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The Limits of Press Freedom in Myanmar

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A Qualitative Study of the Effects of the Lift of State Censorship on Journalists and Media Users

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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations	III
List of Tables and Illustrations	IV
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Problem statement	1
1.2. Aim, scope and limitations of study	2
1.3. Previous Research and Need	5
1.4. Research Questions	7
1.5. Structure of the Study	7
2. Framework conditions to enable Freedom of the Press in Myanmar	8
2.1. Political background	8
2.2. The Media Landscape in Myanmar now	16
2.2.1. Legal situation	16
2.2.2. TV	19
2.2.3. Radio	20
2.2.4. Online Communication	21
2.2.5. Exile media	22
2.2.6. Print media	24
2.3. Current Challenges for the Media	28
3. Media in New Democracies	32
3.1. Normative and formative ideals of Media	32
3.2. Problem of comparing Media Systems	34
3.3. Media in Transition Processes	38
3.4. Media in Conflict Situations	42
3.5. Tension between Press Freedom and Accountability	43
4. Freedom of the Press and how to assess it	44
4.1. Freedom of the Press	44
4.1.1. Related Concepts and Development	44
4.2.2. Internal vs. External Press Freedom	48
4.2. Threats to Press Freedom	48
4.2.1 State-centered Censorship	48
4.2.2. Structural Censorship	51

4.2.3. Economic Power Distortion	53
4.2.4. Self-censorship	54
4.3. Self-Regulation and Public Service Media	56
4.4. Evaluation of existing Press Freedom Indices	58
4.4.1 Freedom House	59
4.4.2 Reporters Sans Frontières	60
4.4.3 IREX Media Sustainability Index	62
4.4.4. African Media Barometer	63
4.4.5. Unesco Media Development Indicators	65
4.4.6. Conclusions on Press Freedom Indices	67
5. Methodology	
5.1. Development of Research Questions	71
5.2. Selection of Method: Qualitative Research	71
5.2.1. Qualitative Interviews as the Main Research Instrument	72
5.2.2. Interview Guide	73
5.3. Sampling and Time-Frame of Research	74
5.3.1. Selection of News Media	75
5.3.2. Selection of Journalist's Sample	78
5.3.3. Selection of Readership Sample	80
5.3.4. Pretest	82
5.3.5. Research Design	83
5.4. Content Analysis	84
5.4.1. Structuring Analysis	84
5.4.2. Inductive and deductive Category Building	85
5.4.3. Description of Categories System	86
5.5. Limitations to the Method of Research	90
6. Discussion and Interpretation of Results	92
6.1. Dimension 1: System of Regulation fostering Freedom of Expression	92
6.2. Dimension 2: Media as a platform for democratic discourse	97
6.3. Dimension 3: Professional Capacity Building and Support	103
6.4. Dimension 4: Infrastructural Capacity	105
6.5. Dimension 5: Development of Press Freedom	106
6.6. Dimension 6: Media in Conflict and Reconciliation	110
6.7. Self-Reflection on the Research Process	112
7. Conclusions	113

8.	Bibliography	118
Appendix		140
I	Interview transcripts	141
II	Category Scheme	220
III	Interview Guide	221

List of Abbreviations

ASEAN	–	Association of South-East Asian Nations
CPJ	–	Committee to Protect Journalists
EU	–	European Union
IREX	–	International Research and Exchange Board
ITU	–	International Telecommunication Union
KIA	–	Kachin Independent Army
KIO	–	Kachin Independence Organization
MCPC	–	Myanmar Core Press Council
MDI	–	Media Development Indicators
MICTDC	–	Myanmar Information Communications Technology Development Corporation
MOI	–	Ministry of Information
MRTV	–	Myanmar Radio and Television
MSI	–	Media Sustainability Index
NGO	–	Non-Governmental Organization
NLD	–	National League for Democracy
PSRD	–	Press Scrutiny and Registration Division
RSF	–	Reporters Sans Frontières
SPDC	–	State Peace and Development Council
UK	–	United Kingdom
UN	–	United Nations
UNESCO	–	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNO	–	United Nations Organisation
USA	–	United States of America
USDP	–	Union Solidarity and Development Party
VOA	–	Voice Of America
WTO	–	World Trade Organization

List of Tables and Illustrations

Fig. 1 - Sampling of Journalists	80
Fig. 2 - Sampling of Readers	82

1. Introduction

“We didn’t arrest or torture anyone, but we had to torture their writing,¹”

U Tint Swe, Former Chief Censor in Myanmar

For over half a century, Myanmar had no real press, not much freedom and certainly no press freedom.

An absurdly oppressive military dictatorship turned the South-East Asian country into a pariah state where private daily newspapers were prohibited, the rightful president were in house arrest and the internet was a place where the term 'democracy' wouldn't exist either.

But now, something exciting is happening in Myanmar, and it is happening at a dizzying speed. Under president Thein Sein, Myanmar currently experiences an unprecedented political transition. The government is trying to shed its rogue status and has freed not only political prisoners from jail, but also one of the most repressed media systems in the world from an all-encompassing paralysis. Suddenly, the formerly ignored journalists find themselves at the frontline of democratic reforms.

After Thein Sein's government abolished all censorship in August 2012 and allowed private newspapers in April 2013, now is the time to critically ask what the relaxation of state control towards media freedom mean – and which changes it brought along for journalists and citizens. In this study, the effects and limits of the political liberalization towards political newspaper coverage should be examined.

1.1. Problem statement

Practical research on freedom of the press has so far focused on comparative press rankings, applying methodologically rather insufficient indicators that could dismiss important details and specifications of the highly peculiar media system in Myanmar.

1 Fuller, Thomas: Myanmar’s Chief Censor Is Closing His Office - NYTimes.com. (August 21, 2012). Retrieved May 12, 2014, from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/22/world/asia/myanmars-chief-censor-is-closing-his-office.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

However, the combination of media freedom and Myanmar is as new of a research field as it is a new field for the press to operate in. It is well worth to inquire about the limits of this lift of censorship for the media and ask not only the journalists about the effects but also their readership.

The military-dominated government has a lot of catching up to do on virtually all fields of democratic practice and governance and a lot of trust to gain back internally and externally.

Even in high-ranking countries in terms of Freedom of the Press like the United States, the bulk of information concerning national security is classified, hindering investigative journalism and impairing freedom of expression. Recent developments connected to mass data and communication surveillance like the fate of whistleblower Edward Snowden, the trial against Bradley Manning and the UK government-directed forced destruction of hard drives containing sensitive files in the Guardian newspaper's office has shown how easily a seemingly free press can be curbed and mutilated when it touches on sensitive issues of national interest and secret service tactics, even if these issues are breaches of international law that affect millions. They have also shown that it does not take a military rule for half a century to override constitutions and basic human rights.

Therefore, this examination aims to monitor the development of the free press from its very beginning, in the hope of avoiding mistakes in the first place that the established democracies failed to see in the last years.

1.2. Aim, scope and limitations of study

Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify the limits of press freedom in Myanmar today. The study is designed to deliver some insightful hints about shortcomings that can help the journalists build up a functional media sector that enables democracy to take roots.

A free media's goal is an informed, opinionated and engaged citizenship. Thus, it seems

crucial to also ask the media audience about the differences they feel in the reporting on political news and it remains to be seen whether the media can ideally engage them into participation of shaping transformation processes in society towards democracy. It can help to gain insightful ideas on current challenges of a country in a transformation process and to single out indicators which describe the threats to the freedom of the press best.

This study aims to be a first snapshot of a country's media that stands at the center of massive changes in a country in flux.

The mirroring approach, which compares the answers of journalists to those of their readers in a branching questionnaire was designed for two main reasons:

First of all, all media is to facilitate – and so to speak, mediate – communication. In a democracy, this type of communication is a two-way-process. Not only those who produce the media outlets can profit from press freedom and exercise their responsibility, their audience also have to benefit from it and have to feel/grasp it. If media have direct consequences on daily life decisions and should inform the readers, then they should feel represented better and more informed.

Scope

This study will cover a small but diverse sample of journalists working in executive and general reporter positions on some of the widest-read political news journals in Myanmar and six newspaper readers. Through qualitative interviews, it will analyze how working conditions have changed and what the lift of censorship meant for both groups. It will identify challenges and shortcomings and recount personal first-hand experiences to deepen understandings about the Myanmar media system.

The study aims to understand the effects of the lift of censorship on Burmese print news journalists and their readers nine months after the regulation was lifted. In the center of the examination are topics surrounding censorship and forms of repression and the question: How free can the media be now?

This thesis will therefore focus on the media which are most widely used, especially

after the lift of censorship: weekly newspapers, also called journals. As the first daily newspapers were licensed while the study was carried out, it is difficult to assess their impact as these publications were still struggling to gain a readership and to be financially sustainable. Weekly papers, on the other hand, are the publications who took the most risks in the previous years, which are known for analysis and which have the most trust among the general public.

For conceptual assumptions, it is particularly important to decide which part of the big and varied media landscape one wants to map, since some tools “fall short of properly scoping and defining their terrain²”. To do so, Banda suggests to look at and define media in the broadest possible way and then narrow down logically which aspects to highlight in the respective examination. In this thesis, the author will have to limit the scope of the study to look at the journalistic function of the media and look at media in a traditional sense, that is, leave out any media communication via internet, chats, online forums and social media organizations. While in other countries these media forms would form a big and vital part of the media mix, taking up a huge proportion of the media's function as a public forum, in Myanmar the internet penetration is one of the lowest in the world, reaching merely 0,1 percent of the population.

It will try to answer the research questions by analyzing categories relevant to these issues from media development assessment/press freedom indices. It inevitably has to omit some other areas to make the amount of text manageable, they are outlined below:

Limitations

Measuring media freedom is a complex task, not only because the concept of media freedom is debatable, but also because a country's specifications have to be taken into account. In general, the lesser data available previously, the harder a complete and thorough examination. It should be noted that thorough assessments of media freedom, even if they cover just one country, are carried out by a multi-stakeholder approach, covering the entire media landscape and involving a team of researchers. These examinations can take up to six months. However useful this kind of examination may prove, it would exceed the scope of this study to assess the entire media landscape.

2 Banda, Fackson. "What are we measuring?" (2010). CAMECO: Measuring Change II: 46.

This study has been carried out within eight weeks in the former capital of Yangon, without any fundings and external support. Its small sample of twelve interviewees can only provide a current snapshot of the situation and does not claim a wider representivity. However, until both a comprehensive content analysis of Burmese media text is carried out and a thorough mapping of the media system in all its dimensions has taken place, this approach may help to tackle the changes in the written content from two sides and help measure the effect of the lift of censorship.

Due to temporal and economic restraints, this study was not designed to analyze the entire media environment in Myanmar according to the proposed approach of UNESCO. It is designed to examine the most crucial indicators typically found and asked for in media freedom assessments with a special focus on citizen voice and the forms of censorship.

The print media market proves to be the most vibrant and interesting, now enjoying much more freedom than the broadcasters do. The study will therefore only focus on news print media.

Another area that the author acknowledges to be an important part of any media landscape assessment is the economic ownership structure and the pressures that can arise from market pressure towards advertisers and publishers. As this is not an issue yet in the underdeveloped market of media which is just struggling with the basic responsibilities of a professional journalist towards the state, plurality issues, broadcast regulations and revenue and ownership structures are widely dismissed.

1.3. Previous Research and Need

Research on the Burmese media system has been rather scarce so far due to the closed nature of its media system along with imposed restrictions that hindered researchers to carry out extensive studies. Most NGOs and media development agencies were only slowly established in the country in the last six years, although many of them opened offices during the time of research.

Brooten (2009) used more than 15 years of research to document the change in the

Burmese media system by looking at exile media in Myanmar³. She found that the most widely used press freedom indices, FH underestimate the extent of democratic transition through being too state-centered. The Freedom of The Press Index displays numerous inaccuracies, one of them being the exclusion of exile media as “foreign”, failing to recognize this media's interdependent nature with local and ethnic nationality media.

Bullerdieck (2012) focused on the role of new media on societal transformation processes in Myanmar shortly after the first relaxations of internet censorship. Her findings illustrated the growing influence of new media as means of communication, especially on blogs and Facebook, and the shift of civil society organizations and young media consumers to “prosumers”, creating and decentralizing news content⁴. Still, the importance of these media for the older and rural citizens is marginal. Thus, Bullerdieck resumes, if traditional media could take up its central tasks of building a free political platform and exercising political control and criticism, the two media combined could accelerate important democratic transformation processes in society⁵.

The state of the media in Myanmar after half a century of suppression under military rule is still very questionable. So far, there has been little research on how exactly the promises of the government are holding up against the reality of media production. Since the censorship was lifted in August 2012, there have been no systematic examinations on the day-to-day freedom of the media targeting only locals. This represents a serious gap in the knowledge required for effective media assistance. If the international community wants to take on a positive and supportive role in a peaceful transitions to a fully civilian government, the dissemination of information about the country essential. Therefore, it is well worth to examine the effects that can be felt for journalists and readers after the formal lift of pre-publication censorship in 2012.

More work than independent scientific studies was carried out by organizations whose research is frequently informing donors: Two extensive reports focus on the changing environment in the media landscape after the recent opening up of the country; one was carried out by a team of researches of Reporters Without Borders, the other by the US

3 Brooten, Lisa: The Problem with Human Rights Discourse and Freedom Indices. The Case of Burma/Myanmar Media (2013). *International Journal for Communication* (7), p. 681-700

4 Bullerdieck, L. (2013). Myanmar 2.0: eine Studie zum Einfluss neuer Medien auf gesellschaftlichen Wandel. Regiospectra-Verl., Berlin. p.119 ff.

5 Bullerdieck, L. (2013). p.127

Congress-funded United States Institute of Peace, although the latter one is drawing on data the former one published in 2012.

At the time of writing, there has been no scientific research on the changes in the new environment after the opening of the media system.

An important exception are yearly press freedom assessments in the form of international rankings, carried out by overseas media organizations. In the last years, to find Burma one only had to look at the very bottom ranks of any given comparative study. The rapid change that took place in the last three years is reflected in higher ranks for Myanmar in the most widely known assessments of Press Freedom carried out by Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House.

Since their approaches vary significantly, they will be described and critiqued in the theoretical chapter later leading up to the construction of the research tool of this study.

1.4. Research Questions

Where are the limits of press freedom in Myanmar?

What consequences can be felt for journalists and readers of news media after the lift of pre-publication censorship?

What are the challenges under which news journalists operate?

What kind of content are readers expecting from a free press?

1.5. Structure of the Study

The media market in Myanmar follows a logic that has been shaped by the rigid repressions and rules set up by the military, who effectively ruled Myanmar for over 50 years. To achieve the aim stated in chapter 1, the thesis will outline the basic structures of the Myanmar media landscape first before examining some of the theories which link democracy building to the importance of press freedom.

The first chapter of this study has introduced the topic and stated the problem to be

researched. It defines aim, scope and limitations of the study, touches on previous research and closes with a provision of the structure of the study.

The second chapter provides some background to understand the media's current situation in Myanmar. It examines current legal preconditions and then maps the Burmese media landscape. It concludes and points out some recent challenges which are specific to the country after the transition to a free media.

Chapter three focuses on issues concerning media in new democracies. In this section, the problem of comparing media systems is briefly outlined and normative ideals of media are being discussed before leading to the specifics of media in transition processes..

The fourth chapter starts out with defining press freedom and related concepts to highlight the importance of the link between democracy and freedom of the press.. Following this, the most important measures to rank press freedom are being examined and assessed.

The fifth chapter explains the field study and its analysis tool, starting off with the development of the research questions, explaining the research design and concluding with descriptions of the categories of the qualitative analysis carried out.

In the sixth chapter, the results of the content analysis are being presented along previously defined categories.

In the conclusion chapter at the end of the study, the author points out correlations, draws conclusions from the results of the case study towards the research questions and gives some suggestions for further research opportunities.

2. Framework conditions to enable Freedom of the Press in Myanmar

2.1. Political background

Myanmar's long history of repression shows in the debate about its name policy. The English term “*Burma*”, as the country is also known, is a legacy from British colonial rule and solely referencing to the largest ethnic group in the population, the Bamar. The transliteral “*Myanmar*”, on the other hand, was imposed on the people overnight by the domestic military dictatorship in 1989⁶. Today's rather confusing use of both names in various bodies worldwide reflects the degree of acceptance or disapproval of the current form of government: The European Union (EU) uses *Myanmar/Burma*, the opposition in the country and official United States (US) diplomacy address the country exclusively as *Burma*, international organisations as ASEAN, the United Nations (UN) and even news media in exile have picked up on *Myanmar*⁷. Most importantly, common people on the streets of Yangon⁸ nowadays use both terms interchangeably when speaking English. This most natural and citizen-driven approach will be reflected in this study: For the country name, *Myanmar* will be used, for issues relating to the nation, *Burmese*.

Myanmar is the largest country on the South-East Asian peninsula, sharing borders with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand. It is abundant in natural resources, precious stones, gas and minerals and offers strategically important access to the Andaman Sea on its almost 2000 km long coastline⁹. Occupying the lowest ranks of the Human Development Index (149), it is also one of the world's poorest and least developed countries, lacking even the most basic infrastructure. The economy is dominated by agriculture. Two thirds of Burmese live in rural areas, and its population density is among the lowest in Asia. With a rich history and a wealth of cultural and religious traditions, Buddhism today plays a major role in most people's life, and about 90 percent of its population are practicing it. Myanmar is also one of the world's most diverse countries. It is home to at least 135 ethnic groups, many of them at war with the

⁶ The official name is “Union of the Republic of Myanmar”.

⁷ Bye-bye Burma, mingalarbar Myanmar. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2013, from <http://www.mizzima.com/edop/editorial/8848-bye-bye-burma-mingalarbar-myanmar.html>

⁸ The former capital and merchant center, also known by its British name Rangoon.

⁹ The World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 16, 2014, from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

government for decades, and a population of between 52¹⁰ and 60 million citizens¹¹ - reliable statistical data is yet hard to come by.

For a period of 62 years between 1824 and 1886, Great Britain colonized the country and incorporated it into the Indian Empire¹². Burma gained full independence from colonial rule in 1948. After a short democratic episode, General Ne Win took power in a brief military coup in 1962 and subsequently failed spectacularly in his attempt to model Myanmar into a socialist state, prohibiting private press and political parties. Over the years, the ruling SPDC party isolated Myanmar systematically from most of its neighbors in South-East Asia, with the exception of China. The country spiraled into total isolation and dismay, often being mentioned in one breath with states like North Korea.

Myanmar's younger history is unseparably entwined with the life of the influential general and independence fighter Aung San's daughter and national icon, Yangon-born Aung San Suu Kyi. After living abroad with her British husband, she returned to Burma in 1988 for a family visit, only to witness the long-ruling dictator Ne Win stepping down. Over 3000 people died when mass backed protests nearly ended the rule of military dictatorship in a violently shot down student uprising in September 1988. In the bloodshed of the protests, she became the nation's hope and cornerstone of peaceful democratic opposition first – and then a political prisoner for the next 15 years to follow. After winning the the general elections in a landslide victory with her party NLD in 1990¹³, the junta refused to step down. Instead, they placed their biggest political rival under house arrest, claiming she was “likely to undermine the community peace and stability¹⁴” Effectively separating her from family members and shutting off any outside contact, these measures were an attempt to make her leave for her terminally ill husband

10 Myanmar | Data. (n.d.). Retrieved April 15, 2014, from <http://data.worldbank.org/country/myanmar>

11 The last census has being carried out over 20 years ago, and sociodemographics were most likely distorted by the military to play down the percentage of muslim and other minorities in the population, so that polulation data can only be estimations.

12 The World Factbook. (n.d.). Retrieved March 16, 2014, from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

13 The National League for Democracy won 59% percent of all votes, which would have secured them 80 percent of all seats in parliament.

14

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Union of Myanmar N.d. [http://www.mofa.gov.mm/news/Press%20conference%20on%20clarifying%20Articles%2010%20\(a\)%20and%2010%20\(b\)%20of%20the%20Law%20to%20Safeguard%20the%20State%20Against%20the%20Dangers%20of%20Those%20Desiring%20to%20Cause%20Subversive%20Acts%20held.htm](http://www.mofa.gov.mm/news/Press%20conference%20on%20clarifying%20Articles%2010%20(a)%20and%2010%20(b)%20of%20the%20Law%20to%20Safeguard%20the%20State%20Against%20the%20Dangers%20of%20Those%20Desiring%20to%20Cause%20Subversive%20Acts%20held.htm), accessed March 21, 2014.

in Great Britain to then deny her re-entry. All activities of her party, the National League for Democracy which emerged from the student movement in '88, were deemed illegal as well. She stayed, however, focussing on her political work and pushing for reconciliation and peaceful transition to democracy. Her popularity grew and her ideas earned her the Nobel Peace Prize in received in absence in 1990.

After 1988, coverage on any political issue required a permit from the respective officer himself. Burmese democratic movements were violently suppressed. The remaining few news media were nationalized and turned into propaganda papers until 1988. Only favourable news were permitted, which meant it was practically impossible to even obtain information from hospitals or police stations.

When the junta decided to double the price of gas overnight in 2007, which affected the daily lives of most people by making bus fares unaffordable, the citizens protested throughout the country. They were also joined by buddhist monks, who held influential positions and were widely revered, thus they were widely believed to be untouchable by the military and police and could protect the protesters. The movement in which the spiritual leaders took to the streets and became political, even leading demonstrations in 2007 for the first time was later known as the “Saffron Revolution”.

Impoverished Myanmar, geographically in a vulnerable and exposed position to natural disasters, was severely hit by a cyclone called Nargis in 2008. The estimates on how many people lost their lives to the cyclone range from 120,000 to 140,000 people. The junta's reaction in the days to follow the tragedy was to completely shut off and isolate the country internally and externally, which meant the press was not allowed to report

The turning point for Burma came after the parliament of president Thein Sein was sworn in following elections of 2010, although these were widely believed to be unfree and unfair, and boycotted by the main opposition party NDL. In March 2011, the junta announced its retreat from the government after over 50 years of military reign, and was subsequently replaced by a “civil”¹⁵ government. Since then, observers in and outside of the country can note a real commitment to reform. The old army hierarchy is gone for

15 The term “civil” is used in quotation marks since the military still holds 25% of all seats in parliament and the current government makeup is largely dominated by ex-military officials.

good in favour of a more believable system of checks and balances in place as the president has disconnected himself on many levels from the army.

