in Addis Ababa has given us to a chance to look askance at the CPJ and its integrity as defender of press freedom where we saw its representative conducting itself in a disgraceful manner. CPJ has shamelessly exhibited its ideologically driven operation during the international convention held last month in Addis Ababa. The representative of CPJ had adamantly tried to avoid the agenda set earlier and tried to smuggle new agenda. CPJ's representative opted to use the forum to demonize the Ethiopian government. However, to the dismay of many at the conference, she has publicly shown the spiteful character of CPJ and the keen interest the organization has to attack the Ethiopian government.

The panelist from CPJ has tried to smuggle her own agenda and stubbornly insisted to divert the focus of the panel. She made every effort to exploit the platform and to mobilize hostility against and attempt to vilify the Ethiopian government. Nonetheless, she got nothing but successfully defeated the cause CPJ has pretentiously claimed to stand for.

But the convention has crisply indicated the emergence of a new spirit in the African media landscape. The conference reflected a pragmatic shift in the general attitude of African Media practitioners, where African journalists made successful attempt to appraise the media environment with an *emic* view; as opposed to the traditional approach they have been adopting in the assessment of their condition. That was an absolute shift that would stand antithetical to the traditional disposition of African Media.

This could frustrate the commonly held thesis of the CPJ in matters of apprising African Media environment. African Medias have shown this radical shift in their orientation as well as approach and assessment of the general media environment and made it clear that they want to own the agenda and also formulate issues of discussion that matters most to the daily lives of the people rather than advancing agendas that are of interest to the colonial powers and their allies whose interest promoting the political and economic interests of Western states, multinational corporations and other interest groups. These interests are now being perceived as irrelevant and the channels that have been serving to advance the interests of these powerful actors were put to scrutiny under the African lens.

This general attitude was reflected in the fervent responses of the participants to the queries of ETV journalists. The reflections of the participants would definitely declare the dawn of a new era in the African continent in general, and the disposition of African Medias in particular. If it wishes to remain relevant to the public spheres of the African continent, CPJ should realize this transformation and dynamics in African Medias. African media is really undergoing a dramatic transformation.

The CPJ and other global rights groups, including Amnesty International, had so far been serving as proctors of the powerful West should begin to depoliticize their organizational endeavor and readjust themselves to the reality on the ground. They should urgently pluck the false attractive plummet they used to decorate themselves with, and engage honestly in promoting the universal and professional and civic agendas that would create better future for the people of Africa.

One participant has declared that Media freedom is the functionary of many actors. And he noted “these days, there is more freedom and African Medias are more liberalized, much less the mentality.” But African media is gradually showing the interest to free up itself from the shackles that has arrested its progress. This is a moral victory over the colonial masters. The recent strides of the African media practitioners clearly witness the most important elements of moral victory. They vowed to disavow the morbid style of Western journalism. They commit

themselves to cross the line of being the mocking bird of the west and they determine to stop being mockery of freedom of expression.

The traditional view of various African media practitioner is now changed. African journalists have become much concerned about the crazy international organizations that are insanely pessimistic about the condition of the freedom of expression in Africa.

We have got the opportunity to listen to African journalists calling up their professional colleagues to free themselves from various handicapping influences so that they can be democratic functionary of African renaissance. The governing principles and values of the mainstream Medias in West are drawn from Western ideologies. The African media also have been shackled with these values.

Africa should gear all its energy and resources to towards transformation, and the media should assume the leadership role in bringing about political and economic transformations. African transformation is not the issue of building fine roads and metros. For transformation to happen in Africa we need to have mental transformation. The institutions should be refurbished and renovated. The African Medias should focus on the primary needs of the nation to bring answers to the questions of the day and thereby get answers to the queries of the day.

Amadu Mahtar, a participant at the conference has said the mainstream Media outlets did not depict the true picture of Africa, as global rights groups and CPJ are unswervingly devout themselves on tarnishing Africa's image. Mahtar also indicated that many international organizations including CPJ were forbidding him and his professional colleagues not to go to Addis Ababa to attend the international that discuss Africa's Media environment. However, he has attended the meeting against the cynical advice of the CPJ. He decided to come to the conference with a conviction that boycotting would serve nobody's interest.

According to Amadu Mahtar, the so called global rights groups lack the goodwill and trust to engaged African government. In an interview he had with Meet ETV, Mahtar has pointed out that the Ethiopian government has put a supreme foundation to guaranty the freedom of expression. He said "many African countries do not have bold legal provisions for freedom of

expression as Article 29 of the Ethiopian constitution.” The Ethiopian government has laid the legal framework that would create conducive environment for the exercise of the freedom of the press in such bold and precise manner as stipulated in the EFDR constitution.

He also told us this insanely pessimistic CPJ was arguing the situation in Ethiopia is so dismaying and was accusing that “no one can engage the Ethiopian government.” He also noted that boycotting platform is no option and the conference has proved the strategy of CPJ to be a failure. CPJ and its allies they are not ready for dialogue with African governments, they have rather adopted hostile tendency toward them. And this does not serve our effort to see better media environment in Africa. According Amadu, the sure means of achieving better media environment is dialoguing, and not boycotting.

He refers a tangible experience in this regard. In his stay in Addis Ababa he found that the Ethiopian government has sincere commitment “to polish the diamond” in collaboration with African Media professionals. Moreover, he admired the commendable disposition of the government to fix what is broken and advance media environment and freedom of expression in Ethiopia. His experience in Addis has proved that the biding and censure of the CPJ is incongruent with the behavior and attitude of the Ethiopian government he has practically observed.