Thein Sein's motives for opening up the country may remain debatable, but it is hard to deny the positive outcome and unprecedented progress that has been achieved in the past three years. Driven by the government's will to reform, the years 2012 and 2013 saw not only press censorship abolished¹⁶ but most Western sanctions dropped¹⁷, exiles to return in scores¹⁸, a peaceful by-election won in a landslide victory by Aung San Suu Kyi's NDL, enthusiastic interest in foreign investment and tourism and a visit from US President Obama. Still, there is a reality that speaks of a different Myanmar: War in Kachin state, communal violence in Rakhine against Muslim minorities^{19,20} that could provoke the term 'ethnic cleansing'²¹, violent crackdowns of protests with chemical weapons²², along with land grabs, human rights abuses by the army, severe environmental problems, corruption and high AIDS rates.

Numerous armed conflicts along questions of ethnical identity mean Myanmar is the last country in the region to have sizable territories controlled by non-state militia. Recent violence against Muslim minorities not only in Yangon but in the poorer regions of Rakhine state showed government involvement in the violence²³. The general elections in 2015 will show much commitment the reformist government really has when it comes to reform, rebuilding and reconciliation.

16 Burma: Regierung schafft Medienzensur ab - SPIEGEL ONLINE. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2012, from <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/burma-regierung-schafft-medienzensur-ab-a-850911.html>

17 BBC News - EU lifts sanctions against Burma. (n.d.). Retrieved April 22, 2013, from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22254493>

18 Bye-bye Burma, mingalarbar Myanmar. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2013, from <http://www.mizzima.com/edop/editorial/8848-bye-bye-burma-mingalarbar-myanmar.html>

19 Burmese Neo-Nazi Movement Rising Against Muslims | The Irrawaddy Magazine. (n.d.). Retrieved March 24, 2013, from <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/30321>

20 Buddhist monk leads violent national campaign against Myanmar's Muslims | GlobalPost. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2014, from <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatches/globalpost-blogs/groundtruth-burma/buddhist-monk-wirathu-969-muslims-myanmar>

21 Burma: End "Ethnic Cleansing" of Rohingya Muslims | Human Rights Watch. (April 22, 2013). Retrieved May 5, 2014, from <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/04/22/burma-end-ethnic-cleansing-rohingya-muslims>

22 BBC News - Burma confirms phosphorus used at mine protest. (March 12, 2013). Retrieved May 5, 2014, from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-21751357>

23 Burma: End "Ethnic Cleansing" of Rohingya Muslims | Human Rights Watch. (April 22, 2013). Retrieved May 5, 2014, from <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/04/22/burma-end-ethnic-cleansing-rohingya-muslims>

Aung San Suu Kyi and her NLD were allowed to take part in the by-elections of 2012 and, again, scored a landslide victory, gaining 45 of 48 contested seats in parliament. But in spite of that, under the 2008 constitution that guarantees a quarter of all seats to be assigned to the military, her party remains a small and relatively irrelevant minor factor in parliament. For the next general elections to be held in 2015, many Burmese would like to see their national hero Aung San Suu Kyi in the president's chair.

However, this is becoming less and less likely due to a clause in the constitution²⁴ especially designed by the military in 2008 to keep its main rival at bay after her release from house arrest. The clause outrules a run for presidency if the candidate's spouse or kids are foreigners. Aung San Suu Kyi's late husband was an English academic, her two sons hold British passports. A commission set up for the sole purpose of reviewing the current constitution has received around 30,000 suggestions for changes from the population, so that observers fear time will run out to replace Clause 59 (f) before the elections take place²⁵. There also have been accusations of a staged signature run in favour of Clause 59 (f) as the military-dominated parliament claims to have received around 100,000 pleas from throughout Myanmar to keep the clause in place.

Formerly completely isolated, Myanmar will host the ASEAN foreign minister's meeting in 2014 for the first time and is determined to return to the international political stage. In May 2013, president Thein Sein was dropped from the Reporters Without Borders list of Internet Predators, after he was shortlisted for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Myanmar has reestablished international relations and is now interconnected like never before. The country is at a crossroads, geopolitically emerging between the world's two greatest rising economic megapowers India and China. However, the mismanagement of past decades still makes Myanmar one of the poorest countries in the world with an annual income per capita of just USD 1,144²⁶. An expenditure of less than 2% of the

24 Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Clause 59 (f). The Ministry of Information, Union of Myanmar, Retrieved March 11, 2014 from http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar_Constitution-2008-en.pdf

25 The Economist explains: What is wrong with Myanmar's constitution? | The Economist. (n.d.). Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2014/03/economist-explains-3>

26 UNdata | country profile | Myanmar. (n.d.). Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=MYANMAR>

GDP on public health care²⁷ and years of closure of universities to disperse student protests has left the tertiary educational and health sector in a shambles. There is also wide debate on whether decades of Western sanctions imposed on the country worked or just kept the country poor when it was already in dire need of technical aid.

Seen by many as the last big untapped market in the region, the first big US-American globalized companies like Coca-Cola²⁸ are returning to Myanmar now that the government has promised some major reforms on the foreign investment law. In 2013, after Visa and Mastercard showed interest in doing business with the former pariah state, the CB Bank installed the first ATM to connect the shaky Burmese finance sector to the outside world²⁹. Bilateral trade of goods in 2013 between the EU and Myanmar rose by 40 percent to 570.000.000 Euros³⁰. Nevertheless, the deep entanglement of business and military remains to cause a questionable side-effect for any big foreign investment that lines the pockets of former or current junta officials who are in control of the banking sector, foreign exchange and commodity trade.

The price for infrastructural projects in mining, railway and pipeline construction is usually paid by the Burmese people. The army notoriously relocates citizens without compensation and uses forced labour to realize Chinese investments. Other international low-wage industries, like garment production, are yet to follow.

Apart from new border openings and, the country also opened up to tourism recently, making it easier for visitors to cross into the country from Thailand or to apply for a visitor's visa from overseas.

In today's Myanmar, reliable statistical data on its social structure is still rather hard to get hold of. In March 2014, the country conducted its first census in 30 years³¹ to

27 WHO | Myanmar. (n.d.). Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://www.who.int/countries/mmr/en/>

28 Coca-Cola kehrt nach Myanmar zurück - Wirtschaft – Süddeutsche.de. (June 5, 2013). Retrieved March 16, 2014, from <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/coca-colas-rueckkehr-nach-myanmar-flaschendreihen-fuer-die-freiheit-1.1688146>

29 Decades of corruption and mismanagement meant the ATM was only met with a limited degree of trust from citizens.

30 EUROPA - PRESS RELEASES - Press release - Aushandlung eines Investitionsschutzabkommens zwischen der EU und Birma/Myanmar. (March 20, 2014). Retrieved May 5, 2014, from http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-285_de.htm

31 A census in Myanmar: Too much information | The Economist. (March 22, 2014). Retrieved May 5, 2014, from <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21599404-ill-considered-headcount-stirs-anger-and-mistrust-too-much-information>

determine its widely debated population size³². Observers warned that this poll could spark further ethnic and religious violence – many Buddhist citizens share increasing hostilities towards Muslim minorities, fueled by hate speech of leading and very influential monks like Wirathu³³, who is heading the fascist “969” campaign: “Muslims are like the African carp. They breed quickly and they are very violent and they eat their own kind.³⁴”. In March 2013, 12,000 people were displaced and more than 40 killed following clashes between marginalized Muslim Rohingya communities and Buddhist citizens in the city of Meiktila in Rakhine State. The Rohingyas are now considered the most-persecuted minority in the world.

Widespread corruption during military rule, along with a historical general economic mismanagement of the country means that the former biggest rice exporter in the world is nowadays still be found in the lowest ranks when it comes to international comparison on governance³⁵, social equality or transparency³⁶.

But the press rankings honored Thein Sein's approach on opening the country up, helping Myanmar to rehabilitate its status and to encourage further media reforms. In 2013, it jumped 18 places to 151st out of 179 in a World Press Freedom Index compiled by media rights watchdog Reporters Without Borders — its highest ever position.

Most notable developments towards debate in the media sector are two summits organised by the Swedish International Media Support and UNESCO, chaired by the MOI Director-General U Ye Thut. First held in 2012, this international conference outlined a possible development for the media as suggested by the five indicators the UNESCO defines as being of crucial importance for a sustainable and desirable media system. These indicators are further described in the chapter on press freedom assessments. In August 2013, the pre-press censorship was being lifted after some

32 Myanmar's Chief Censor Is Closing His Office - NYTimes.com. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2014, from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/22/world/asia/myanmars-chief-censor-is-closing-his-office.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

33 Full Text Of The Banned Time Story – “The Face Of Buddhist Terror” | Colombo Telegraph. (n.d.). Retrieved April 8, 2014, from <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/full-text-of-the-banned-time-story-the-face-of-buddhist-terror/>

34 Buddhist monk leads violent national campaign against Myanmar's Muslims | GlobalPost. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2014, from <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatches/globalpost-blogs/groundtruth-burma/buddhist-monk-wirathu-969-muslims-myanmar>

35 Myanmar ranks 26th out of 178 states under scrutiny in the Failed State Index 2013. Failed State Index 2013, The Fund for Peace. Retrieved May 5, 2014, from <http://ffp.statesindex.org/>

36 Myanmar ranks 157th out of 177 countries under scrutiny in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, labelled “highly corrupt”. Corruption Perceptions Index 2013 - Results. (n.d.). Retrieved May 5, 2014, from <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2013/results/>

gradual relaxations for non-news press and public debate by the chief censor, who said that “censorship [is] incompatible with democratic practices and should be abolished in the near future”³⁷.

2.2. The Media Landscape in Myanmar now

Having been shut off from the rest of the world has taken its toll on the Burmese media landscape, which seemed to have missed major jumps in media globalization and somehow side-stepped the corporations that dominate the media markets in the rest of the world. Apart from a few satellite TV channels and a few recently arrived internet service providers, Myanmar's media market is almost entirely homegrown. Interesting research results from a 2012 World Gallup Poll in Myanmar showed that even before censorship was lifted, over half of all people asked confirmed that they found domestic media more trustworthy than six months ago.³⁸

2.2.1. Legal situation

The 1962 Printers and Publication Registrations Act introduced the Press Scrutiny Board, which was renamed in 2005 to Press Scrutiny and Registration Division. This body, a subdivision of the Ministry of Information, was previously in charge of the pre-publication censorship.

Since the Motion Picture Law of 1996, a separate censorship board has controlled visual productions. Myanmar jailed about a dozen journalists and bloggers under the 2004 Electronic Transaction Law for sharing material with exile media or uploading it. They were freed in and shortly after a mass-amnesty for around 600 political prisoners in January 2012.³⁹

37 Harvey, R.: BBC News - “Burma censor chief calls for more media freedom”. (October 8, 2011). Retrieved December 21, 2012, from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-15227175>

38 BBG, Gallup Issue Findings on Media Use in Burma - BBG. (September 21, 2012). Retrieved May 6, 2014, from <http://www.bbg.gov/blog/2012/09/21/bbg-gallup-issue-new-findings-on-media-use-in-burma/>

39 In mass amnesty, nine journalists released in Burma - Committee to Protect Journalists. (13.01.2012). Retrieved May 4, 2014, from <https://www.cpj.org/2012/01/in-mass-amnesty-nine-journalists-released-in-burma.php>

The 2008 constitution guarantees freedom of expression and publication of opinion to all citizens and the liberty of language, literature, culture and religion.⁴⁰

In June 2011, Thein Sein announced a gradual lift of censorship. Since then, a complaint commission has been established as part of the PSRD, examining content after publication for any breaches of law and for “archiving” newspapers.⁴¹

Until the lifting of the censorship, all Burmese media had to submit their publications for pre-publication censorship. The immense censorship on all arts and media went as far as to ban the color red, deemed a political color, from paintings, along with poems and books.⁴² Taboo topics included parliamentary debates, democracy, human rights, the opposition movement, Aung San Suu Kyi, the student protests of 1988, land confiscations, the military and environmental issues.

These procedures were relaxed and lifted initially for a selected group of about 160 health, children, technology and sports sector journals, and magazines.⁴³ A pre-deposited fine system in the event of publishing an ‘unhealthy’ story came in its place, leading to self-censorship. So-called Category II publications on politics, religion, business, education and crime were still subject of scrutiny until August 2012, when censorship was lifted for all publications. On the same day, before the new media law came into effect, the ministry of information handed out 16 guidelines to follow for reporting.⁴⁴ Guidelines that, in theory but possibly not in practice, are still applicable today. Among these guidelines was the message that reporting on issues that “violate the state's dignity” was unacceptable⁴⁵. Divided into social, political and economic dimensions, the guidelines also included: “Do not write insulting articles about the government’s

40 “Citizen, Fundamental Rights and Duties of the Citizens”, Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008). The Ministry of Information, Union of Myanmar: Sub-section (A), Section 354, Chapter (8)

41 Hindstrom, Hanna : Burma abolishes pre-censorship, but forbids criticism of state | DVB Multimedia Group. (August 20, 2012). Retrieved May 12, 2014, from <https://www.dvb.no/news/burma-abolishes-pre-censorship-but-forbids-criticism-of-state/23383>

42 Fuller, Thomas: Myanmar’s Chief Censor Is Closing His Office - NYTimes.com. (August 21, 2012). Retrieved May 12, 2014, from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/22/world/asia/myanmars-chief-censor-is-closing-his-office.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

43 International Media Support (2012): Change is the Air. An assessment of media development challenges and opportunities in Myanmar. Kopenhagen: International Media Support, p. 14

44 Reporters Without Borders (2012): Burmese Media Spring. Mission Report. Paris: Reporters Without Borders

45 Linnarz, Paul: Medien in Myanmar: Enlich frei(er)! Regionalbericht Medien (2012), Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

economic policies”. While there was and still is no legal reprimand attached to these guidelines, critics fear this 'government reminder' could breed a culture of self-censorship.

On November 13, 2010, nine journals were banned for one to two weeks following reports on the release of Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest.⁴⁶ Weekly journals were also shut down after they reported the ill-health of a former junta senior general and the possibility of a cabinet reshuffle.

Restrictions on the media in Myanmar have been significantly eased since Thein Sein took office in 2011. After the preliminary censorship was dropped in August 2012, the first daily newspapers were allowed to return to the market in April 2013, after over 50 years.⁴⁷ However, recent arrests and moves by the government outlined in the chapter of this paper on current challenges for the media in Myanmar, threaten these new freedoms and have led right groups to call for a enshrinement of their new rights in a binding law.

The first draft of a new media bill was rejected by all the three Burmese journalist's associations, delaying its implementation due to allegations of restrictive laws being put into place that could curb newfound media freedom. Journalists and journalist organisations outside the country, such as the Committee to Protect Journalists and the International Press Institute have called for reform of these proposed laws. The journalists say the law to be a backward step towards the restrictive Printers and Publication Registrations Act from 1962. Although otherwise promised, the draft was not written in consultation with the media and allowed the registration department of the Ministry of Information wide-ranging powers to make decision concerning the publishing process.

In March 2014, the government passed two parallel media laws to be effective by June 2014: The MOI's own Printer's and Publishers Registration Bill as well as the journalist-drafted Press Law.⁴⁸ In the new MOI law, as one lawmaker from the

46 Htun, Y: “Nine journals suspended by censorship board” | Myanmar Times (29.11.2010). Retrieved May 4, 2014, from <http://www.mmmtimes.com/2010/news/551/news55103.html>

47 Linnarz, Paul: Medien in Myanmar: Enlich frei(er)! Regionalbericht Medien (2012), Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

48 Nyein Nyein: Myanmar's Parliament Approves “Parallel” Media Laws. (March 5, 2014). Retrieved May 12, 2014, from <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/burmas-parliament-approves-parallel-media->

opposition NLD party noted, the threat of imprisonment were removed and journalists would now be able to call the courts for help in a dispute situation. However, the law still keeps the MOI in control of revoking or publishing licenses.⁴⁹

2.2.2. TV

The state operates six television channels, most of those are entirely state-owned: MRTV, Myawaddy TV established in 1995, MRTV3 and Channel 5. The station MRTV4 is a joint venture between the private company Forever Group and the state, while Myanmar International caters to English speakers. SkyNet is another channel owned by a crony⁵⁰. International broadcasters like Radio Free America also offer limited broadcasting programs in regional languages.

State TV programmers are producing light entertainment programs with focus on folk dance performances, game shows or religious speeches. MRTV recently announced to continue operation currently as a half-privatized station while the government is claiming to reform the station to remodel it into a public service broadcasting model in 2015.⁵¹

MRTV4 tries to attract younger audiences with entertainment-oriented music and youth programs. This channel is currently trying to expand to a completely privatized structure, partnering up with DW-Academy and the Myanmar Media Development Center to offer television training for journalists.⁵²

According to a Gallop poll in 2012, 44.7 % of all Burmese watch television at least once a week.⁵³ In rural areas, 84% own a TV set. Especially popular is the highly revered exile television channel Democratic Voice of Burma for reliable information

laws.html

49 Ibid.

50 Gray, S. (2014). Media and Conflict in Myanmar. United States Institute for Peace. Retrieved from <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW92.pdf>, p. 18

51 Myanmar Union Parliament Bill: Public Service Media Bill (2013): Retrieved from <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/2013-Public-service-media-bill-en.pdf>

52 Myanmar: Auf dem Weg zu freien Medien | Asien | DW.DE (April 5, 2012). Retrieved May 13, 2014, from <http://www.dw.de/myanmar-auf-dem-weg-zu-freien-medien/a-15856710>

53 Gray, S. (2014). Media and Conflict in Myanmar. United States Institute for Peace. Retrieved from <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW92.pdf>, p. 18

and news via satellite.⁵⁴ Surprisingly, these dishes could be seen on rooftops and facades in Yangon even during the strictest times of the military regime, so one could assume that the government tolerated the reception of foreign and international satellite channels.

TV penetration is much higher in metropolitan areas of Yangon and Mandalay than in the other regions. Viewership drops sharply moving away from the cities, into the regions where the electrical supply worsens.⁵⁵ Still, TV watching is a communal affair in many regions even though not every household has a TV set. Often a local monastery will supply a communal room for these people to watch the news.

2.2.3. Radio

According to World Gallup research in 2012, 62.8% of all Burmese listened to the radio in the past week,⁵⁶ which makes FM radio the most used media in the country. This is also due to a major disproportion in newspaper copy distribution from urban to rural areas. In the countryside, where significantly less copies are distributed, the reliance on radio is accordingly much higher.

There are sixteen domestic radio stations, the most popular of them being the state-owned Myanmar Radio with 23 percent of listenership according to a Burmese market research company.⁵⁷ Ownership is mixed and there are some community radio stations along with advertising-dominated bigger urban stations with a high level of advertising.⁵⁸

Foreign radio broadcasters like the BBC Burmese service, DVB and Radio Free Asia

54 Gray, S. (2014). Media and Conflict in Myanmar. United States Institute for Peace. Retrieved from <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW92.pdf>, p. 18

55 Gray, S. (2014). Media and Conflict in Myanmar. United States Institute for Peace. Retrieved from <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW92.pdf>, p. 18

56 BBG, Gallup Issue Findings on Media Use in Burma - BBG. (September 21, 2012). Retrieved May 6, 2014, from <http://www.bbg.gov/blog/2012/09/21/bbg-gallup-issue-new-findings-on-media-use-in-burma/>

57 International Media Support (2012): Change is the Air. An assessment of media development challenges and opportunities in Myanmar. Kopenhagen: International Media Support, p. 17

58 Gray, S. (2014). Media and Conflict in Myanmar. United States Institute for Peace. Retrieved from <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW92.pdf>, p. 18

and Voice of America can be received and remain popular in the media dark areas. Some state-run stations are broadcasting in regional languages. According to the only market research company in Myanmar, radio listenership is increasing, while the number of TV viewers is in decline.

2.2.4. Online Communication

A multitude of factors make internet usage almost impossible for the establishment of an unrestricted public sphere, mainly cost-driven. An internet access point at home, when leaving issues of infrastructure, electricity and speed behind, still costs about ten times as much as the average monthly salary. Myanmar has one of the lowest internet penetration rate in the world with about only 1% of the population using online services.⁵⁹ Still, with more and more public access points in cafes offering affordable alternatives, the internet, especially social media platforms like Facebook has become the favored channel of communication for the younger, urban generation in Myanmar⁶⁰.

From December 2011 onwards, internet access became unrestricted. Previous to that, users had to provide their ID in internet cafés to facilitate state surveillance, although it is quite common knowledge that the service providers in public internet cafés commonly ignored these regulations or helped users to access blocked content by providing a proxy solution.⁶¹ Search terms like “human rights”, foreign news websites, social media and exile media websites were blocked entirely.

Nowadays, most media outlets operate an online presence or share their content on Facebook. Information Matrix, a publishing house responsible for the political journal 7Day News, also runs well known internet portals like the file sharing platform My Suboo and the forum network Planet Myanmar and recently they expanded with a video portal and online travel agencies.

Still, for future media opportunities seeking to create revenue with advertising online,

⁵⁹ International Media Support (2012), p. 18

⁶⁰ Gray, S. (2014), p. 19

⁶¹ Beset by online surveillance and content filtering, netizens fight on - Reporters Without Borders. (March 13, 2012). Retrieved May 13, 2014, from http://en.rsf.org/beset-by-online-surveillance-and-12-03-2012_42061.html

there is another very practical obstacle: Myanmar fonts, along with North Korean, cannot currently be displayed properly in Unicode, which makes text unable to be indexed by search engines.

With regard to mobile communication, Myanmar is also one of the least connected countries in the world. The Burmese mobile market is unique and still grossly underdeveloped.⁶² While 16.6% had a mobile phone in their household, only about 4% used text services in 2011. This paradox can be explained by the monopolizing of the SIM card sector by the military government. Cards were distributed so scarcely that families shared one and took turns in using them day by day, using mobile phones otherwise for taking pictures or using as address books. The lack of availability raked the price of a SIM card up to the equivalent of US \$ 2,000 on the black market.⁶³ Thus, a SIM card for a mobile phone was considered by many to be a more reliable investment into the future than to deposit money at a bank or invest in real estate.

At the time of the field research being conducted in April and May 2013, the government announced a dramatic drop in the price of SIM cards and also announced a plan to achieve mobile internet coverage for all of Myanmar by granting two new telecommunication providers operational licenses. At the end of a competitive tender process and some delays in the drafting of telecommunication regulations, Qatar's Ooredoo and Norway's Telenor won the contracts which were awarded in January 2014⁶⁴ and will now begin to roll out a telecommunications network. The government is therefore looking into a method for rapid change in the communication habits of its citizens as it attempts to catch up with its highly connected neighbors.

2.2.5. Exile media

A unique characteristic of the already peculiar Burmese media market, exile media, are outlets founded and funded either by exiles or by Western foreign aid agencies with the aim of bypassing stifling publication laws and regulation in Myanmar. Their aim is to

62 Gray, S. (2014), p. 20

63 Gray, S. (2014), p. 21

64 Reuters (14.01.2014): "Ooredoo, Telenor finally set to get Myanmar Telecom Licenses" / RTRE/3925/AFA/VORRANG (3)

provide Burmese citizens with uncensored and often critical information they would not retrieve from inside the country and to provide a window into the world the government previously attempted to conceal, employing various tricks and means of distribution to fill this gap. Their characteristics are a strong charter, usually enshrined in editorial statute, and a publication angle between neutrality and activism, often employing opinionated pieces, especially when it comes to issues of democracy. Most exile media vowed to return to Myanmar once democracy was restored⁶⁵ and most have done so already, facing an unknown future in the new market. Ironically, with no dictatorship to counter, these outlets will or already are running out of donor money⁶⁶ to prevail in the tough economic circumstances of a booming market.

The *Democratic Voice of Burma*, registered in Norway since 2003 as a Public Service Broadcaster was a Nobel Peace Prize Nominee and was the only source of reliable information about the scope of devastation in the country when Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar, killing at least 120,000 people in 2008.⁶⁷ At that time, there was no way of reporting on the injured or dead since access to the area was restricted. The military regime was too worried about 'destabilizing' effects on the country's unity, effectively hampering aid efforts and the flow of information.

It is difficult to distinguish between regular and exile media since the correspondents and reporter's network exceed 100 staff in the country itself.⁶⁸ The material for broadcast was previously smuggled out of the country, then cut and rebroadcast from Oslo, Norway, to finally reach the Burmese people via satellite. To make sure messages were being delivered, DVB let its news programmes run in a loop, also providing for the very likely case of an electrical power cut.⁶⁹ The station has worked hard to earn its credible reputation and to be known as a reliable source remarkably critical of the government policy of concealment and censorship and is not afraid to poke its way into difficult social issues. It has often been the subject of case-studies and assessments on successful

65 ABOUT US. (n.d.). Retrieved April 8, 2014, from <http://www.irrawaddy.org/about-us>

66 Crispin, Shawn W.: An uneasy homecoming for Burma's exile media - Reports - Committee to Protect Journalists. June 13, 2013. Retrieved April 17, 2014, from <http://www.cpj.org/reports/2013/06/an-uneasy-homecoming-for-burmas-exile-media.php>

67 Letter to Donors on Reconstruction after Cyclone Nargis | Human Rights Watch. (July 24, 2008). Retrieved May 12, 2014, from <http://www.hrw.org/news/2008/07/22/letter-donors-reconstruction-after-cyclone-nargis>

68 ANU Myanmar / Burma Update 2011 – Podcast (TC 39:40 min ff.)

69 ANU Myanmar / Burma Update 2011 – Podcast (TC 48:20 min ff.)

exile media.⁷⁰

Founded in 1993 by Burmese activists who fled Myanmar after the 1988 student uprising, *The Irrawaddy* is a magazine specializing on coverage on Burma which operates from Chiang Mai, in Thailand. Formerly printed monthly, it is now published weekly in Burmese and English and has been legally distributed in Myanmar since 2013. Its focus is news and background pieces with a strong pro-democratic angle, making it a prime political analysis publication during military rule. In the recent years, it has faced some criticism damaging its reputation after reporting a series of false news stories, among others the resignation of general Than Shwe in 2010.⁷¹⁷² Funded by international NGOs and donors,⁷³ The Irrawaddy is capable of offering short-term training and exchange programs for Burmese journalists.

In June 2013, the Irrawaddy moved back into Myanmar and is now operating with 30 staff from Yangon. Still, the founding editor Kyaw Zwa Moe is treading with caution after spending eight years in the infamous Insein jail for publishing a critical underground newspaper previously. He will keep the *Irrawaddy's* office setup in Chiang Mai “in case anythings happens”⁷⁴ for at least two more years, as well as a European passport for a quick escape if need be.

The *Mizzima* magazine (the name is derived from the Pali word for 'moderate') was founded in 1998 by three members of the 8888 democratic movement in Indian exile. In 2007, the International Press Institute awarded it the Alternative Media award⁷⁵. The Mizzima Group has since returned to Yangon and is trying to adapt to the fast changing market by employing a broader publication channel strategy: Mizzima publishes a daily newspaper in Burmese, the weekly economy magazine Mizzima Business Weekly, runs a TV channel and as its main operative, news websites in Burmese and English.

70 Nordahl, J. (2009): Waves of democracy Contemporary exile journalism: A case study of The Democratic Voice of Burma. Oslo: University of Oslo

71 The Irrawaddy - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved April 8, 2014, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Irrawaddy

72 Junta Chiefs resign in military reshuffle. (n.d.) Retrieved April 8, 2014 from http://www.irrawaddy.org/highlight.php?art_id=19323

73 ABOUT US. (n.d.). Retrieved April 8, 2014, from <http://www.irrawaddy.org/about-us>

74 Crispin, Shawn W.: An uneasy homecoming for Burma's exile media - Reports - Committee to Protect Journalists. June 13, 2013. Retrieved April 17, 2014, from <http://www.cpj.org/reports/2013/06/an-uneasy-homecoming-for-burmas-exile-media.php>

75 IPI International Press Institute: Mizzima News. (2007). Retrieved May 12, 2014, from <http://www.freemedia.at/awards/mizzima-news.html>

Mizzima also caters to several digital platforms like Android and iOS⁷⁶.

2.2.6. Print media

The last UNESCO literacy report asserts a very high literacy rate of over 92.7% in Myanmar.⁷⁷ Citizens are avid readers who photocopied uncensored texts and stockpiled them in makeshift bookshops even under military rule. Therefore, the print publication market is the most vibrant and important media market in Myanmar. As a percentage, print media has a relatively small audience but in sheer numbers nearly seven million people use print for news and information due to higher circulation rates. The periodicals market currently covered about 361 titles in November 2011, out of which 138 could be grouped to be news journals⁷⁸. About a third of those titles are published from Yangon.⁷⁹ It is important to note that most of the outlets can not afford their own printing houses, so the printing offices can have a notable influence on the publications.

From 1988 to 2007, all daily print publications carried a propaganda slogan box with varying forms of the regime's "four political, economic and social objectives". These included aggressive demands to "crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy" and heavy criticism of foreign media like the BBC and voice of America, which were both called "killer broadcasts"⁸⁰. The curtailment of the press and the strict licensing meant the market was stifled, although copies of books circulated and magazines with non-political news were allowed operation. Proper news journals with commentary and features did not appear until the 21st century.

Myanmar did not have any private daily newspapers for fifty years. Instead, the Ministry of Information issued three daily newspapers: Myanma Alinn, its English edition New Light of Myanmar and Kyehmon (The Mirror), while the military operates the Myawaddy Newspaper. They sell for a fraction of a price of other news print media,

76 About Mizzima. (n.d.). Retrieved May 12, 2014, from <http://www.mizzima.com/about-us/item/38-about-mizzima>

77 INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DATA. (n.d.). Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://www.uis.unesco.org/literacy/Pages/data-release-map-2013.aspx>

78 International Media Support (2012): Change is the Air. An assessment of media development challenges and opportunities in Myanmar. Kopenhagen: International Media Support, p. 15

79 Reporters Without Borders: Change is in the air. Burmese Media Spring (2012)

80 Change is in the Air. (2012). International Media Support (IMS).

but decades of top-down information selection methods, poor writing and a strong paternalistic tone of the articles meant that their readership and trust in these papers is very limited⁸¹. The New Light of Myanmar carried propaganda boxes and lengthy articles defaming Aung San Suu Kyi or “external elements”, the reliance on Western nations or simply reprinted the “Four national objectives” each day which were repeated also on television and on billboards throughout the city.

From May 2013, Thein Sein's government announced the government wanted to turn the former state mouthpiece the New Light of Myanmar into an editorially independent publication⁸² “like (Britain's) Guardian Newspaper”, an MOI spokesperson told the AFP⁸³. The new focus of the former propaganda-heavy paper is supposed to be “people's interest centered” and the plan is to privatize it after a Myanmar company takes a 49 percent holding.

Currently, Myanmar features a vibrant print media landscape with more than three hundred newspapers including periodicals; roughly one-third of these newspapers are based in Yangon.⁸⁴ Since the beginning of 2013, 16 publishing houses have applied for a licenses to print daily newspapers.⁸⁵ On April 1 in the same year, eight new daily newspapers entered the market.⁸⁶ Among them were publishers who already had had experience with newspaper publishing before the military dictatorship and who now have the chance to publish an independent paper again after over 50 years (e.g. “Golden Fresh Land”)⁸⁷ and yet another daily paper published by the military, the Union Daily. Many other publishers were previously publishing weekly journals and are planning to expand their business by adding a daily paper to their enterprise. The interest is generally high for dailies because stories develop quicker than a weekly can reflect.⁸⁸ That being said, the high number of newspapers on the market combined with the poor

81 Gray, S. (2012), p. 18

82 The New Light of Myanmar Times? (January 31, 2013). Retrieved March 13, 2013, from <http://www.mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/8828-the-new-light-of-myanmar-times.html>

83 AFP: “Myanmar state mouthpiece promises ‘independent’ future” (January 15, 2014) Retrieved May 4, 2014, from <http://www.mb.com.ph/myanmar-state-mouthpiece-promises-independent-future/>

84 Gray, S. (2014). Media and Conflict in Myanmar. Retrieved from <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW92.pdf>, p.16

85 Ibid.

86 Schmidt, U.: Myanmars Zeitungsmarkt öffnet sich für private Medien | tagesschau.de. (March 13, 2013). Retrieved March 13, 2014, from <http://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/myanmar514.html>

87 Ibid.

88 Myanmars Zeitungsmarkt öffnet sich für private Medien | tagesschau.de. (n.d.). Retrieved March 13, 2014, from <http://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/myanmar514.html>

distribution infrastructure in the country means that the market will eventually sort out the least financially viable ones. Six licenses were rejected by the MOI without the ministry stating a reason.

Magazines

The magazine market is mainly focused on sports and entertainment, although they carry current news to some extent. Magazines are published weekly, every fortnight or monthly, although the line on what exactly differentiates a magazine from a news journal is somewhat blurry. In this study, magazines are defined as mainly carrying non-political content. The market spans hundreds of magazines but most commonly read publications are the celebrity-oriented People Magazine, First Eleven (half-news, half-entertainment and sports with a strong connection to Eleven Media's other news journals Bi-Weekly Eleven and Weekly Eleven) and sports magazines like the 7Day Sports Journal.

Recently, magazines emphasizing IT and internet related news such as Information Matrix's Internet Journal have also become quite popular. A relative novelty are business magazines focusing on real estate and investment opportunities. These magazines, like the newly founded M-Zine, usually cater to an educated middle class and foreign investors and publish bilingual in English and Burmese. In general, it can be noted that the biggest publishing houses like Information Matrix and Eleven Media Group usually supplement their range of products with almost a dozen magazines each, signifying a tendency towards concentration of ownership.

Journals

historically speaking, in many countries around the world political commentary and opinionated pieces carrying ideas have traditionally been handled by periodicals, while the daily press remained tightly controlled through licensing and tax restrictions (e.g England). The weekly news journals in Myanmar were the only source of independent news and information to a certain degree even under military rule as they remained in private hands,. Since censorship laws have been relaxed, their readership has been growing steadily.

Journals are defined as being news magazines or newspapers published weekly or every fortnight in tabloid format. Their content focusses typically on local news affecting the daily lives of Burmese people, but other service sections are also common.

The only market research company in Myanmar, the Myanmar Market Research Department, has just partnered up with Nielsen to increase efficiency and reliance of their data collection. Their last market share report for weekly journals, carried out in May 2010, listed the three most popular journals as follows: First Eleven had 24%, 7 Day News 21%, Weekly Eleven News 19% in market share for publications.

Journals saw an increase in consumption from 2004 to 2010. This data trend reveals a demand for information relating to current affairs. Today, the highest weekly circulation numbers are less than a few hundred thousand. However hard it is to make a prediction of the market development, there is strong evidence that the market will reduce the large number of weeklies over time.

2.3. Current Challenges for the Media

Media still has to find its role in a system that is striving to become a democracy, but is in fact still a military-dominated parliamentary system. With 25 percent of all seats in parliament are appointed to the military under the constitution of 2008, over 135 ethnicities to represent, some of them being in armed conflict with the ruling government for years, the current political situation is still a volatile work in progress.

The changes are taking place before a background of numerous armed conflicts and the alarming situation of the Rohingya minorities, the media's responsibility is to find a way to reconcile parties and offer a forum for minorities. There is a looming danger of a “common enemy” in public opinion that could now be easily found in the Muslim minorities as there is virtually no media or lobby group to back up their claims or room to investigate human rights abuses. The media in Myanmar face three main conflict lines: inter-communal violence, ethnic and citizen-state.⁸⁹ NGO Minority Rights warned

89 Gray, S. (2014). Media and Conflict in Myanmar. Retrieved from

that Burma's Rohingya are among world's most vulnerable to mass killing or genocide in 2014.⁹⁰

Statistical data on journalists is also hard to come by, but it is estimated that around 1000 journalists operate in the country. On average, they are 25 years old and untrained⁹¹. Another issue related to this is the dim state the universities and the whole educational sector is in: To prevent student uprisings, the separate schools of the Yangon universities are located far apart on the outskirts of the city. Lending books from the library on a subject students are not studying is not permitted.

In March 2014, the East-West Center discussed the numerous issues in the country during a conference entitled “ Challenges for a free Press”.⁹² When Aung San Suu Kyi addressed the press: “Unless there is a free press to check those who are in power we will not be able to defend the rights and freedoms of the people. But at the same time, the same press has to be aware not just of its great power and influence, but of the great responsibility it bears towards the building of a new nation”⁹³.

In April 2013, four new daily newspapers were licensed, the first non-state daily press people could read since 1962.⁹⁴ However, rural representation is also poor, so that distribution is nonexistent. In bigger cities, it is at the very best only reliable in the dry season⁹⁵

<http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW92.pdf>, p. 5

90 Minority Rights Group International : Press releases : Minority groups in Asia at grave risk of mass killings: MRG. (April 28, 2014). Retrieved May 5, 2014, from <http://www.minorityrights.org/12368/press-releases/minority-groups-in-asia-at-grave-risk-of-mass-killings-mrg.html>

91 International Media Support (2012), p. 6

92 Agenda » East-West Center Media Conference: Yangon 2014. (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2014, from <http://www.ewcmedia.org/yangon2014/agenda/>

93 International Press Institute: Press freedom in Myanmar. (March 11, 2014). Retrieved May 13, 2014, from <http://ipi.freemedia.at/special-pages/newssview/article/ipi-blog-press-freedom-in-myanmar.html>

94 Erste private Tageszeitungen in Myanmar erschienen | Aktuell Asien | DW.DE | 01.04.2013. (n.d.). Retrieved March 16, 2014, from <http://www.dw.de/erste-private-tageszeitungen-in-myanmar-erschieden/a-16711831>

95 In Myanmar, Newly Free Media Struggle to Turn a Profit - NYTimes.com. (n.d.). Retrieved March 13, 2014, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/26/business/international/in-myanmar-newly-free-media-struggle-to-profit.html?version=&action=click&adxnnl=1®ion=searchResults#/burma+press/since1851/allresults/2/allauthors/newest/&adxnnlx=1394737481-JgKAiDunDdUbT5WqbaXGDQ&gwh=8A2E4DCF64810E6EF980A1899CF5EC01&gwt=regi#1&module=Search&url=http://query.nytimes.com/search/sitesearch/>

This lack of resources and investment in education by the state leads to challenges in assembling sufficient independent, trained journalists. In turn, editors and reporters who worked in the country previously have no experience of working with free coverage of news and also working at such a fast pace, without censorship latency. There is a need to change their role and professionalize and also take on their responsibility as regulators.

Apart from no legal regulation for the press in place yet, the Press Scrutiny Board, previously responsible for pre-press censorship, remains intact. The government claims it keeps the articles for 'archiving reasons' but it also can revoke a print publication's license if it deems it appropriate. The government remains concerned about media reports of corruption, top generals and their business empires, the military's poor human rights record, army involvements in ethnic regions and Burma's relationships with neighboring countries including China, India and Thailand as well as its military connections with North Korea.

In connection to this, there were a number of issues and arrests reported after Thein Sein took office. In December 2013 Eleven Media Group journalist Ma Khine⁹⁶ was convicted of defamation and trespassing while interviewing a lawyer on corruption in the judicial system for a story her paper ran and was subsequently sentenced to three months in jail⁹⁷. She was the first journalist to be imprisoned under president's Thein Sein's government.

In January 2014 the government banned Myanmar's first sex education magazine Hnyo, for "publishing near pornography"⁹⁸. In the same month, the government detained four journalists and the CEO of Unity Journal for the alleged exposing of state secrets after their investigative reporting about a plant which was assumed to be used for the production of chemical weapons. They are still on trial and could face up to 14 years in

96 Eleven Media hit back at jailing of reporter | DVB Multimedia Group. (n.d.). Retrieved May 4, 2014, from <https://www.dvb.no/news/eleven-media-hit-back-at-jailing-of-reporter-myanmar-burma/35483>

97 AFP (07.01.2014): "Myanmar reporters protest new threats to press freedom". AFPE/0644/EAA/DRINGEND

98 Myanmar bans first sex education magazine after first issue (n.d.). Retrieved April 8, 2014, from <http://www.betweenonline.com/2013/01/10/myanmar-bans-hnyo-sex-education-magazine-magazine-after-first-issue/>

prison.⁹⁹ On April 7, 2014, the local DVB video journalist Zaw Pe was sentenced to one year in prison for “trespassing” and “disturbance of a civil servant” in an attempt to examine corruption allegations against an educational officer in Magwe in the Mon state.¹⁰⁰

One of the most pressing challenges is to find an advertiser who is not connected to either the cronies of army or government as that was the case for most business enterprises to date in the country. With business laws on foreign investment being relaxed and reformed, this situation is likely to change for the better, albeit a lot of uncertainty remains surrounding incentives. Even if the advertisers and investors seem politically unbiased, Myanmar may face the same fate as most developing countries: Sustainability issues will become a problem once the market keeps developing at the current speed. With the media houses making the most of their freedom launching new print magazines and newspapers, the next logical question is who is going to actually pay for all this?

Myanmar citizens spend up to 70% of their income on food and have a very limited buying power. The market will eventually sort the dailies out that have proven to be financially unstable, which in turn will increase the dependence towards advertisers to report in a favorable way. But some daily newspapers have already proven to be not sustainable enough. Of the twelve new dailies introduced in 2013, three have already shut down six months after they began, and the publishers of the remaining ones claim that they are not raking in the profits either.¹⁰¹ Even those who are competing with the long-running subsidized state newspapers, who will remain in business? In an Internews report on the future of the Burmese media market, a government advisor sums up the fragile situation nicely: “I am worried that crony media and big business entertainment media will tie up all the revenue ... and that independent media will die not from censorship but from starvation”¹⁰².

99 Myanmar journalists on trial for reporting alleged chemical weapons factory | Reuters. (February 16, 2014). Retrieved May 13, 2014, from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/16/us-myanmar-journalists-idUSBREA1F03D20140216>

100 Free Zaw Pe | DVB Multimedia Group. (April 11, 2014). Retrieved May 13, 2014, from <https://www.dvb.no/special-report/free-zaw-pe-burma-myanmar/39537>

101 Fuller, T.: In Myanmar, Newly Free Media Struggle to Turn a Profit - NYTimes.com. (November 25, 2013). Retrieved March 13, 2014, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/26/business/international/in-myanmar-newly-free-media-struggle-to-profit.html>

102 Foster, M. (2013). The Business of Media in Myanmar. Internews Report. Retrieved from

3. Media in New Democracies

3.1. Normative and functional ideals of Media

Stemming from Luhmann's system theory, functional approaches towards media examine the contribution of mass media as a subsystem to the preservation and continuity of greater systems of society¹⁰³. Some of the functions of mass communication most often referred to are: information, criticism and control, social, political and economical functions, education and the reduction of complexity.

In contrast, normative theory considers media's obligations to society and questions what functions media *should* fulfill. It does not focus on how media actually behaves, but is rather based on the assumption that media has an observed reason to exist in society.¹⁰⁴ The basic fundamental element of serving the the public interest should be fulfilled while operating under the same restrictions, principals and guidelines that govern societies. This encompasses a wide framework of social, commercial and political values.

The first widely acknowledged theory of the press is that of the fourth estate, the fundamentals of which developed during the flourishing liberalism of England's late eighteenth century.¹⁰⁵ In contemporary usage the name refers to media having the same institutional status and power as the three traditional estates of democratic government: the executive, the legislative and judicial branches. Since the evolution of democracy and the development of mass media have paralleled each other in many regards, the notion of the media's role is said to be that of a democratic pillar that represents, debates and evaluate the state's actions in the public arena.

The US-government initiated Hutchins commission in 1947 marked a shift in paradigm for media¹⁰⁶. The commission looked at the shortcomings of the press and attempted to

103Kunczik/Zipfel (2005), p. 71

104 McQuail, D. (2010). Mcquail's mass communication theory (6th ed.). London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications. p.164

105McQuail, D. (2010). Mcquail's mass communication theory (6th ed.). London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications. p.168

106De Smaele, H.:In The Name of Democracy . In: Voltmer (2006), p.42

find an effective way of introducing a system of accountability without compromising its free liberal tradition.¹⁰⁷ Its aim was to “discover where free expression is or is not limited, whether by government censorship pressure from readers or advertisers or the unwisdom of its proprietors or the timidity of its management”¹⁰⁸. The media, or press as it was referred to then, was wildly unpopular at the time and the commission found that it catered too closely to those in positions of influence and power.

The Hutchins Commission's findings recommended a system of self-regulation, free from government oversight and suggested a number of normative goals for the media. It redefined the media from being an asset that was simply in the hands of private ownership void of responsibility, to being a public trust which had obligations and duties to the public. These conclusions gave birth to the ideas of media having a social responsibility and stated that it should be a “diverse, objective, informative and independent press institution that would avoid causing offense or encourage crime, violence or disorder.”¹⁰⁹

In 1956 Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm took their understanding of the social responsibility theory and developed normative ideas about how media work in four different types of society. The authors attempted to find out why “the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates.”¹¹⁰ Their book *Four Theories of the Press* is widely accepted as the first attempt to classify various media systems into normative theoretical categories.¹¹¹ The four theories were defined as: the authoritarian model as the oldest, the libertarian introducing the control function for governments, the theory of social responsibility addressing problems of inner press freedom, and the soviet theory stemming from authoritarian where the press' core function is the strengthening of the state system. The authors claim that from a historical and geographical standpoint, liberal theory of the

107Hardy, J. (2008). *Western Media Systems*. New York ; Routledge, p.11

108McQuail, D. (2010). *Mcquail's mass communication theory* (6th ed.). London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications. p.170

109McQuail, D. (2010). *Mcquail's mass communication theory* (6th ed.). London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications. p.170

110Siebert, F. S., Peterson, T., Schramm, W. (1963). *Four theories of the press: the authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and Soviet communist concepts of what the press should be and do*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. p. 2

111Hardy, J. (2008). *Western Media Systems*. New York ; Routledge, p.11

press was the most pivotal tool to combat authoritarian rule and state censorship.

The *Four Theories of the Press* was heavily influenced by the cold war era however, deeply rooted in ideology and dismissive of alternative media systems outside of the ideologies of Western liberal democracies. The authors took the Western liberal media model as a starting point – as an ideal form from which the rest of the world, divided up in rigid political categories, diverted to a certain extent. The problem being that different cultures have different priorities and values, therefore a normative approach to media theory has been subsequently heavily criticised.

McQuail attempted to expand on the four theories of Siebert et al, by adding two more. Firstly, the development media theory applicable for transitional countries that lack a certain extent of communication infrastructure and other basic resources. Central to the model is its strong focus on social development and transformation – the core goal of development being so strong he even made allowances in his model for state censorship. McQuail's second additional model describes a democratic-participatory media theory, as a reaction to a monopolized commercial media system and the bureaucracy-dominated elitist institutions of public broadcasting based on the social responsibility theory¹¹². However, he later distanced himself from this approach, admitting “the goal of formulating consistent and coherent 'theories of the press' in this way is bound to break down sooner or later¹¹³” due to media convergence, the inherently Western departure point of the original models and the variety in specifications of political systems.

Today, a set of universal core duties of media is often said to include four main tasks: to support the maintenance of public order and the security of the state, maintain the quality of media content, to meet international human rights obligations and to support the democratic process.¹¹⁴ These functions are central to the public charters adopted by many public service broadcasting organisations around the world.

3.2. The Problem of Comparing Media Systems

¹¹²See Kunczik/Zipfel, p. 75

¹¹³McQuail (2010), p. 177

¹¹⁴ McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. SAGE Publications Ltd. p.167

Not many, if any books published has caused so much of a stir among communication scholars recently as Hallin and Mancini's *Comparing Media Systems* in 2004. Departing from the normative approach used previously in media theory, the authors attempted to compare media systems rather from an empirical standpoint instead. In their comparative study of 18 Western countries, they found that systems could be grouped into a geographical pattern,¹¹⁵ on and between the axes of a triangle they developed with three models. These lines describe the degree of political parallelism of media while taking into consideration the respective developments and circumstances under which the country's media system developed. In total, four dimensions were examined in their study to draw comparisons between nations: The structure of media markets, journalistic professionalism or autonomy, the degree and form of state intervention and political parallelism.¹¹⁶ Political parallelism, in this regard, is defined as “character of links between political actors and the media and more generally the extent to which media reflects political divisions”¹¹⁷.

The three final models the 18 nations could be compared with in varying degrees were called Liberal, Polarized Pluralist, and Democratic Corporatist. The Liberal Model is dominated by market mechanisms and commercial media. The Democratic Corporatist model bears traits of both commercial and media tied to political and societal groups, resulting in an 'active but legally limited role of the state'¹¹⁸. Finally, the Polarized Pluralist model which integrates media into party politics, resulting in a strong role of the state and a weaker influence of commercial media.

The study was deliberately designed to not be from a universalist approach to worldwide media systems such as *Four Theories of The Press*, but with a focus on variations within similar systems that define the type of press. This in turn, has implications for the relationship between media and politics. The 18 nations examined in the Hallin and Mancini study were those that the researchers knew best, (coming from Western nations themselves) and also conveniently had all gone through similar development progressions being capitalist Western liberal nations.

¹¹⁵Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: three models of media and politics*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

¹¹⁶Hallin & Mancini (2004), p. 21

¹¹⁷Hardy (2008), p. 1

¹¹⁸Hallin & Mancini (2004), p. 11

The findings in *Comparing Media Systems* revitalized comparative media studies and inspired numerous subsequent examinations and modifications. Scholars voiced concerns about how applicable the three models could be for media systems in regions beyond Western Europe and North America and whether other geographical patterns would emerge.¹¹⁹ One weakness of the research design is that the researchers left out all forms of new media communication, instead focussing only on the newspaper market. In a study done as recently as 2004, this comes as a surprise since its inclusion in such a large-scale study like this would help a great deal in understanding the media markets and systems in today's context.

However logical and influential Hallin and Mancini's approach is, the problem of applicability outside the Western world still remains¹²⁰ and the question should be asked as to what media system we can talk about in Myanmar before we can describe how it could or should function. McCargo and Voltmer argue that most scholars are too quick in their assessment of foreign media systems outside the Western world as being Polarized Pluralist and seemingly less advanced as such – which could be a theoretical flaw in the model conception or in the assessment.

Voltmer acknowledges that the four dimensions examined by Hallin and Mancini are a valuable tool for global application but - with the exception of professionalism – are usually not defined by media itself.¹²¹ Examinations of economic media environments typically goes beyond Hallin and Mancini's definition of a weak or strong media market and results are often influenced by factors less relevant in the 18 countries examined in the original study, such as illiteracy, technical infrastructure or regional differences, all of which developing countries struggle with. To be related to a certain model, not only does the general level of economic and social development found in a country have to be considered, but also the variances within those systems.

While the literacy rates in Myanmar are generally found to be very high, the infrastructural factor weighs quite heavily. Moreover, the variances along the lines of

¹¹⁹See Hardy (2008), p. 18

¹²⁰See Hardy (2008), p. 15, p.19

¹²¹Voltmer, K. (2012): How far can media systems travel? In: Hallin and Mancini (2012): *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*, p.227

urban and rural education and access to media differ greatly. The second dimension deals with the degree of state intervention. Generalizing here proves to be problematic in terms of degree and nature of these interventions, as some of the highest degrees of state regulation can be found in democratic-corporate systems which have public service broadcasting.¹²² Transitional regimes, on the other hand, tend to employ a similarly high level of state intervention but there is a need to distinguish how and what kind is involved. State intervention in the workings of media producer simply to maintain high quality standards, as opposed to the attempt to exert dominance must be taken into account, just as the method of intervention it uses is of importance.¹²³ These differentiations are aspects that the Hallin and Mancini models fail to cover appropriately when their models are exported to any system outside of the Western world.

McCargo, in a contribution on the extent of Asian applicability, suggests “conceptualizations of media that embrace complexity and confusion and are firmly grounded in messy empirical realities”.¹²⁴ His demand is that diversity must be recognized if we ever want to contextualize media in a broader geographic sense than covered by *Comparing Media Systems* - and even then, “the informal, in terms of markets, parallelism, partisanship and censorship will soon loom larger in Non-Western contexts”¹²⁵.

For example, the dimension of development in mass circulation press becomes harder to measure when in South-East Asian countries like Thailand. The public often gets their newspaper news without even reading it - from a radio show where a presenter reads out summarized segments of the daily press.¹²⁶

Sold copies, on the other hand, can reach 20 people by being traded and shared among relatives and in communal village houses.

To illustrate another dimension, he argues most Asian new democracies have skipped the party system phase of political development and went straight to a hybridized form

122Vltmer, K. *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World* p.228

123Vltmer, K. *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World* p.228

124McCargo, D.: “Partisan Polyvalence: Characterizing the Role of Asian Media”. In: Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (Eds.). (2012). *Comparing media systems beyond the Western world*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 203

125McCargo (2012), p. 204

126McCargo (2012), p. 205

of rule characterized by a combination of instrumental political practices, for example, vote buying, electoral professionalism and political marketing.¹²⁷

The prospects of having to bridge social, cultural and political divides in order to make scientific statements or generalizations regarding a media system is a daunting one. The myriad of nuances and scientific pitfalls, especially in regions where media systems are in a relatively under-developed state, make defining a media system difficult.

In the end, the US and European systems might prove to actually be the exceptions to the rule of non-classifiable systems, according to McCargo. To get a clearer picture about the behaviour of media in contexts which divert from established Western democracies, the media's role in transition processes shall be examined in the chapter to follow.

3.3. Media in Transition Processes

Voltmer states that democratic transitions are “social experiments” that can help us better understand how democratic institutions work in different political and cultural contexts. Media act in specific ways in new democracies, defined by the trust or mistrust from political actors towards the media and ultimately playing a vital part in the failure or success of the new democracy. This defines how well political communication can take place. In turn, the performance of the mass media has a crucial effect on the viability of the democratic process and its other institutions. However, research on the mass media as a factor in democratization has fallen short of its importance (1).

But whether the media helps or hinders the establishment of a democracy has been long debated among scholars,¹²⁸ just as its ability to promote democracy. According to Voltmer, the media do not take on a passive role like the defenders of the 'marketplace of ideas' stance would assign it but they are actively forming the political agenda and shape the orientations and actions of other participants,¹²⁹ highly involved in a

¹²⁷McCargo (2012), p. 219

¹²⁸See Street (2011), p. 303

¹²⁹Voltmer (2006), p. 6

reciprocal relationship between media and politics and dependent on cultural dimensions of political communication as well as institutional conditions.¹³⁰ She compares the situation in new democracies to the struggle for free speech in classic libertarian thinking in the 19th century, where it is “of crucial importance that alternative views have access to the forum of the media, regardless of the validity of their truth claims”¹³¹.

It is therefore important to see political communication as an interaction between mostly old actors who are finding a new role on a systemic level: the media has to find the right balance between simplification, objectivity and winning of new audiences. The role of international policy makers, trying to export a certain understanding of democracy and the media's role in it, also proves to be problematic since these notions appear to be much more flexible and interpretable. An example Voltmer states is the World Bank's program ComGAP, which emphasizes a preference for private media and adversarial journalism found in Hallin and Mancini's Liberal Model. To this end, Curran argues that market forces are not regarded enough in the research of the relationship between media and power¹³².

Voltmer further argues that the quality of information and the need for orientation is of utmost importance in former authoritarian states, especially directly after regimental transition. Citizens of these states have not had the time to acquire political knowledge freely over a period of time; instead, they have to get to know a multitude of unknown institutions and procedures. Complicating these acclimatization processes further is the lack of credibility that most political parties have to struggle with, leaving the media as the only source of information for the citizens¹³³.

But the extent to which the media in new democracies adopt the practices of Western-styled journalism or follow along traditionally grown political values, remains debated¹³⁴. Research has shown that there are as many alliances and different

¹³⁰Voltmer (2006), p. 6

¹³¹European Consortium for Political Research. (2006). Mass media and political communication in new democracies. (K. Voltmer, Ed.). London ; New York: Routledge, p. 6

¹³²Curran (2002), p. 220

¹³³European Consortium for Political Research. (2006). Mass media and political communication in new democracies. (K. Voltmer, Ed.). London ; New York: Routledge, p. 4

¹³⁴Kunctik/Zipfel (2005), p. 111

developments as there are case studies. While in Latin America, the media have become opinionated to an extent of extensively promoting political party viewpoints instead of subscribing to journalistic objectivity to win new audiences, in Russia, the media and political actors are hostile towards each other. On the other hand, the example of Spain after Franco's death shows that media sided with the democratic movement, promoting viewpoints that eventually took roots in the establishment of a stable democratic system¹³⁵.

In situations where the government still has a stranglehold on all media, the internet can gain importance as an arena where public debate among citizens takes place. In other cases, experience has shown how media can actually take on opposite roles, serving only those with the most money or the most power, and actually curbing the democratic process. This is especially critical when seen in a context of new democracies, where the democratic institutions are not stable and established. The alternative however is out of the question: In order to let media fulfill the roles mentioned above for a good democratic practice, it has to be free from censorship.

Nevertheless, in many regards, Myanmar defies classification according to Voltmer's logic. The behaviour of state and media shows how atypical the development has been and how few generalizations can be made using the models created from Western perspectives. In the author's view, it is hard to extract many helpful similarities from the case studies of other countries coming from a military dictatorship or communist rule. It might therefore be more effective to look at the role and behaviour of media in a certain political process.

As the most important link between political actors and citizens, deciding what to cover and what to dismiss, the mass media act as active participants for political agenda-setting and not just as channels for political messages. The form of presentation plays just as big of a role to the transportation of political messages as the content, since the media tends to sensationalize messages, stress conflict and oversimplify – a term coined 'media logic', as opposed to the 'party logic' of highly persuasive communication like propaganda in authoritarian states. However, not only does this oversimplification lead

¹³⁵European Consortium for Political Research. (2006). Mass media and political communication in new democracies. (K. Voltmer, Ed.). London ; New York: Routledge, p10

to blurred lines between entertainment and information, it also helps the media secure market shares with audiences who are looking for easily consumable media.

“Any lack of diversity in the 'marketplace of ideas', low quality of information or absence of critical discussion are not, therefore, an isolated problem of the media, but a result of the specific constraints evolving from the media's relationship with politicians and their audience”¹³⁶.

Political parties whose organizational structure has remained intact to some extent under the authoritarian government can often keep their dominant role in shaping political socialization of citizens as well. Otherwise, the media may fill the vacuum of political orientation if they enjoy a certain degree of credibility from citizens¹³⁷.

Drawing from experiences of other former one-party rule countries who have recently undergone a transition towards democracy in the “third wave” of democratization, Katrin Voltmer explores what could go wrong and why there were so many similarities in the conducted case studies:

The most recent democratization processes all took place in a mediated environment, where media is a pivotal part of everyday life and new leaders have to fulfill their campaign promises, often finding themselves heavily criticized regardless. In turn, a “media democracy” develops where these leaders focus their strategy on political spin¹³⁸ and management of public messages delivered to counter the ubiquitous media¹³⁹.

Different paths taken according to autocratic regime types:

Most literature found about such movements covers transitions from communist oligarchies, military dictatorships or from one-party rule. In Myanmar's case, the transition the country is trying to make is one from a military dictatorship. Voltmer states that as a military dictatorship's main concern is to depoliticize its citizenry, trying

¹³⁶European Consortium for Political Research. (2006). Mass media and political communication in new democracies. (K. Voltmer, Ed.). London ; New York: Routledge, p. 7

¹³⁷European Consortium for Political Research. (2006). Mass media and political communication in new democracies. (K. Voltmer, Ed.). London ; New York: Routledge, p. 16

¹³⁸Street (2012), p. 241

¹³⁹See Street (2012), p. 235 f.

accordingly to keep topics out of the media by employing censorship as a main communication strategy. However, her statements after this, about the media in this case remaining in private hands to keep a certain degree of independence, do not apply to the Myanmar case at all. Apart from a joint venture private-state media TV channel that had to comply to strict state rule, there was simply no private media outlet that could operate independently for decades. This was especially apparent in the newspaper industry, where no daily press were allowed apart from the state owned propaganda papers. It is true, though, that the agenda of the remaining media in private hands was largely dominated by entertainment – that is because political coverage was out of bounds.

Therefore, it may be argued that Myanmar has again a special status in this case, falling somewhere between the transitional characteristics of one-party rule and military dictatorship.

3.4. Media in Conflict Situations

In a country in transition to democracy, the press has to provide a contribution for a reconciliation and play a positive role in peace building by reducing hostilities and tensions in society. Experience has shown nevertheless that media often play a role in fueling conflicts. The journalists are often prone to subtle biases towards certain political parties or marginalized societal groups that they are likely to reproduce or leave unquestioned and to overcome these biases, it is important to understand how a conflict starts. In the training of journalists for conflict-sensitive reporting, a useful exercise is to sensitize the professionals for the prejudices others have, instead of using examples from their own countries.

In the Development Media Concept, which to this day is advocated at least implicitly in many states of the so-called Third World, the media are to a certain extent allocated the task to first and foremost cooperate in the formation of a nation after the era of colonization. Kunczik and Zipfel accuse the creator of this model, McCargo, of ethnocentric arrogance because he not only assumes a lack of technical resources to establish a functioning communication system, but also accredits this to a lack of cultural resources. According to this view, the media's primary tasks are nation-building

and finally, contributing to social and economic development. Pluralism and freedom of the press are often looked upon as second-rate, sometimes even as detrimental, assigning the state the power to censor for development's sake and to reduce the number of conflicts.

Even without censorship, the political parallelism of media proves to be as problematic as pivotal, since media in transition plays a crucial role in terms of partisanship to reflect conflicts. However, the usual dichotomy between the historically rooted left and right positions in Europe, which act along party lines and tend to negotiate the distribution of economic assets, fails to deliver in most other regions. Especially so in Asia, where the danger of media aligning along ethnical, religious and regional lines is high and can fuel conflicts that potentially spiral out of control.¹⁴⁰ This can lead to communal violence and even civil war in some cases. Recent events have shown that in Myanmar, these lines are alarmingly sensitive, demonstrated by the state's inability to keep religious and ethnic conflicts at bay even at times when the media was entirely under the control of the junta. The role of media in reconciliation and national unity versus aligning with existing singular positions is especially vulnerable, as there is no common forum like that of a public service broadcaster to reflect positions in a fair and equal way and also next to no shining examples of new democracies who have succeeded in establishing such a forum.¹⁴¹

3.5. Tension between Press Freedom and Accountability

Katrin Voltmer points out the apparent tension between Freedom of the Press and Press Accountability¹⁴². Limits of public expression are commonly reasoned to be in the protection of higher public good or where they touch on private interests of others. How these limits are defined is closely related to a country's traditions, religion, customs and political history. Even in democratic countries where the press is found to enjoy relative freedom, these sensibilities can take on various forms. Thais can face a prison term for criticizing the royal family (*lèse-majesté*)¹⁴³. In Germany, the laws on fascist symbols,

¹⁴⁰Voltmer, K. Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World p.229

¹⁴¹Voltmer (2012: How far can Media Systems travel? In: Hallin & Mancini (2012), p.230

¹⁴²World Bank. (2010). Public sentinel: news media & governance reform. (P. Norris, Ed.). Washington, D.C: World Bank, p. 140f.

¹⁴³See McCargo (2012), p. 217 f.

text, images and speech are much stricter than in most other European countries. In terms of youth protection, the *Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Medien* can order certain media such as violent video games to be removed from public display. The media has to bear an age restriction sticker and cannot be sold to minors under the age of 18 years, ultimately shifting the responsibility in implementation of this law to the merchant.

Especially when it comes to religious issues, sensibilities can be found to be easily hurt and critical in its vague around the world.

4. Freedom of the Press and Assessment Concepts

4.1. Freedom of the Press

4.1.1. Related Concepts and Development

Pursuing freedom of expression and freedom of publication is at the very heart of the history of the press, closely connected to democracy. With the dissemination of mass-produced text after the invention of the printing press, knowledge found new ways of being spread and centers of knowledge shifted from church institutions to universities. The printing press played a central role in the constitution of the public sphere, where new democratic ideas about the relationship of government and governance could be debated. Clerical and political authorities, challenged in their power monopolies, reacted to the ability of laypeople to learn autonomously by imposing taxation and licensing restrictions on the distribution of text as control mechanisms.¹⁴⁴

in 1644, John Milton presented his speech “Areopagitica” to the British Parliament in order to voice his contempt at the licensing of the press during the Puritan revolution. It is widely seen as the first extensive rationale in favour of press freedom – almost a century before the respective developments on the European continent took place.¹⁴⁵ Other laws and concepts closely related are the freedom of speech and the freedom of expression, the latter referring to a wider concept considering the communicated content, while freedom of the press (or media) only refers to the means of enabling publication¹⁴⁶.

These freedoms were enshrined in law first in the English Bill of Rights (1689) and by the Virginia Constitution (1776) then most explicitly, in the First Amendment to the U.S Constitution. The most universal of legal foundations for this right however can be found in Article 19 of the United Nations' declaration of human rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers."¹⁴⁷ In international law, article 19 was further

¹⁴⁴ See Kunczik & Zipfel (2005), p.149

¹⁴⁵ See Noelle-Neumann, E. (2009). *Das Fischer-Lexikon Publizistik*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl. p. 742 f.

¹⁴⁶ See McQuail (2010), p. 193

¹⁴⁷ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights N.d. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>, accessed

substantialized through additional transnational conventions, such as the UN Millennium Development Goals, ITU and WTO conventions.

Political representation and freedom of expression are at the starting point of any democratic conception, with freedom of information and freedom of communication as pivotal building blocks for developing and expressing an informed opinion and acting accordingly. In turn, this means that transparency and accountability of political institutions are central to upholding democratic ideas and to the relationship between democracy and communication.

Whereas this freedom is guaranteed in almost all national constitutions around the world, the individual state's highest courts have final jurisdiction in this matter.¹⁴⁸ The problem is not the agreement on a concept, but the application in national and international law. There is a large body of literature that argues in favour of absolute free speech, in which every citizen in a democratic state should have the legal capacity to say what he or she wishes, without repercussions. Chomsky asserts: "If we don't believe in freedom of expression for people we despise, we don't believe in it at all"¹⁴⁹. Nevertheless, implementation of this concept is not that simple. There is no state in the world that allows pure unrestricted freedom of expression.

Despite the obvious possible negative result of having a media system that protects unregulated freedom of speech for all, there is a convincing argument to be made that the positive aspects that society receives outweigh the possibilities of negative exploitation. Freedom of speech can hold those in power accountable, both independently and systematically fulfilling its traditional role as the watchdog of power. It can inspire and engage activity in a democratic system and social life while offering opportunities to portray and explain ideas, knowledge and perspectives about the world. It can assure that culture within society progressively undergoes regeneration and it can maintain and variety of freedoms that already exist or even increase them.¹⁵⁰

May 12, 2014.

148 See Noelle-Neumann, E. (2009). *Das Fischer-Lexikon Publizistik*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl. p. 266 f.

149 See Bracken, H. (1994). *Freedom of Speech: Words Are Not Deeds*. Westport: Praeger Publishing. p.124

150 McQuail (2010), p. 193

McQuail defines the Freedom of the Press as a “fundamental principle of individual, political and human rights that guarantees in law the right of all citizens to publish without advance censorship or permission by authority, or fear or reprisal”¹⁵¹. While it has to be exercised within rule of law and respect the rights of others, the main challenges and limitations stem often from barriers to the access to the means of publication; most of these are of economic nature and refer to ownership.¹⁵²

Sometimes structures are built within the framework of society to enable and design a legislated environment where freedom of expression can occur. The fundamental elements of freedom of speech can also sometimes be limited by its incorporation in a societal framework. An example of this is a journalist operating in public service broadcasting context in Germany, where press freedoms are constitutionally guaranteed. Their subjective freedom of speech is limited by the societal charter of the broadcasting system in which they operate¹⁵³. The legislative framework in Germany states the basic right of press freedom is twofold: The press is seen as a medium transmitting information and as a crucial contributor to the development of public opinion. The freedom of the press also safeguards one's personal right to self-development. Article 5 in Germany's constitution rules out censorship but states the limitations of press freedom in the constitution, with the protection of minors and the respect for others personal honor included¹⁵⁴.

There are a number of important laws and privileges¹⁵⁵ connected to the freedom of the press that safeguard this right: access to the profession must be free and also access to publication licenses in order to ensure plurality. The right to information is a crucial part in enabling freedom of expression: it stipulates that authorities must give information to the media as disseminator and facilitator of ideas and debates. The media in turn has special privileges with regard to witness immunity in court for journalists working for periodicals and newspapers in order to protect their sources¹⁵⁶. That being said, the freedom of the press can also be interpreted as a defensive right towards the state and

151McQuail (2010), p. 557

152McQuail (2010), p. 193

153See Noelle-Neumann, E. (2009). *Das Fischer-Lexikon Publizistik*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl. p. 266 f.

154See Kunczik & Zipfel (2005), p.146

155See Kunczik & Zipfel (2005), p. 146

156Kunczik & Zipfel (2005), p. 146 f.

economical power groups, granting independence for institutions and individual actors.

For freedom of expression to exist there are a number of structural requirements from society, namely: The absence of censorship; the right to publish but also no obligation to publish; equal right for citizens to access to channels of expression, also as receivers; no excessive control from owners or political and economic groups; competitiveness, and the freedom to obtain information.¹⁵⁷ Many of these elements are foundations on which public service broadcasting charters around the world are built on and are theoretically justified with Habermas' concept of the public sphere.

The Public Sphere

Habermas has redefined his influential and complex concept over the years¹⁵⁸, but four main aspects remain. It is firstly an abstract sphere of social life in which public opinion can be formed¹⁵⁹ and expressed and in which citizens can behave as a public body¹⁶⁰. It provides a network for communicating information and diverse viewpoints. It is a place where public information is available, which in turn enables the democratic control of state activities. Finally, it mediates between society and state.¹⁶¹

The public sphere is an ideal, an unachievable goal, but useful to help understand the relationships between the media industry, the state, society and the economy and can serve as a standard for democratic media infrastructure to counter state authority and enable informed citizenship. Although the application of Habermas' model has been met some skepticism with regard to altered and modern forms of communication and diffusion and reception in the age of new media¹⁶², his idea of media creating a sphere, a platform for public debate, was adopted during the development of the UNESCO media development indicators.

It its broadest and universal idea, this embraces and encompasses a variety of functions which can also overlap. It sees media as a vehicle for cultural expression and as a

157McQuail (2010), p. 193

158See Street (2012), p. 322

159See Street (2012), p. 55

160See Street (2012), p. 322

161See Devereux (2007). p. 343f

162See Devereux (2007), p. 345

national voice, as a promoter of government transparency and a facilitator of an informed debate to resolve conflicts peacefully, and as a tool to enhance economic efficiency. It can be a communication channel for citizens to correct information asymmetries between those in power and the governed, a disseminator for ideas, stories and information and even a social actor to advocate certain issues and causes. Media's most important function is to operate as an “essential constituent of the democratic process and one of the guarantors of free and fair elections”¹⁶³.

4.2.2. Internal vs. External Press Freedom

When questions of pluralism and the independence of the press from the state are dealt with in bigger legal frameworks, organizations or systems are said to be defined as having 'external press freedom'. Accordingly, the individual journalist is a member of an hierarchically structured organization and, as such, subject to the control mechanisms influencing the climate they operate in. If possible, journalists will often choose to work in environments that align them with their personal political standpoints to minimize friction.

Vice versa, the organization picks journalists that are expected to share the values of the editorial line the publisher deems appropriate. This problem concept can be summarized as having 'internal press freedom'¹⁶⁴ and deals with the independence of the individual journalist towards the publisher and among editors. Only when both dimensions of plurality are given, the prerequisites for pluralism and diversity crucial to independent journalism are fulfilled.

4.2. Threats to Press Freedom

4.2.1 State-centered Censorship

Censorship is an ancient concept, used by those in power worldwide to control and manipulate the flow of information, reinforce norms, secure power positions and as a

¹⁶³Media Development Indicators: A Framework for Assessing Media Development | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization N.d.<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/media-development-indicators-a-framework-for-assessing-media-development/>, accessed May 13, 2014. p. 4

¹⁶⁴See Kunczik & Zipfel (2005), p. 177

tool against the challenging of established belief systems. It can take on many forms, and is historically exercised by the state or the church.

Müller traces the complexities of censorship over nations, time and cultures and defines censorship as a battle for information: “The many factors relevant to censorship – the writer, the text, its code, its medium, the reader and the context – encourage us to view it as an unstable process of actions and reactions in the struggle for power, publicity, and the privilege to speak out, rather than merely as a repressive tool with predictable results”¹⁶⁵.

Until roughly 20 years ago, censorship was widely understood as a direct form of regulatory intervention by an authority with the ultimately ideological goal of safeguarding their own power. Caso finds that, in effect, the practice of censorship is a form of abuse of power by rulers that forbid “speech, writing and images they considered a threat to their authority or contrary to divine law.”¹⁶⁶ Often, the monitoring system relies on some form of institutionalization or even legislation to watch over the stipulated norms.

According to Caso, three reasons for its implementation can be identified: the retention of political power, upholding of religious dogma and the maintenance of community standards. However, justification for its widespread use on the public is usually constructed around the pretext of alleged protection of a populace from harmful tendencies. In turn, this means that “common interests are constructed, thus denying legitimacy to diverging interests of particular audiences.”¹⁶⁷ In order to consolidate political power and silence dissenting voices, censorship, forced on to the press using various techniques, is considered a powerful method to block criticism.¹⁶⁸ In academia, measures are commonly distinguished between licensing or pre-press censorship, the control of material before publication, and post-press censorship, to circumvent the dissemination and reception of already published material.

The value of free speech and freedom of the press is rooted deep in our consciousness

¹⁶⁵See Müller (2004), p. 25

¹⁶⁶See Caso, F. (2008). *Censorship*. New York: Facts On File, p. 6

¹⁶⁷Müller, B. (2004). *Censorship & cultural regulation in the modern age*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi. p.13

¹⁶⁸See Caso, F. (2008), p. ix

and stems from ideas that have existed since the French Revolution. They emphasize the importance of freedom of speech for society and contrast it with censorship. As noted earlier in this paper, in the modern era most states have incorporated passages regarding safeguarding of freedom of expression into their respective constitutions¹⁶⁹, often also directly addressing the operation of free media. However, most states keep a backdoor open by wording the limits of press freedom in vague terminology.

In fact, censorship laws and their workings are often disguised in euphemisms bearing “an uncanny resemblance to Orwellian Newspeak”¹⁷⁰ as Müller notes. An example for this would be the “process to obtain the permission to print”¹⁷¹ in the former GDR which actually signified the censorship process.

The collapse of the soviet bloc brought along the opening of state archives, shedding light on the scope and implementation of practices of state censorship in Europe. This 'paper legacy' revived the academic debate about what censorship entails, along with public debates taking place in the US as a reaction to the Bush/Reagan administration's attempt to curb civil and aesthetic liberties. These discourses questioned the relationship of free speech with areas such as 'hate speech', ethnic minorities, political correctness, pornography, feminism and the canon of the arts¹⁷².

In Singapore, so called “OB markers” (out-of-bounds markers) define the scope of topics unacceptable for public debate, such as racial issues within this multi-ethnicity state. Flexible as they are, they determine what can be printed and criticized. Ironically, these markers are discussed verbally, while they are not entrenched in any laws and never to found in press.

Strategies to counter censorship

Even in very repressive states, talks with censorship officials often resemble

169 See Behmer

170 See Müller, B. (2004). *Censorship & cultural regulation in the modern age*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi. p. 15

171 See Müller, B. (2004). *Censorship & cultural regulation in the modern age*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi. p. 15

172 See Müller, B. (2004). *Censorship & cultural regulation in the modern age*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi. p. 15

negotiations, where a compromise is sought. Still, a writer in an authoritarian environment always has to have two audiences in mind: The public and the censor.

It can prove fruitful to disguise political criticism in literary text and make use of its indeterminacy to establish a connection or common ground of interpretation between the reader and the author. So-called Aesopian language can therefore be used as a tool to smuggle potentially contestable passages into the medium “between the lines”. Ideally, the intended audience can decipher the message, while the censor is deceived.

In an example from Myanmar under military rule, the Denmark-based artist duo Surrend placed an advertisement in the semi-official newspaper Myanmar Times in 2007. It took the form of a travel agency advertisement from the Danish Tourist Board but carried the messages “Killer Than Shwe”¹⁷³ and “Freedom” in the text when read backwards and combined the first letters of an “old Danish poem” printed under the copywriting¹⁷⁴.

Another strategy writers can employ is the provocative exaggeration of a certain passage that will catch the censor's awareness to distract from other, less obvious passages in the text the writer wants to transmit.

4.2.2. Structural Censorship

Today, some scholars suggest a new dichotomy between *regulatory* and *structural* censorship, focussing on the latter as an expansion to all forms of social interaction and the building of discourse. This branch of scholars sees censorship as a given, leaving only the degree of repressiveness open for contestation and examination.¹⁷⁵

One important aspect and question for further research to take away from the proponents of 'new censorship' is that censorship is a cultural phenomenon transcending time and place. Led by Foucault's idea of power as a productive force and Butlers

¹⁷³The reference is aimed at Burmese senior general Than Shwe.

¹⁷⁴Myanmar Times Carries “Killer Than Shwe” Ad. (n.d.). Retrieved March 25, 2013, from http://www2.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=7972

¹⁷⁵See Müller, B. (2004). *Censorship & cultural regulation in the modern age*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi. p. 5

“censorship (as) a productive form of power”¹⁷⁶, they argue that the norms and rules within any discourse production itself constitute ubiquitous censorship.

Professionals who are competent in their field have to submit to the initiation processes, values and rules in their specific area of interest while excluding most of the general public who cannot partake in what Bourdieu would call “the compromise between expression and censorship”¹⁷⁷ by employing “strategies of euphemization”¹⁷⁸.

However, while the most recent developments in this field are important to point out, expanding the concept of censorship to other forms of human interaction¹⁷⁹ and social exclusion can be misleading and counterproductive, especially in regard to press freedom. The catch-all application might undermine bigger concepts like society and culture – and ultimately label all attempts at making sense as censorship.

To illustrate the importance of differentiation here, Müller puts forward the example of an author in former GDR whose new book was banned by state authorities before publication¹⁸⁰. In the classic communication model, this third-party authoritarian interception takes place between the sender and the receiver, preventing the message to be delivered or the book from being read by the audience it was intended for at all.

Different situations to consider: the rejection of an academic's article in a leading journal (peer-driven professional self-regulation), a publishing house that is committed to host only certain classics (a decision to reinforce the existing canon but the text is still able to be published elsewhere) or a child silenced by parents (private communication generally not intended for the public sphere). All of these cases are forms of communication control, but only the first one is circumventing public discourse, and thus can be classified as censorship.¹⁸¹

176See Müller, B. (2004). *Censorship & cultural regulation in the modern age*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi. p. 6

177See Müller, B. (2004). *Censorship & cultural regulation in the modern age*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi. p. 8f

178See Müller, B. (2004). *Censorship & cultural regulation in the modern age*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi. p. 9

179See Street (2012), p. 307

180See Müller, B. (2004). *Censorship & cultural regulation in the modern age*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi. p. 11

181See Müller, B. (2004). *Censorship & cultural regulation in the modern age*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi. p. 11

4.2.3. Economic Power Distortion

While censorship has an direct and obvious effect on media content, the failings of classical liberal market theory towards media can often be equally as evident and distorting to media output. The power of a pluralist media in a free market, supposed to police the state, can also be curbed and diminished by market suppression, market corruption and state control and therefore run the danger of fostering censorship by curbing the media's main functions.

In unregulated pluralism, media can fall into, what many would describe as, the pit of privatisation. Curran says that while many media during past phases of deregulation were trying to remove themselves from any state influence because, along the lines of liberal reasoning, “the state has a monopoly of legitimated violence”¹⁸², they failed to see how entangled and vulnerable they had become the power of the market and of their private owners. Suddenly, they were prone to movement on markets they have absolutely no influence over, like media concentration which took place in most countries after the media gained a private, democratic status. Curran describes in more pessimistic words what Katrin Voltmer saw as a natural line of progression for recently freed media, as explained in Chapter 3:

“The conception of the media as a democratic watchdog is important but it does not legitimate, as neo-liberals claim, a free market system. Market pressures can lead to downgrading of investigative journalism in favour of entertainment. Corporate ties can also subdue critical surveillance of corporate power. More importantly, the owners of private media can be aligned to those in power, or have a mercenary relationship to government, in a way that silences critical exposure of official wrong-doing.”¹⁸³

Four key factors can be identified in which the free market undermines free expression. It restricts the freedom to publish by raking up entry costs, it reduces the amount of public information, it often misinforms people and increases the amount of entrainment factors in news content¹⁸⁴ and it restricts participation in public debate by leading to a polarization between information elites with information-rich media and information-

182Curran, J., & Gurevitch, M. (2005). *Mass media and society*. London; New York: Hodder Arnold ; Distributed in the U.S.A by Oxford University Press. p.123

183Curran, J., & Gurevitch, M. (2005). *Mass media and society*. London; New York: Hodder Arnold ; Distributed in the U.S.A by Oxford University Press. p.127

184McQuail (2010), p. 193

poor media for the general public.¹⁸⁵

Curran identifies key factors limiting consumer influence, the first being an increase in media ownership concentration, leading to high market entry costs: “it is an invisible form of censorship that excludes social groups with limited financial resources from competing in the main media sectors”¹⁸⁶. These market systems tend to be closed and controlled by conservative media moguls. Thirdly, minorities become underrepresented as a consequent of mass media catering only for affluent niches in demand and trying to minimize costs (economies of scale).

Therefore, with higher media concentration, the ideological span covered is also contracting, as shown by research on developments of the British press and US television: “In short, market democracy is a universe where individuals do not have equal votes.”¹⁸⁷

4.2.4. Self-censorship

The ultimate goal of censorship is to police the mind rather than the product¹⁸⁸. This means that censorial measures are aimed also indirectly at other practitioners of the field apart from the original author; it serves as a reminder on which lines are not to be overstepped.

In many cases however, self-censorship is much more common and effective than explicit state censorship because it is “not really a conscious process whereby the writer weighs the pros and cons of including or excluding a potentially contentious passage; the internalization of norms cannot be easily overcome, let alone reversed.”¹⁸⁹

185Curran, J., & Gurevitch, M. (2005). *Mass media and society*. London; New York: Hodder Arnold ; Distributed in the U.S.A by Oxford University Press. p.128

186Curran, J., & Gurevitch, M. (2005). *Mass media and society*. London; New York: Hodder Arnold ; Distributed in the U.S.A by Oxford University Press. p.131

187Curran, J., & Gurevitch, M. (2005). *Mass media and society*. London; New York: Hodder Arnold ; Distributed in the U.S.A by Oxford University Press. p.132

188Levine, Michael G. 1994 *Writing through Repression: Literature, Censorship, Psychoanalysis*. Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 16

189Müller, B. (2004). *Censorship & cultural regulation in the modern age*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi. p. 25

Many case studies from countries around the world highlight the efficiency of self-censorship and the potential dangers that loom for the development of a free and functional media in democracies.

Kuwait replaced its strict censorship laws with a 'code of conduct' for the press only one year after introducing its laws in 1981. In breaking this code, anyone could be held liable and papers could be suspended if they published content that could 'damage national unity' or 'spread rumors'.¹⁹⁰ The vague wording led to a culture of fear and insecurity also found throughout the Middle East and in Hong Kong after its return to China. Here, Street notes that the Chinese government created a media environment that worked in its favour without direct state intervention through a catalogue of rewards and implicit punishments, leading to a permanent change in journalist's behaviour.¹⁹¹ An editor sums up his experiences in editing papers in the Middle East: "Sitting at my desk, I feel at times that I am not so much covering the news, as covering it up."¹⁹²

But not only authoritarian systems, but also liberal ones apply these mechanisms to their favour.

In their highly influential book "Manufacturing Consent", Chomsky and Herman first develop a media 'propaganda model'¹⁹³ for media which serve only the interests of ideology-driven establishment sources, power holders, owners and conservative politicians - before proving it to be applicable for US mass media with the help of case studies covering certain international political contexts. They found that the media dehumanized certain 'unfavorable' victims, playing up the favorable ones. In their study, they showed that it is often much more difficult to identify propaganda systems where formal state censorship is absent.¹⁹⁴

Chomsky and Herman identified five filters that the raw material of news has to pass through to serve as a system for the elite and examined the effects of an inequality in power and wealth on access to a private media system and its performance. These five filters are ownership and profit concentration, advertorial dependence for revenue, the

¹⁹⁰See Street (2010). p.136

¹⁹¹Street (2011), p. 136f

¹⁹²Khazen (1999), after Street (2011), p. 137

¹⁹³Herman, Edward S. & Noam Chomsky (2002) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon. p. 2

¹⁹⁴Herman, Edward S. & Noam Chomsky (2002) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon. p. 14

reliance on government or power-agent funded or approved information¹⁹⁵, “flak”¹⁹⁶ to discipline the media, and finally, anticommunism as a control mechanism. The results of these powerful filter systems are journalists who cannot escape the elite domination of the media even with the utmost amount of goodwill, and ultimately the change of premises for discourse that dismisses all dissident voices and undermines media's role entirely.

It is important to note that Chomsky's assessment was written during the period of the cold war with clear front lines between communism and western systems. However, while some of these mechanisms have arguably softened along with political lines, others have become even more alarming and pressing in the current age of democratization and globalization. In an environment of mistrust between government and media in a transitional country, however, the sourcing of mass media news and the power structures that can hinder it appears to be especially crucial for the development of a free press in a globalized world.

4.3. Self-Regulation and Public Service Media

Self-regulatory bodies are set up to allow the media to adhere to and uphold standards set by the practitioners from the field instead interference by third parties. Press complaints commissions are one of these self-regulatory organizations, set up by the newspaper industry itself and usually not equipped with any legal powers. Instead, it works on a code of practice to which publishers and journalists should adhere. However, if this code is violated, the means for punishment from the board are minimal.

Usually, the members of the board can order the publication to print an apology in severe cases. Again, there is no legal enforcement if the paper decides to ignore this order. No one in the newspaper industry wants regulation by the government, which could curb the freedom of the press. It is the press best interest, to adopt a common code of practice and stick to it as defining the rules of the game.

195Herman, Edward S. & Noam Chomsky (2002) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon. p. 18

196Herman, Edward S. & Noam Chomsky (2002) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon. p. 26

Curran's proposition to counter these developments is the development of a strong public service broadcaster to exist alongside private media houses as a real competitor for private media companies.

Public service broadcast is at the core of his model, encircled by civic media, professional media, private media and a social market sector catering to minorities.¹⁹⁷

“It should empower people by enabling them to explore where their interest lies; it should foster sectional solidarities and assist the functioning of organisations necessary for the effective representation of collective interests; it should sustain vigilant scrutiny of government and centers of power; it should provide a source of protection and redress for weak and unorganized interests; and it should create the conditions for a real societal agreement or compromise based on an open working through of differences rather than a contrived consensus on elite dominance”¹⁹⁸.

Both Public Service broadcasters and the forms of private and civic media should be competitors to each other to foster a healthy environment of vibrant media landscape.

197Curran, J., & Gurevitch, M. (2005). Mass media and society. London; New York: Hodder Arnold ; Distributed in the U.S.A by Oxford University Press. p.143

198Curran, J., & Gurevitch, M. (2005). Mass media and society. London; New York: Hodder Arnold ; Distributed in the U.S.A by Oxford University Press. p.148

4.4. Evaluation of existing Press Freedom Indices

If it is a complex task to define freedom of the press, accordingly it is even harder to measure it. There are hundreds of organizations which claim to keep track on press freedom¹⁹⁹ and most of them do so for systems having undergone transitions in Latin America. In international comparison, it is easier to keep an overview.

There are three main rankings which draw the most attention to their results when published. There are three organizations who aim to measure press freedom around the world by publishing an ongoing series of yearly information and reports: Freedom House, Reporters sans Frontières (RSF) and the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX).

These studies attract researcher's and media's attraction and are commonly used as a background when assigning aid programs in international assistance, to create media development opportunities, allocate funds, inform foreign policy makers.

Their final ratings are usually based on legal protection for media independence and their legal application or experience of journalists. Often, they don't match. So these surveys can only show trends over time or help in comparing media systems.

Most of the studies take Article 19 as declared in 1948 by the UN General Assembly as a departure point because this defines press freedom as universally applicable for every UN member state. Going further, the studies divert in conception, ideology and methodology. Irrespective of the survey method, northern European countries usually top the lists, while Myanmar had its place in the last years firmly reserved in the bottom ranks, along with North Korea, Eritrea, Cuba and Turkmenistan. After the lift of censorship, Myanmar has moved up considerably in the studies.

Even though most of the indices claim to be measuring the 'entire enabling environment', they usually don't. This has important implications, especially when the results of their rankings have an influence on policy makers and donors when it comes

¹⁹⁹ See Behmer (2009), p. 18

to the distribution of money allocated for media development cooperation²⁰⁰. Most of the used instruments focus on elite or peer assessment in a target country or region. In the following assessment and description of the three most widely used instruments and two different approaches, there is a special focus on methodology and financing to illustrate their possible shortcomings and strengths.

4.4.1. Freedom House's "Freedom of the Press"

The oldest and most extensive ongoing international ranking measure of freedom of the press is conducted by the NGO Freedom House, whose aim it is to "promote democracy globally". Headquartered in Washington D.C, it has been publishing its "Freedom of the Press" reports since 1978, employing almost identical criteria since the first report. Freedom House publishes its final rankings labelling countries "free", "partly free" or "unfree" each year on May 3rd^d, which is World Press Freedom Day.

In its 2014 report, it examined 197 countries and territories, making the ranking the most-cited ranking by press and a valuable tool for tracking developments geographically over time²⁰¹. However, its vulnerability stems from its methodological challenges, as Becker notes²⁰².

For a report, Freedom House assigns points to a country in a survey divided in three categories: The legal environment (30 points), investigating normative framework which might influence the media content and how this framework is carried out factually, the political environment (40 points) addressing threats, violence, political pressure and working conditions, and the economic environment (30 points) dealing with ownership and concentration issues that might influence the content.

A country is subsequently being labeled either as free, partially free or unfree, and then put into a ranking order according to the points assigned to each country (ranking from

200 Brooten, Lisa: The Problem with Human Rights Discourse and Freedom Indices. The Case of Burma/Myanmar Media (2013). *International Journal for Communication* (7), p. 681-700

201 Holz-Bacha (2003), p. 3

202 Becker (2003), p. 190

0 to 100 = completely unfree).

There are several issues connected to this methodology:

Firstly, the incorrect scaling in the ratings can lead to a very distorted picture. Its allocation of points is rather random, and the question arises what exactly is being gained by labelling the world's nations into three categories.

Secondly, how the score is actually achieved is not published. Neither does Freedom House publish its data basis, nor its evaluation process. For a publicly accessible and somewhat famous freedom index which attracts a lot of media attention each year, the Freedom of the Press index is remarkably closed-source. Also, the inquiry does not really include the possibilities of access to the media. The actual quality of coverage isn't considered, either.

Freedom House gathers its sources from travel and correspondents' reports, staff's own research, year reports published by NGOs and help organizations, questions to experts and by analysing local media itself. The collected data are analyzed and drafted in New York by about 60 staff.

Finally, it should be noted that the fundings for Freedom House are made up by three quarters directly from the United States federal government, so a strong US bias is expected. Founded as an NGO in New York City in 1941 to battle totalitarianism, Chomsky further asserts that the neoliberal NGO has had “interlocks with AIM, the World Anticommunist league, Resistance International and U.S. Government bodies such as Radio Free Europe and the CIA and has long served as a virtual propaganda arm of the government and international right wing.”

4.4.2 Reporters Sans Frontières' The Global Press Freedom Index

Less detailed than Freedom House's picture and with a more narrow focus on threats to journalists, the French non-profit organization's The Global Press Freedom Index ranking system is a powerful tool in tracking relative press freedom with a focus on the individual professional, but not entirely suitable to explain issues in media plurality and other freedom related issues.

Since 2002, the organization sends out 50-question questionnaires to 14 partner nongovernmental organizations around the world and 130 own correspondents each year, plus lawyers, journalists, human rights activists and researchers. It is, however, unclear how they are selected. With 180 countries covered, the reports cover the widest field.

The study focuses primarily on attacks, imprisonments and arrests, threats, legal repressions, forced exilation, abductions and killings of journalists, although some questions also aim at the oppression of information or ownership issues²⁰³. About half of all points in the study are assigned to questions addressing physical attacks. It is divided up in six subcategories but the questions in the assessment are prompting answers which are hard to quantify: government transparency, interference in content, the degree of self-censorship²⁰⁴. Along with the nuances lost in the overuse of closed questions, their comparability is limited due to changes in the questionnaire. The data is then analyzed and edited in Paris, before the yearly report is published and usually widely cited in media. Additionally, the organization creates publicity by guerilla action in states hostile towards media.

Here lies the main criticism voiced by scholars: The Index, as many note, seems to be a good PR tool designed to raise awareness on issues of vulnerability, but does not serve a serious research purpose, because it falls short of scientific standards. An example from the weighting of scores: The longer a journalist is detained, the more this imprisonment penalizes the country by points.

RSF openly follows a specific agenda on journalist's protection and publicity and also does so in the selection of their partner organizations, who are communicators with their own aims. That being said, RSF has also responded to the criticism and constantly updated its questionnaire by, for example, including qualitative questions handled by RSF staff in their 2013 edition. It also tries to include new media in its survey, along with questions addressing discrimination in access to profession. While this is generally an important step, it affects comparability on the other hand.

203 See Center for International Media Alliance (

204 Reporters Without Borders (2013): Methodology. Reporters Without Borders

Taking an unusual approach, RSF's budget is by about two thirds self-generated through advertisements on its website and through the sale of products and garments in its webshop. The last third comes from bodies such as the UNESCO, the European Commission and the French prime minister, and donors can also allocate money to a certain regional fund.

4.4.3 International Research and Exchange Board's Media Sustainability Index

Following the first Media Sustainability Index of Eurasia and Europe in 2000, this organization was born as part of transitional aid for former communist states and publishes the Media Sustainability Index each year for now 80 different countries in five different “continental” studies in cooperation with USAID²⁰⁵ (United States Agency for International Development) to examine “how media systems change over time and across borders²⁰⁶”. IREX's focus is on the ability of media to act as a “fourth estate” and how sustainable the media sector is in “providing the public with useful, timely, and objective information”.

In order for a media system to take on a successful shape, five “objectives” have to be fulfilled:

- Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech to the public.
- Journalism meets professional standards of quality.
- Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable, objective news.
- Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence.
- Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

The scoring is a two-step process. First, a panel of local experts from NGOs, media outlets, academics and professional associations representing the variety of media outlets in the country is assembled, half of which have already partaken in the year

²⁰⁵ Becker et al (2010), p. 14

²⁰⁶ See Irex Media Sustainability Methodology, <http://www.irex.org/project/media-sustainability-index-msi>

before. They should also reflect regional, ethnic, religious and gender representations. Panelists are asked to rate in a questionnaire their country's performance in seven to nine indicators for each of the five objectives, adding up to a final score. Among the determinants is, for example, the question whether any underrepresented media type could affect the sustainability of the media sector as a whole.

In the second step, the panelists come together and discuss the results. A local moderator writes a report of the talk, which is edited back at IREX. Their staff then score the media system indicators independently after reviewing the panelist's contributions, which has the same weight in adding up to the final overall country score. The averages of all indicator scores describing how well the country is meeting its subcriteria are then presented as an overall 4-step score for the country's media system from "Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press" to "Sustainable". In situations where participants face threats, IREX can offer anonymity or "does not engage panelists as such"²⁰⁷, the study is then carried out through research and interviews with experts on the country's media situation.

In this approach, the MSI can be considered superior to the previously introduced Indices, since it considers the entire environment in which media operates, including questions on its quality such as fair reporting. On the other hand, it attempts to assess media as being only sustainable when they are a profit-generating business. This would dismiss public service broadcasting as inferior to commercial media, unveiling the inherent bias that underlies its methodology²⁰⁸ towards liberal market media.

4.4.4. African Media Barometer

The African Media Barometer takes a very different approach. In short, it is a "self-assessment exercise done by Africans themselves according to homegrown criteria", developed especially for the continent. Its benchmarks are largely adopted from the 1991 Windhoek Declaration and the African Commission for Human and People's

²⁰⁷

²⁰⁸ Banda (2008), 45

Rights “Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression in Africa” from 2002. Jointly developed by the Media Institute South Africa and the German social democrat Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, it is growing steadily. 30 countries were measured with this instrument in 2011, and the methodology is now adopted to assess other world regions for the first time in 2013.

For an assessment, ten to twelve representatives from the media and the civil society in equal proportions are being asked in each country to lead a two-day qualitative discussion chaired by an FES consultant. They are asked to assess 42 indicators on criteria derived from declarations and protocols from Africa.

In this approach, it is the only instrument to actually use homegrown criteria to avoid a Western bias. The local FES staff compile a report which is edited and published. The reports vary greatly from country to country in layout, scope and content.

The AMB is intentionally developed to provide a comprehensive picture of the African media landscapes only by 42 self-developed criteria²⁰⁹ adopted from African declarations, focussing rather on the political environment than on the economical sustainability of a media system. It also does not include foreign experts as assessors like IREX's Media Sustainability Index.

The Panelists are asked to vote anonymously on whether their country meets each of the 42 indicators after discussing them, grouped into four benchmarks: freedom of expression, public service media, transparency in regulation and independence and the degree of professionalism.

In the instrument, a focus is on public service broadcasting²¹⁰. The explorative, qualitative approach it follows makes it more difficult to generalize the data merely from the nature of the discussion. Furthermore, no statement can be made on the quality of the broadcasting.

Arguably, this approach is the first successful attempt to avoid a Western spin.

209 See Banda (2008), p. 42

210 See Banda (2008), p. 42

Further complications can appear when only a certain group is asked to participate. So the panel group's perceptions are actually taken for granted to represent the actual state of affairs in the country as a whole, when they are just “categorised and rank-ordered according to particular attributes of the variable, as defined by the researchers of the research protocols²¹¹”.

4.4.5. Unesco Media Development Indicators

As seen in the assessments above, each of the instruments have strengths and shortcomings that stem from the research design and hinder comparability or the collection of stable data. A different approach is taken with the Media Development Indicators developed by the UNESCO. As an instrument that does not seek to rank, it serves as a convenient guideline for its own examinations, but also for the development of a new criteria catalogue²¹².

The aim to represent the UNESCO's core mandate to foster the “unrestricted pursuit of objective truth”, “the free exchange of ideas and knowledge” and “the free flow of ideas by word and image”, but also to be an interpretation of international human rights standards applicable to all countries as part of international law which were laid out in the 1991 Windhoek declaration²¹³. In reference to the right to freedom of expression founded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights it described ideal characteristics of media as being free, pluralistic, independent. These standards were later endorsed by the UNESCO and in the UN General Assembly. In this regard, it is the most universal approach that a media assessment can take on.

An assessment has to involve the government, commercial and civil society groups.

211A. Banda, F (2008): What are we measuring?” In: Jannusch, Lansner (eds.)
Measuring Change II – Expanding Knowledge on Monitoring
and Evaluation in Media Development
5th Symposium Forum Medien und Entwicklung (FoME)
12–14 Oct 2009, Bad Honnef
Aachen: Catholic Media Council (CAMECO), 2010

212 See Behmer, 2009. Bristol: Intellect, p. 31

213 UNESCO (2008), “Media Development Indicators for assessing media developments”, http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=26032&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

Endorsing a multi-stakeholder approach and designed to be carried out in every country, the MDIs are not a tool to rank countries against each other but to address “gaps and weaknesses in the media development framework, against progress can be mapped”. This means that no mathematics are applied to boil the results down to a number ranking and comparing the country. The studies assess factors in the media environment which have internally and external influence on media development. It is important to note that Phuddephatt, who designed the main categories, acknowledged that the UNESCO approach and its categories need to be applied flexible and in accordance with local circumstances²¹⁴.

An MDI assessment is structured around five principal media development categories. These were designed as a consensus after assessing the existing indicators. These categories each consist of a certain number of subdivisions, also called issues, key indicators and sub-indicators, along with suggested means of verification, positively defining a system of factors vital for media development on a framework basis.

Since it would exceed the scope of this study to discuss the hundreds of subindicators, the five main categories and what they are examining will only be outlined here:

a) A system of regulation conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media

This category deals with the legal framework, regulations and policy and censorship.

b) Plurality and diversity of media, a level economic playing field and transparency of ownership

Examinations of the media market weigh in here, statistical data and broadcasting regulations

c) Media as a platform for democratic discourse

Journalists can reflect the society's diversity in a climate of self-regulation.

d) Professional capacity building and supporting institutions that underpins freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity

214 UNESCO (2008), p. 7f.

This examines whether media workers have access to training in academia and on the job.

e) Infrastructural capacity is sufficient to support independent and pluralistic media
Issues of public access are discussed here, especially in reference to marginalized groups.²¹⁵

The aim of the the assessment is to create a holistic picture of the media in which each category is as important as the others. Taken as a whole, the indicators inevitably create an aspirational picture, but they are an important and powerful tool to map out a desired media ecology and to define what steps could be taken to arrive there.

Most importantly, the assessment documentation follows a transparent toolkit approach, providing civil society organisations and research groups with an extensive and comprehensive set of documents and handbooks on how to apply and verify the subindicators, along with sources and definitions to address challenges in conducting the research and maximize usability in donor programs and international cooperation.

4.5. Conclusions on Press Freedom Indices

The three first studies introduced in this chapter can be commonly criticized in their attempt to gather a complex situation and boil it down into a number. Also, they focus on old media, rely too much on experts, and lack transparency. However, all of these problems are addressable, and the creators of the studies usually are responsive to criticism and try to subsequently improve their instruments from year to year.

The problem is definition of media freedom itself, as the last chapter has proven. To counter accusations of bias, research supervisors argue that there is no Western bias in Article 19 of the Human Rights Declaration and maintaining it would be each state's obligation. Indeed, there are many positive aspects to be found in the classic press freedom studies: Their measures are, if not accurate, relatively consistent and their conclusions do not differ widely when compared. Especially the advantage of tracking developments over time is highlighted often, making the instruments useful, credible,

²¹⁵ See UNESCO (2008), p. 7ff.

crucial tools despite their methodological pitfalls.

However, international comparisons in particular have been proven to be problematic. This is mostly due to the lack of reliable comparable data. Ideological preconceptions and conceptual insufficiencies are factors that can distort the results of the studies, making it hard to tell "what it is the organization is actually trying to measure"²¹⁶.

To illustrate this, even pinpointing seemingly certain issues like agreeing on a number of journalists murdered per year is highly problematic, as Behmer notes²¹⁷. One has to ask who is considered a journalist as opposed to, for example, an employee working in media production or a blogger, and if these persons lost their lives in direct connection to or on the job. These conceptual difficulties especially on the institutionalized profession or informalities connected to it run deep along all fields of measurement and can only be avoided if the outline of a necessarily complex questionnaire is very clearly defined beforehand.

The questions which have to be addressed in developing a research instrument are very much alike to those that have to be asked before starting any research process: What should the concrete avail of the survey be and who will be able to use the results? In terms of media mapping, can a media's role in transition be described and can indicators found identify dangers that could hinder press freedom²¹⁸?

However, a quantitative analysis of four (RSF, FH, CPJ and IREX) of the main measurement systems carried out by Becker, Vlad and Nusser found a high level of parallelism in the results²¹⁹

One other important criticism should be considered here before creating a research tool: The reliance on expert views alone fails to deliver a picture on whether "the media in a particular society actually produce an informed citizenry"²²⁰. The question to which degree all citizens are able to participate and express themselves in the media draws a

²¹⁶ Becker, Vlad and Nusser (2007), p. 19

²¹⁷ Behmer (2009), p. 32

²¹⁸ Behmer (2009), p. 31

²¹⁹ Becker, Vlad and Nusser (2007), p. 19

²²⁰ Center for International Media Assistance (2010): Evaluating the Evaluators: Media Freedom Indexes and What They Measure. Washington: National Endowment for Democracy, p. 37

line back to Habermas' creation of a public sphere, but in media development contexts, Price suggests this is even more crucial because: “free and independent media are not a good in themselves, but only inasmuch as they support other, more intrinsic, values and goals, such as democracy, a particular economic structure, greater cultural understanding, general human development, and so on.”²²¹

Arguably, the MSI asks, for example, whether “state or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest”. But neither do they ask the citizens – but experts²²² – nor can a social desirability effect be outruled in asking such a closed question. Thirdly, the insights gained from these form of questioning are very low since the question can be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no'.

Based on Habermas' paradigm that discourse is legitimizing democracy, the authors suggests asking “validity claims” and “speech claims”²²³ in order to ask the citizens how well the media, even when operating by the best democratic framework, can actually fulfill its duties towards making their voices heard in practice²²⁴. Examples for these could be outlined by questions like:

- To what extent do you feel the media is knowledgeable about the subject they report?
- To what extent do you feel like the media cover your positions fully and satisfactory?²²⁵

Taking the theory laid out in Chapter 2 and 3 into consideration, the involvement of citizens into an assessment of their - the Burmese - media seems pivotal in shaping informed citizens. Moreover, they could identify detailed specifications of the media system like a lack of representation on certain topics that fail to be addressed by big survey studies focused only on experts. Representatives responsible for oversight of the press freedom surveys acknowledge this citizen voice approach, but claim it exceeded their scope.

221 Price, “Press Freedom Measures: An Introduction.” In: Center for International Media Assistance (2010), p. 38

222 Jacobson et al.: “Indicators of Citizen Voice for Assessing Media Development: A Communicative Action Approach,” In: Center for International Media Assistance (2010), p. 38

223 Jacobson et al.: “Indicators of Citizen Voice for Assessing Media Development: A Communicative Action Approach,” In: Center for International Media Assistance (2010), p. 39

224 Ibid.

225 Ibid.

In conclusion, the author is convinced that while all measures assessed above have their specific functions and justifications, a combination of some approaches diverting from the aim to rank is suited best for a meaningful examination of the stated scope and media environment.

A flexible toolkit approach, employing multiple stakeholders to participate in the mapping of the state of a local media system as developed by the UNESCO is not only the most practical way to assess a media landscape, its approach is also ratified by UN member states, making the extension to the fostering of freedom of expression the most universally binding and unbiased measurement to date. Combined with qualitative research to trigger explorative answers and and citizen voice taken into consideration, the results could help develop new aid programs and map the limits in development of a media environment in detail.

5. Methodology

5.1. Research Questions

According to the theory unfolded in the previous chapter, it takes a multi-stakeholder approach and a refined framework of universally applicable indicators to map the development of a media system properly and unbiased. Different variances should be taken into consideration in Myanmar that affect the design of an appropriate research instrument. These variances are the uniqueness of the underdeveloped market that defies common logic of regulation and penetration, the working conditions of journalists in a legal vacuum and the special role assigned to media in transition and conflicts. The last theory chapter has shown that common tools for ranking and assessing press freedom can fall short of their reliability for a lack of a solid conceptual basis. Therefore, a combination approach of UNESCO mapping of media development and a citizen voice approach should now be put onto a methodological foundation. So, the following research questions should be answered with this study:

RQ1: Where are the limits of press freedom in Myanmar as defined by local political news journalists and their readers?

RQ2: What do the readers expect from their news media?

5.2. Selection of Method: Qualitative Research

Every study design demands a different approach from its author in terms of what he wants to measure. While some studies aim for an expanded review of theoretical concepts by reviewing them, others call for a testing of a hypothesis. In assessing a media landscape, Banda notes, some existing tools “may fall short of properly scoping and defining their terrain²²⁶” As laid out in the theory, this proves especially true for assessments of press freedom indices, which find their limits often in a patchy methodological conception. Since the author does not speak Burmese, a content analysis of newspapers could not be carried out. When working with a translator for media text,

²²⁶Banda, Fackson. "What are we measuring?." *Measuring Change II*: 39.

these studies can be successful, but even then there may be some effects and nuances “lost in translation” and the author delegates the responsibility of interpreting the text to a third party. On the other hand, a content analysis of English newspapers or journals would not be representative since their readership is very limited: Only an educated, urban elite does even have the command of English to read these papers, so their content tends to reflect the living world and views of the expat community instead of the general population.

In answering research questions for broader global research problems, the author has to decide whether he wants to approach the topic empirically by carrying out a qualitative or quantitative study or a combination of both. For this study, the approach is to look at in-depth changes in the media system by interviewing media professionals and readers and then mirroring and interpreting their answers. To get the best results in answers which are hard to quantify and also not to dismiss important details and gain insights, the author has decided for a qualitative approach. This is because qualitative analyses can run deep and filter out abstract principles that would not be discovered in a qualitative study. It allows the researcher to be most adaptable to the current situation, to dismiss or rephrase certain questions or to restructure the whole of the interview so that a natural flow of conversation can be achieved.

5.2.1. Qualitative Research in Journalism Research

5.2.2. Qualitative Interviews as the Main Research Instrument

Three methods of interviews are defined in the literature, divided according to their level of structuring:

- Unstructured interview
- Semistructured interview
- Structured interview

The problem-centered interview is based on language as a starting point and rooted (setzt an) along the same specific societal problems that were analyzed from an objective standpoint before. At its heart lies the principle of interviewer-centered openness, which

is to be achieved by the interviewer by creating an equal, confident atmosphere. It should point the interviewee towards certain bodies (komplexe) of questions through the interview guidebook without suggesting too much of a closed answer or fixed answer options.²²⁷ This approach bears several significant benefits for the research; the most important being the possibility for the interviewees to expand on their experiences and interpretations, unfolding bigger relations and structures in their own words - experience show that the interviewee is much more reflected, accurate, open and honest than he would be with a closed question technique or a questionnaire.

5.2.3. Interview Guide

Once the problem to be examined is formulated and analyzed, the development of interview guidelines followed consecutively, its central aspects should be derived from the problem statement and the theoretical analysis.

These guidelines should mention the topical areas of the interview in a reasonable order and offer at least suggestions for articulating questions. In qualitative approaches, it is important to keep the questions as open as possible to ensure the interviewee can expand and explore the area he is asked about, also underlining it with own experiences. While they should not be rigid or trigger a particular answer, they can be grouped in three groups according to the function they serve:

- Starting questions or icebreaker questions are to make the interviewee feel at ease and encourage him to explore and expand on his experiences. Furthermore, they assess the personal importance of the respective topical area for the interviewee.
- Guideline questions are the topics considered relevant and central to the problem
- Ad-hoc questions are to be formulated by the interviewee to react to the interviewee covering important aspects that are not mentioned in the guidelines.

This makes the problem-centered interview appropriate for theory-based research since it incorporates the aspects of the previous problem analysis into the research. Its second main advantage is the partial standardization along the lines of the interview guidelines, helping comparability and data analysis.²²⁸

²²⁷See Mayring 2002, p. 69

²²⁸See Mayring 2002, p. 70

In the construction of the interview guideline, some of the questions remained identical for journalists and readers. In other instances, for example on the topic of representation, the guideline branched out, posing questions only to the readership or the journalists.

In this study, six weekly newspaper readers and six journalists working in the editorial team of these journals were chosen to be interviewed (for sampling details, see next subchapter). The aim of the research is to paint a multidimensional picture of the effects of the censorship lift on both groups. The interview guidelines were therefore designed with the framework of the UNESCO Media Development Indicators in mind. Some questions could be kept similar for both readers and journalists. Other areas touched on the reader's personal experience and expectations for the content of the political news ("What topics would you like to read about?"), while others asked for the professional perspective of the journalists ("How is the cooperation with the government officials? Where are the limits of press freedom?"). In these cases, the interview guideline branched out, acknowledging the expert status of journalists and allocating them more time to talk about limits and effects on their daily work in depth. However, for major aspects, the same guideline was used to enable a comparison between the sender and the receiver of the messages delivered in the form of political news in the weekly paper (for example, "Which changes have you noticed?"²²⁹).

To design a guideline for the interviews, the researcher has to start out with the problem statement under scrutiny. The interview guideline in a semi-structured, problem centered interview should not trigger particular answers or be too rigid. Rather, it is a reminder to touch on the most crucial topics and not get too diverted. The finished interview guideline can be found in Appendix II.

5.3. Sampling and Time-Frame of Research

As mentioned in the introduction, the empirical part of this study will focus on the perceptions of the effects after the lift of censorship in Myanmar as judged by (1)

²²⁹ See Appendix II.

journalists working in the production of the most widely read type of mass circulation press, weekly newspapers called journals and (2) the readers of these papers.

The journals were chosen for several reasons: Firstly, the weekly private print media was allowed to exist during the military rule, but the mechanisms of state censorship meant they were effectively turned into government mouthpieces. The lengthy censorship process meant that no daily newspapers were licensed to operate until April 2013.

Thus, the journalists working in the existing weekly papers are the only ones able to judge the differences in their working conditions and the impact on the content they produce over time. Journalists are also in a position of having to change their role now and work much faster, so an effect on working conditions was expected.

The target group of the readers of these paper allow the researcher to check on the answers the journalists give from a different perspective. They are able to judge on topics like representation and define shortcomings in content, as laid out in the theory, and therefore should be involved in the discursive process of assessing the media environment.

5.3.1. Selection of News Media

The publications to be chosen were homegrown, that is to say exile media were excluded due to their connection with nongovernmental organizations, their fundings structure and also the decreased threat of repercussion they face when an outlet like the reports from Thailand rather than being based in Myanmar.

The news media outlets to be selected were those classified as “political journals” in the country. In this study, a political journal is classified as a weekly newspaper that mainly carries articles and reports focusing on current Burma-related and regional politics, economic and environmental news and interviews. Other sections, like culture and sports, are usually listed in the journals as well, but were disregarded. Further disregarded were sports journals with a small political news section on the last pages.

The following criteria had to be fulfilled for the selection:

- Establishment; The paper had to have a publishing record of more than five years to ensure a comparability over time before and after the censorship lift from the journalist's experiences.
- Beat; Furthermore, they had to be political journals, mainly reporting on local and national affairs in a factual. Sports and entertainment journals, although very popular, were therefore ruled out.
- Reach; Thirdly, they had to be published nationwide, ensuring a widespread reach and audience at least in theory.

In considering these criteria, the aim was to examine the three most widely-read and established political news journals in Myanmar.

Sampling was carried out in two steps. In the first step, selected news outlets were chosen after interviewing experts in and outside of the country and consulting statistics to assess their influence.

As noted, it is hard to come by statistical data on market share and readership. To gather the news media with the biggest readership and influence, the news outlets were therefore selected after consulting several sources: Experts on conferences, stringers for German Television, lecturers and researchers at media development organizations, their staff in Yangon and papers examining the media landscape in Myanmar. The reliance on these sources might be argued to be a weakness on the study, but the picture they provided proved to be surprisingly clear.

For the selection of nationwide media, some concentration considerations came into play: Yangon, the former capital, is the city with the best infrastructure in the country and the liveliest newspaper market. While most big journals operate offices in other states or in bigger cities like the capital Naypyidaw or Mandalay, their operational headquarters are all based in Yangon. A relatively extensive distribution in the capital due to the proximity of printing houses and merchant centers meant that the highest

concentration of readership was also assumed to be found in Yangon.

Information Matrix is the publishing house of *7 Day News Journal*, which is one of the most widely read news journal in Myanmar according to market research²³⁰. As one of the leading political journals in Myanmar, it publishes in Burmese and covers sections such as Health, Environment, Education, Business, Features, IT, Entertainment and news from Myanmar and the ASEAN. About 75 staffers work on the 56-page paper, founded on March 7, 2002²³¹.

The *Myanmar Times* is a journal publishing weekly in an English and Burmese edition. It was chosen firstly for its very specific position on the journal market, as it is the only media outlet in Myanmar with a foreign investor among the owners. Due to this specification, the Myanmar Times is seen to have a favourable relationship with the government²³² – some claim it tends to be too tame in reporting critical content towards the government, others claim that the paper had freedoms in reporting which the local media never had. Australian Ross Dunkley first partnered up with the son of a leading Burmese intelligence service general in 2000, taking up 49% of the share.

In a wipeout power play, the junta arrested the whole intelligence leadership shortly after, sending their families to jail as well. In place of Dunkley's partner, the junta put a crony in who bought out his shares cheaply. In 2011, Dunkley spent some time in Burmese prison after alleged charges of assaulting and drugging a sex worker and for immigration violations²³³. After returning to an unsuccessful eviction attempt from his partner, he stayed nevertheless and kept the paper running, although it is unclear how much influence the military government could exercise in the past years.

Nowadays, Dunkley's former partner is freed from prison again and a Burmese tycoon holding shares in many different business areas around Myanmar has bought out the crony-held shares of the newspaper²³⁴, which is about to expand into daily business.

230 International Media Support (2012): p. 15

231 7 Day News Information Brochure (2013), 7 Days Publishing Yangon. p. 6

232 See Thu, Kyaw (2012): *The Impact of Censorship on the Development of the Private Press Industry in Myanmar/Burma*. Reuters Institute, Oxford, p. 23

233 Freston, Tom: Ross Dunkley's Quest to Run a Daily Newspaper in Burma Is "His Everest" | Vanity Fair. (May 23, 2013). Retrieved April 17, 2014, from <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/on-the-road/2013/05/ross-dunkley-daily-newspaper-burma>

234 U Thein Tun buys into Myanmar Times. (March 3, 2014). Retrieved April 17, 2014, from

The second reason it was chosen was its comparability and stability on the market: the paper has been publishing since 2000, one of the very few private papers to be allowed to operate long before censorship was abolished. This, along with the revenues generated from advertisements (especially job classifieds for foreigners) and distribution outside of Myanmar, allowed the paper to maintain a certain publication standard and operate in-house training of its staff. The Myanmar Times has therefore earned the reputation of an “elite newspaper”, read by local businessmen, officials and expats. About 120 full-time journalists and 180 other staff are involved in producing the two editions every Wednesday. They are printed in color on 56 pages, 16 or more typically cover local political news.

Eleven News is another very popular weekly journal in Myanmar with a market share of 19% in 2012²³⁵. According to the sources involved in selection of the news journals, it was considered to be rather critical and relentless towards the government, and a paper for 'common people'. Eleven Media Group is the publishing house for the journal, and about 120 staff work on the weekly edition.

5.3.2. Selection of Journalist's Sample

The sampling for this study is a combination of random sampling and conscious selection.

The conscious selection can be applied when previous knowledge in a field can help to identify areas of experts. In this study, the Head of News was chosen as an interview partner from each of the three newspapers. He or she was chosen to represent the person responsible for important gatekeeping processes in the daily news flow, ultimately accountable for all content in the News section but also producing content and having experience as a journalist or reporter. A short interview with these people was carried out to ensure the journalist's position had these responsibilities and more than five years of experience on the job.

The remaining three journalists in the group should signify a random sample from the staff. Random sampling, when done right, can prove fruitful for extrapolation of data

<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/9750-savvy-businessman-u-thein-tun-buys-into-myanmar-times.html>

when a simple and systematic method is applied.

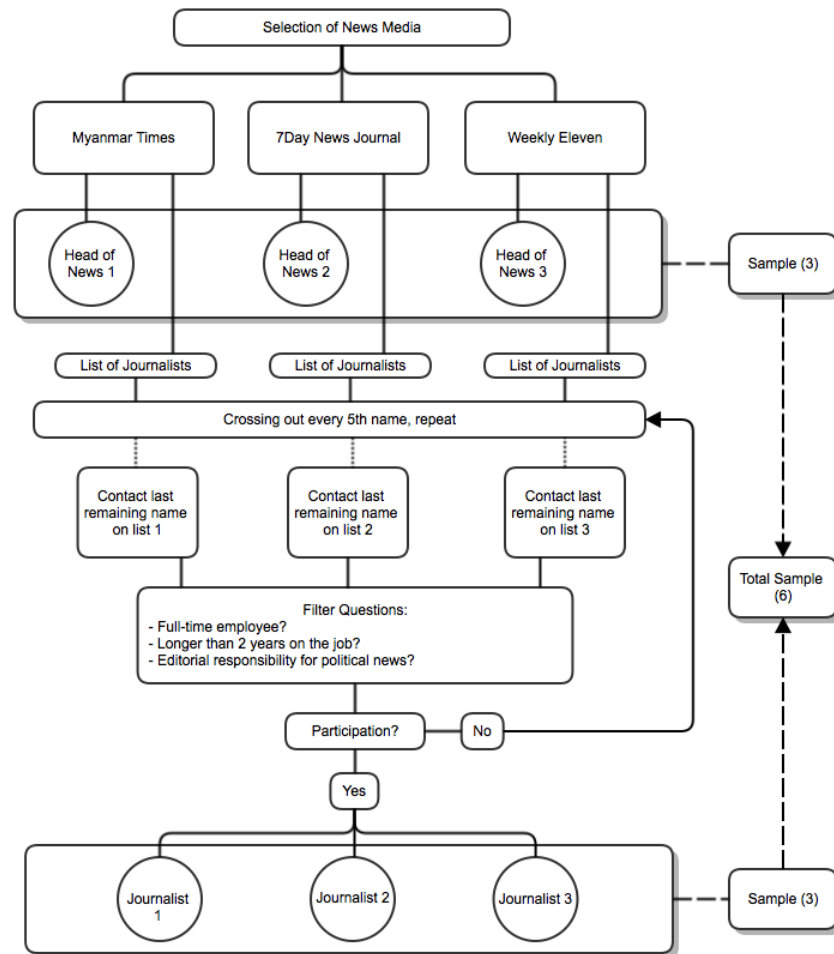


Fig 1: Sampling of Journalists

To get to a random sample in the group of journalists, the author used a lottery method by first obtaining a contact list of employees working as journalists from the Human Resources department of the three chosen newspapers. These lists were then refined by crossing off every fifth name on the list, so that after several runs, only one name per newspaper remained. This person was then contacted and asked for their participation in the interview. If the person declined, the former steps were repeated. A local interpreter could be on site if the interview partners wished so. This was communicated beforehand.

Journalists were defined as those who had editorial responsibility for the content they produced. Here, their level of experience was not considered further than having been on the job for more than two years to be able to judge the effects on working conditions after the list of censorship. Since the journalists in the lower ranks were younger than

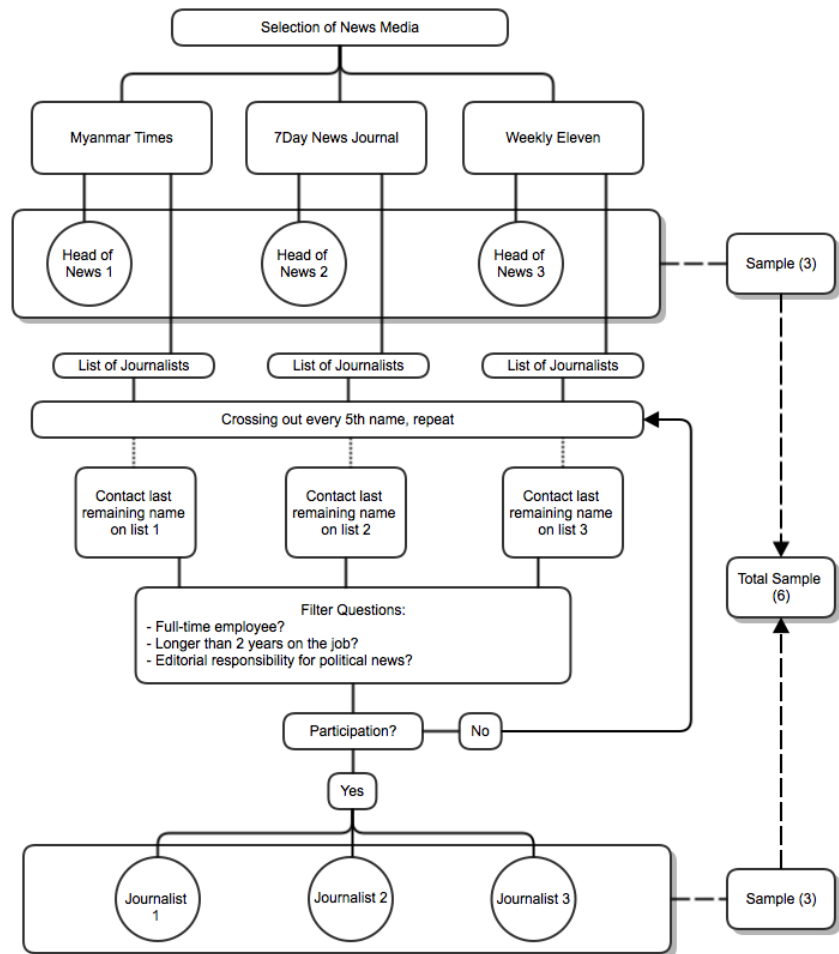


Fig 1: Sampling of Journalists

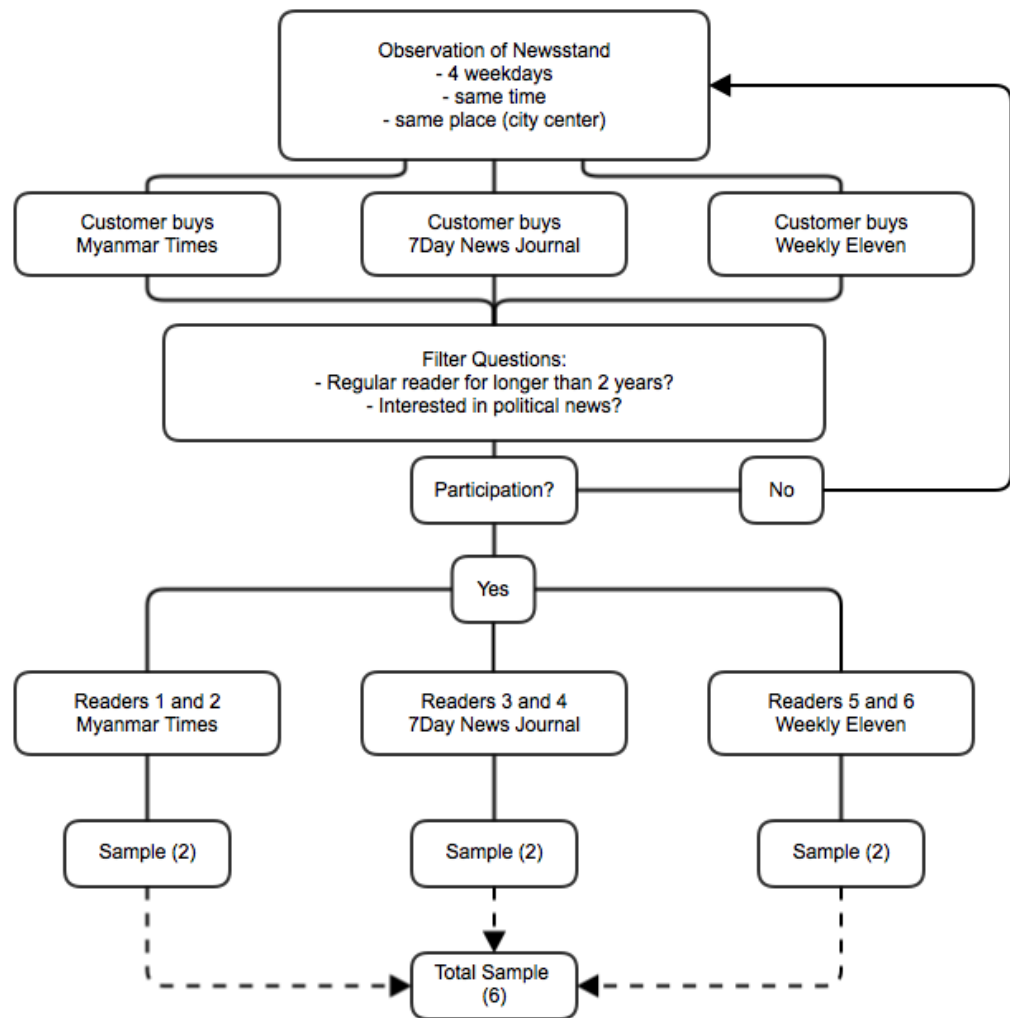


Fig. 2 Sampling of Readers

5.3.3. Selection of Readership Sample

The study attempts to collect and examine the findings extracted from the interviews with journalists and those insights to be found from interviewing the same amount of readers of the selected newspapers. For six journalists, six readers were chosen. For a lack of institutionalized readership or access to market research groups or subscription lists, the choice of sample had to be carried out in a more creative and maybe uncommon way. Newspapers are sold informally along the main streets and big roundabouts. The idea to get to the newspaper readers was to ask them for their participation right at the newsstand. To do so, the author observed a newsstand equipped with all three journals on three weekdays in a row, between seven and twelve o'clock. The weekdays were chosen as the day of publication of the respective weekly editions of the newspapers, because it was assumed that readers would be more likely to buy a paper on the day when the new issue was published.

The position of the newsstand was chosen strategically in the commercial center, on the main roundabout in the city center, next to office buildings and between two main bus stops to ensure maximized exposure to passersby on their way to work or on their lunchbreak. If a person bought one of the newspapers under scrutiny, the author greeted the person and presented a sign to her or him with three filter questions, translated into Burmese by a trusted translator working for English newsmedia:

“Do you read this journal regularly and for more than two years? Are you interested in political news? Would you like to participate in an interview I am carrying out for my master's thesis on the changes in the Myanmar journals since 2012? A translator can be provided for you. Thank you very much!”

This approach, while arguably very explorative, ensured that the first language barriers were overcome and the readers did not feel pressured to participate – they could decline by just shaking their heads and walking off. It also helped to randomize the sample as not only English-speakers and elite persons were considered, but common people buying a paper on the street every week. This approach was taken to pay tribute to the concept of “citizen voice” as thought of by Habermas and often asked for when it comes to examinations of media development.

To find readers willing to talk about the news they are reading was not that difficult, but some interviewees had trouble concerning their role. Before the interviews were carried out, most of them voiced concerns that they were not “experts” - the practice of being asked for opinion is not too common in the country yet.

The following table illustrates the approach to get to the sample of six journal readers:

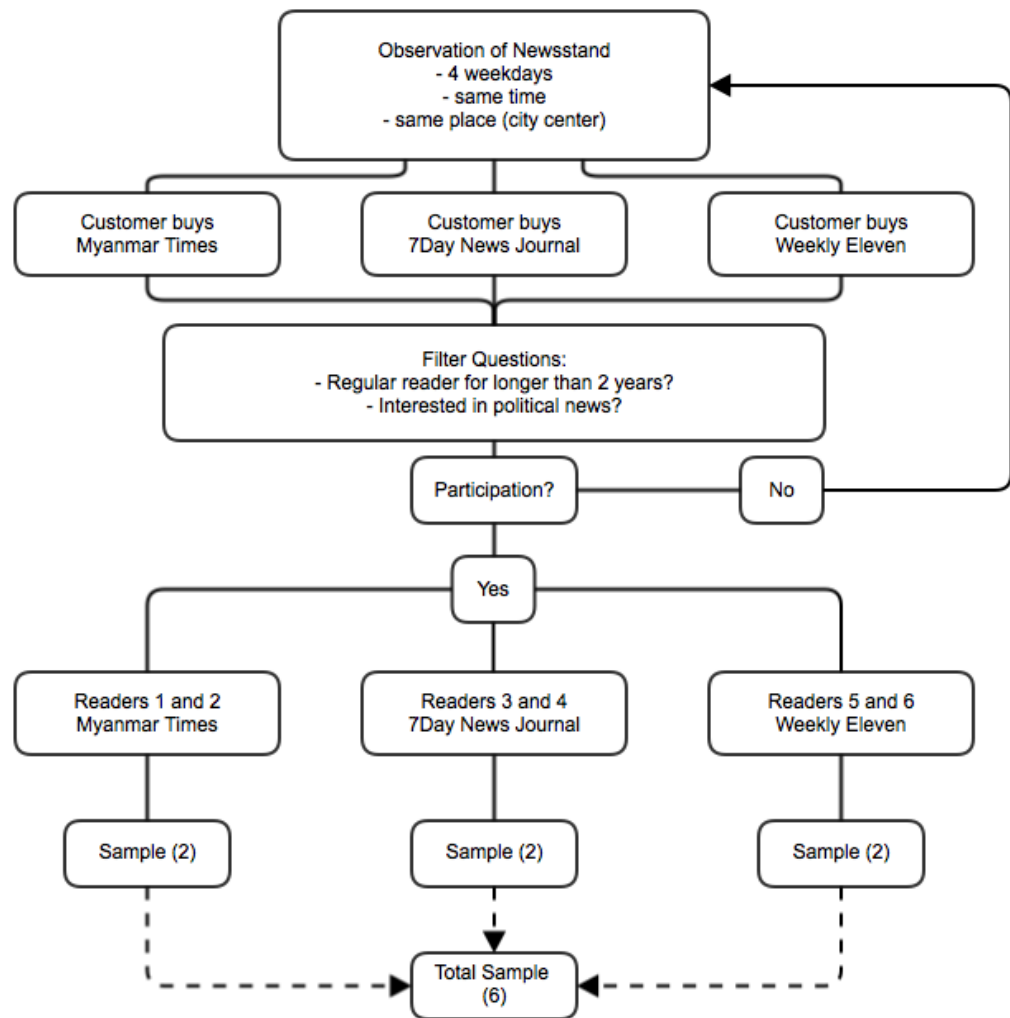


Fig. 2 Sampling of Readers

5.3.4. Pretest

To check whether the questions in the questionnaire were formulated in an easy to understand, precise and adequate manner, two test interviews were carried out, one with a Burmese young journalist working as a reporter for Eleven Media and one with a newspaper reader quizzed after buying a copy of Weekly Eleven on a newsstand in the center of Yangon. While the interview with the journalist proved to be unproblematic, the wording of the guideline questions for the reader interviews was slightly adapted to ensure better understanding.

5.3.5. Research Design

All interviews were carried out in March and April 2013 face-to-face in Yangon. After selecting the journalistic candidates, the author asked the interviewees to suggest a setting for the interviews. All of the journalists invited the interviewer to their newsroom to further demonstrate working conditions and workflow.

It was assumed that the interviewees would be most open in an environment they felt most comfortable in. Within the interviewee group of the readers, there were several different settings suggested: Four of the interviews were conducted on the spot in an open-air 'tea shop'²³⁶ directly next to the newspaper distribution point where they were asked to participate, one interviewee asked to conduct the interview at their home, the sixth one made an appointment in a restaurant.

It may be argued that the journalists have had time to prepare for the interview while most of the readers didn't, but it was not so much the expert views by readers the author was after, but their sincere experiences and feelings.

The material was recorded on tape and later transcribed by word-by-word-transcription for further analysis.

All interviewees were asked whether they preferred to have a translator on site. Four out of six readers preferred that, while just one of the journalists took on this offer but conducted the most part of the interview in English. For reasons of readability, the grammar in the transcripts was in some cases slightly adapted into correct English where necessary.

In case of misunderstandings, the interview time allocated allowed for questions to clarify possible misconceptions. These are noted in the transcript found in the Appendix. Apart from remarks on extralingual actions, for example where material is shown to the researcher, the language transcribed was left as natural and authentic as possible. Since every cooperation work to overcome language barriers can distort the results, the Burmese audio files and transcripts were sent to another native Burmese double-check

²³⁶ Common name for a simple roadside café found everywhere in Yangon that serves savoury snacks and green tea.

after completion.

5.4. Content Analysis

Journalists, Mayring notes, usually have an advantage over scientists when it comes to presenting the collected data, since a well-written report can be more powerful and enlightening than a poor study.²³⁷

In journalism research, especially when asking journalists why they do what they do, Content Analysis proves to be a stronger tool for answering these questions and measuring behaviour than surveys would, especially because the former set room for exploration, ruling out answers that would not fall into pre-manufactured options.²³⁸ This is especially important when surveying journalists. Even though, as noted above, their role differs according to the type of media system they are working in, it can be concluded that they are more used to ask questions than the general public.²³⁹

5.4.1. Structuring Analysis

For the interpretation of a text, three qualitative techniques used in content analysis can be distinguished²⁴⁰:

- structurizing
- explicating
- summarizing

The technique chosen for the text in this study is a structuring analysis of the text by content since it aims to filter a structure of certain aspects from the material. Material can then be extracted, condensed and presented along certain content lines.

²³⁷ See Mayring 2002, p. 85

²³⁸ See Weaver, David (2008).: Methods of Journalism Research – Survey. In: Löffelholz, Weaver (ed.) (2008) Global Journalism Research. Theories, Methods, Findings, Future. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p. 107 f.

²³⁹ See Weaver, D.(2008), p. 108

²⁴⁰ See Mayring, P. (2008). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse: Grundlagen und Techniken*. Weinheim; Basel: Beltz. p. 58

The structuring dimensions, as derived from theory and described in the previous subchapter, are now further differentiated into categories. These dimensions and categories are being collected and create the final category system. To determine whether a portion of text falls under one of these categories, Mayring suggests three steps²⁴¹: First, the portions of relevant text should be clearly defined. Next, “anchor examples” should be formulated to aid the coder with listing a text example for each category. In the third step, the researcher has to define coding rules to avoid overlapping between two categories.

After the main dimensions are set, the material was being examined several times to check whether the category system is efficient in grasping the text under scrutiny, highlighting and marking portions of text with its respective matching category.

5.4.2. Inductive and deductive Category Building

How useful and valid a content analysis can be is highly dependent on the exact definition of its categories. In communication research, the usual procedure is to first define units of text under scrutiny and then to examine them for certain manifestations²⁴². Here, the units are the answers given in the twelve interviews that were carried out. As described in the inductive and deductive category building chapter, the categories this analysis is built on are derived from the UNESCO framework to assess media development.

After that, the category system was finally revised and inductively built categories were included to include leftover text that did not match the deductively built system. Inductive categories are derived directly from text without reliance on theoretical concepts to allow a most natural and least distorted representation of material²⁴³.

To allow an exact measurement, the categories should be defined as narrowly as

241 See Mayring, P. (2008), p. 83

242 See Noelle-Neumann et al. (2008), p. 54

243 See Mayring (2008), p. 75

possible to rule out overlapping. This is especially important to allow intercoder reliability and validity of qualitative studies. Ideally, different analysts should be able to secure the same results from a certain body of text.

Now the coding technique is applied: Units of texts are labeled according to the main structuring dimensions. Data was first grouped into categories derived from theory, in this case the UNESCO MDIs, and then split up into (Ausprägungen) within subcategories. For example, category 2.2. dealt with issues of self-regulation, but turned out to be best split up into issues addressing self-regulation and self-censorship. They The category system should then be revised considering theory and material

5.4.3. Description of Category System

All aspects in interview answers related to freedom of the media are defined as relevant text elements. The initial category system was derived from four out of five dimensions of the UNESCO MDIs²⁴⁴. These four categories examine the a media environment in a culturally neutral, encompassing and universal way. The main dimensions were taken, and subcategories were derived from the subcategories that are called “issues” in the UNESCO framework. They were adjusted, shortened and sometimes condensed to fit the scope of the study and the sample. Based on these main dimensions, the category system has been revised and adjusted several times following Mayring's suggested course of analysis²⁴⁵.

After some test runs in revising the material, two more dimensions have been added for analysis: “Development of Media Freedom” and “Media in Conflict and Reconciliation”. To assemble passages for examination for these last two inductive categories, double coding was used in some instances to filter out multiple thematic aspects of certain passages. The following list displays the final category system which allows all relevant text elements to be grouped into categories and subcategories:

244At the beginning of the research process, the second framework category examining regulation and “level economic playing field” was being dismissed since it focusses on mainly market data-based statistics as means of verification that this study did not aim to provide or examine.

245 See Mayring (2008), p. 84

Dimension 1: System of Regulation fostering Freedom of Expression

Category 1.1. Legal and Policy Framework

Category 1.2. Defamation and unwarranted legal restrictions

Category 1.3. Censorship

Category 1.4. Government pressure

Category 1.5. Access to information

Dimension 2: Media as a platform for democratic discourse

Category 2.1. Representation and Service to Society

Category 2.2. Self-Regulation

Category 2.3. Public Trust and Confidence in Media

Category 2.4. Safety of Journalists

Category 2.5. Media Accountability

Dimension 3: Professional Capacity Building and Support

Category 3.1. Access to Media Training

Category 3.2. Access to Academic Media Courses

Category 3.3. Availabililty of Trade Unions and Professional Organisations

Dimension 4: Infrastructural Capacity

Category 4.1. Access to Technical Resources

Category 4.2. Press, Broadcasting and ICT Penetration

Dimension 5: Development of Media Freedom

Category 5.1. Past Experiences

Category 5.2. Present Perceptions

Category 5.3. Future Predictions

Dimension 6: Media in Conflict and Reconciliation

Category 6.1. Kachin conflict

Category 6.2. Intercommunal violence and religious violence

The main dimensions each consist of several categories and subcategories.

Dimension 1: *System of Regulation fostering Freedom of Expression*

This was developed in accordance with the first main category of the UNESCO MDIs. As laid out in the theory, the right to freedom of expression in compliance with international standards and the right to information have to be guaranteed in law and respected in practice without interference of government or government-operated regulatory bodies to ensure editorial independence. This category was coded whenever interviewees referred to current legal and policy framework (1.1.) or censorship (1.3.) issues affecting editorial independence. It also analyses interviewees' references to extralegal and informal pressure from government for example in the protection of sources (1.4.), or a lack of legal guarantees towards defamation and libel issues and unwarranted legal restrictions (1.2.). The right to freedom of expression is also closely connected to the right to information. Government and ministries should disseminate information proactively and on-demand. Category (1.5.) therefore discusses answers referring to any issues affecting the access to information from the public administration. An important part of a regulatory system that is conducive to freedom of expression is a self-regulatory mechanism operated by the media itself. To avoid overlapping, all references to self-regulation were coded in Category 2.

Dimension 2: *Media as a Platform for democratic discourse.*

Media should be able to create a place where democratic debate can take place without external interference, but as a social actor in its own right, it needs to be accountable for its actions. As described in the theory, this is especially crucial in conflict-ridden states in transitional processes, where media can fuel conflict by partisanship and imbalanced reporting. This category deals with issues of self-regulation (2.2.) operated by the press communities themselves to promote freedom of expression and fair reporting and was coded when interviewees referred to means to ensure balance and fairness by codes of conduct, editorial ethics, self-regulation up until self-censorship and professional peer-scrutiny setting standards to foster accountability.

In order to fulfil its democratic potential, media should reflect the diversity of the society in which it carries discourse, cultural expression and information. It was coded when interviewees referred to the level of trust and confidence placed in the media or its representatives (2.3.). The *Representation and service to society* category (2.1.) dealt

with all remarks towards representation of societal groups and connections between journalists and audience, such as feedback, reader orientation, content which readers desired.

The tension between freedom of the press and accountability can lead to a climate of insecurity, preventing media from being able to fulfil its duty towards the creation of a public sphere. Journalists operating in a climate of fear and uncertainty will withhold critical information, leading up to regular self-censorship. Answers referencing these issues are addressed here.

An important differentiation to make here is between crimes against journalists that affect their physical safety - coded in this category - and pressure from government surrounding legal and policy issues. Threats, violence and harassment affecting the safety of the journalist are coded here (2.4.), while issues related to lawsuits or pressure directed at the content stemming, for example, from too broadly defined defamation and secrecy laws are coded in Dimension 1 (1.2).

Dimension 3: *Professional Capacity Building and Support*

The category covers issues of access to the journalistic profession and training for qualification, both academically and on the job. Text was coded when interviewees talked about university courses, how they got into journalism and about professional training opportunities provided by either employers, the state or media training institutions. It also aims to map support structures and was coded when interviewees referred to the availability, accessibility and functionality of journalism unions and professional organizations.

Dimension 4: *Infrastructural Capacity.*

Any remarks towards press penetration (4.1.) and distribution or access to technical resources (4.2.) were grouped here.

Dimension 5: *Development of Media Freedom*

This category was developed inductively after several runs through the material. It turned out that journalists and readers liked to draw comparisons in the development of media freedom to illustrate and substantiate the scope of changes taking place. Using these examples allows to assess the attitude and wishes of the journalists and the media-

interested public towards the future of the country and the stability of the current system. It also helps to draw insightful comparisons between media audiences and professionals in mirroring the results. This category is split up in three different temporal subcategories to trace possible changes and examine reader's and journalist's attitudes. The subcategories were called

Past experiences (5.1.) with censorship and media referred to experiences in the past that were juxtaposed with present perceptions or developments taking place now to illustrate the level of freedom the interviewees gained today.

Present perceptions (5.2.) about press freedom should examine current perceptions on media freedom in general and in Myanmar. They should examine the status quo as well as generalizations.

Future predictions (5.3.) of media freedom aimed at analyzing answers in which interviewees made assumptions about the future development of media freedom in the country. An indicator for this was the use of the word 'future', 'one day' or the use of future tense.

Dimension 6: *Conflict, Reconciliation and Peace*

This category was also developed inductively to examine specifically the role and behaviour of Burmese media in recent conflict situations. It was coded when journalists and readers talked about war, peace, reconciliation in connection to the the armed conflicts with *Kachin* (6.1.) groups in the northern states or the *intercommunal* (6.2.) violence towards Muslim minorities in Meiktila, Rakhine and Yangon in March and April 2013. In this category, double coding is sometimes used as some passages in the interview can be analyzed for multiple aspects.

5.5. Limitations to the Method of Research

Three limitations could be identified beforehand: Firstly, this research approach is not tackling the type of media system under economical viewpoints as suggested in an

assessment of media development indicators. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, this is due to a lack of reliable data that the researcher could examine. This category examines the economical playing field of media, including public service broadcasting regulation, concentration, transparency and ownership issues. In an environment that had been closed away from the world so rigidly for half a century, most of these factors are simply not applicable yet or not confirmable.

A second limitation taken into account was the dismissal of the involvement of the government usually suggested in an assessment of media development after UNESCO. Not all governments are accessible in equal ways, thus, the focus of this study should be on the media and its audiences. Since the Media Development Indicators are especially designed to provide an adaptable framework to be used in aid programs, creative research methods have to be taken on in the field, but always within scope and limitations of the examination.

Finally, possible language barriers in interviews were expected and tried to be gapped by providing a translator on site if necessary.

6. Presentation of Results

The following outline illustrates the findings in their most common and extreme forms, and summarizes the answers given according to the defined categories and subcategories.

6.1 Dimension 1: System of Regulation fostering Freedom of Expression

Three strong common tendencies among the journalist's answers concerning *legal and policy framework* (Category 1.1.) could be observed. All journalists discussed the problem of currently not having proper press laws or judicial institutions²⁴⁶²⁴⁷ that they could rely on, as Myanmar Times reporter Nilar sums up: “We need laws, every time a journalist has gone to court he is the loser. It is because the government are more powerful. They can also pay the better lawyers and maybe pay the court. The court people are also afraid and will not decide against them”²⁴⁸. Furthermore, the interviewees addressed the contradictory notion of working free from censorship on the one hand, but still having licensing laws from 1962 in place on the other.²⁴⁹ Thirdly, all media representatives referred to issues connected with the drafting of the new media bill by the MOI,²⁵⁰ in which journalists were not involved, although they had been previously promised otherwise. Journalists familiar with the draft law said they had protested²⁵¹²⁵² against the version submitted to parliament and had voiced concerns that the new press law would be just another tool to control the media²⁵³: “[...] if the parliament passed this law, the old one will be abolished. But it's essentially the same! We are not stupid, we can read, too. They said it's a Publication Law, so that means we as publishers have to have a license and they can control it, take it away from us when we don't comply. So they are in fact trying to control us”²⁵⁴.

In reference to *defamation and unwarranted legal restrictions* (1.2.), all journalists

246 Appendix I, p. 58

247 Appendix I, p. 6

248 Appendix I, p. 12

249 Appendix I, p. 39

250 Appendix I, p. 38

251 Appendix I, p. 55

252 Appendix I, p. 46

253 Appendix I, p. 46, p. 39

254 Appendix I, p. 46

expressed insecurity and identified areas that were unclear on, which could lead to the press being sued on libel and defamation grounds²⁵⁵ for publishing inaccurate information or overt criticism.²⁵⁶ Wai Phyo said that some forces from the old regime “still want to control the media, so they find many ways to press the media.” In turn, there was strong consensus that finding hard evidence in the form of documents to properly archive stories and use as defense against any possible lawsuits was especially problematic, as Ko Ko from Myanmar Times explains: “Otherwise, you can be sued, especially when you are talking to the cronies. So actually, you have to find everything to prove your story first and then you present it to them. It is hard the other way. I would like to ask many more questions, but then my editors say: What if people get angry and you cannot prove anything?”²⁵⁷.

Ahr Man connected the uncertainty towards unwarranted legal restrictions to judicial corruption: “They can take money and then you have a problem. (...) If I write a story about someone but I can't show evidence, then they can sue me. Even if what I write is absolutely true”²⁵⁸. On the other hand, the government systematically collects evidence, as Ahr Man describes: “We have to send the publications off to them, at least ten copies. So these people still read it and then they archive it. That means, in case we were sued, they have everything handy”²⁵⁹. However, Wai Phyo gave an example of the news journal *The Voice*. The journal published an article on their website after the censorship had been lifted, which had previously been banned and for which the ministry of mining had earlier sued them for”²⁶⁰.

In addressing *censorship* issues (Category 1.3.), all interviewees from media outlets acknowledged that they were, in principal, free to write whatever they wanted, including on sensitive topics such as Aung San Suu Kyi, armed conflicts (for detailed results on conflict reporting, see Category 6) and environmental issues.²⁶¹ Myanmar Times editor Sann Oo said cooperation with the MOI was good and that he tested the freedom from day one by running a big story on the regulations that had been

255 Appendix I, p. 11

256 Appendix I, p. 7

257 Appendix I, p. 57

258 Appendix I, p. 19

259 Appendix I, p. 50

260 Appendix I, p. 50

261 Appendix I, p. 58

changed.²⁶² Conflict reporter Aye Mya Kyaw, who said most of her work was cut before censorship, said she could “write on the Kachin conflict freely now. I can report. (...) So we can write whatever we want, I can print it in the paper - I can see my efforts. That's the change for me”²⁶³. She also acknowledged the censor's willingness to change the regulations: “In the censorship group, not all the people were bad. They had some good people, they had some educated people there and they knew we had to change for the good. Thanks to them, we are here now”²⁶⁴. Other framework conditions impairing that right are discussed in 1.4., 1.5. For detailed insights about past censorship, see 5.1. Three of the readers explicitly referred to censorship and explained they felt that the scope of topics covered and the tone reflected a greater freedom.²⁶⁵²⁶⁶ Reader Zin Phyu of Myanmar Times followed the story on the lift of censorship mentioned by Sann Oo in the paper.

When the interviewers discussed *pressure from government* (Category 1.4.), the journalists gave conflicting statements on the level of pre-publication and extralegal government interference in the newsroom. While the Head of News at Weekly Eleven does not remember any calls from the ministry of information in the past year debating content, the deputy editor of Myanmar Times claims they do happen sometimes, but the tone has changed into “discussions²⁶⁷” concerning accuracy. Reporter Nilar from the same paper identifies government calls about unfavorable content “every week”²⁶⁸, once successfully applying pressure on the editor to erase government quotes from a press conference:

“[...] and one of the officials said: "Blah blah blah, because not being educated is like being blind". Someone in the audience (...) made a joke. I put both of these quotes into my story. The next day, we get a very angry call from an official from the Ministry: "I did not say that, you cannot put that into the story!" Actually, I didn't even talk to him, but my editor did. Then they agreed to take it off the Burmese edition, but keep it in the English one. (...) And even the reporter who made the joke did not put the quote in his paper. He was afraid”²⁶⁹.

262 Appendix I, p. 6

263 Appendix I, p. 37

264 Appendix I, p. 42

265 Appendix I, p. 59

266 Appendix I, p. 63

267 Appendix I, p. 6

268 Appendix I, p. 10

269 Appendix I, p. 10

Wai Phyo identifies different means of pressure, such as the hacking of e-mail accounts after reporting on army airstrikes against rebels: “Two of our reporters who also cover armed conflicts have found some messages from Google in their inbox, it said that their account was hacked by the state. (...) Our website was also down for some days, [...]. Before the attacks we had some troubles with the officials, they did not want the reporters to go to these areas to report”²⁷⁰.

Him and Aya Mya Kyaw accredit this sort of behaviour to “hardliners in the same positions”²⁷¹: “The government official is still the same person as in the military regime. They dare to tell the journalists: ‘If the journalists write about it, they will be in trouble! They will lose their position’. That’s still in their minds. They are afraid of telling the journalists. Sometimes they use journalists as a channel to tell people, like a propaganda instrument”²⁷².

Nilar said the government sent 16 guidelines for reporting after the lift of censorship to private media, although they could not be subjected to legal repercussions anymore: “That was like a manual for self-censorship. (...) For example, number two was ‘Do not comment on the government in a negative way’. Some of them are also really funny, like ‘Don’t write vampire stories’. It sounds like a joke, but it isn’t. Then they claimed that these were just suggestions, like a code of conduct. But some of my colleagues and me too, we were unsure what to think of it. You know, we didn’t know what would happen when we just disobeyed it. But then we tried and it was okay”²⁷³.

Other journalists however also identified a changing dynamic with the government and talked about the willingness to test their limits step by step. Referring to the protection of sources, Ahr Man from 7Day News resisted extralegal pressure on a business story in 2011 for weeks: “The government contacted us and asked ‘Who is your source?’ and ‘How did you get this information?’ but our reply was that we cannot supply our source”²⁷⁴.

270 Appendix I, p. 45

271 Appendix I, p. 46

272 Appendix I, p. 40

273 Appendix I, p. 11

274 Appendix I, p. 20

Access to information (Category 1.5.) was the area in which all of the journalists saw their work and freedom of the press impaired the most. Throughout all media, all interviewees repeatedly described the lack of government communication as being very problematic and challenging in writing balanced, fair reports. Government, ministries and the military were seen as reluctant to give out even basic information, quotes or confirmations, and interviewees accredited this behaviour to the lack of trust and unfamiliarity towards the media and the unchanged mentality²⁷⁵ of the same people in power. Sann Oo of Myanmar Times describes the hindrances: “There are days when we can't even write the news properly, because we have to say: the government didn't comment on this, the official was not available for a statement, we are not sure because no one gives us an interview or anything we need for the story. So they deny us information”²⁷⁶.

According to reporters covering a particular beat, not only general information is withheld, but also access to sites and statistics.²⁷⁷ Reporting on sensitive issues and investigative journalism are perceived especially hard under these conditions, leading to the avoidance of conflict topics altogether for the lack of proper proof and fear of repercussions: “[...] if we want to write about corruption or corruption in the army or some army torturing the people, we know what's going on, but we don't have a proof. So that's why we cannot write. We are still trying to get the evidence we need to tell the people the truth. That is our weak point”²⁷⁸. San Oo sums up: “To be frank, we don't do much of it. [...] it is safer for all sides not to go into these areas (investigative reporting)”²⁷⁹.

As an exception to this rule, two journalists Nilar and Ahr Man pointed out some of the communication policies of president spokesperson U Ye Htut, who recently started providing information to the public via Facebook²⁸⁰²⁸¹: “Before him (U Ye Htut), we would just get one statement, then we would ask more – and they would just run away”²⁸². Facebook was identified as the only output apart from government

275 Appendix I, p. 16

276 Appendix I, p. 5

277 Appendix I, p. 40

278 Appendix I, p. 38

279 Appendix I p. 4

280 Appendix I, p. 13

281 Appendix I, p. 18

282 Appendix I, p. 18

propaganda in state newspapers and infrequent official statements in which sections of public administration, such as the police, actually communicated actively.²⁸³

The implications for the content put in the newspaper meant stories were described as being “boring”²⁸⁴ without enough substantial information to truly inform the audience and it was seen as a major hurdle to real freedom of the press.²⁸⁵ In order to get balance in their articles, the journalists said they have to use “old government statements”²⁸⁶ from state newspapers, search for “published documents” or “announcements”²⁸⁷: “We can't do anything, only repeat. But (...) it is faster than when I call. It is always no answer, no answer”²⁸⁸.

A direct result of this policy is that formerly suppressed groups at war with the national army, which employ an open strategy of open unrestricted access, communicate their aims and viewpoints to the media without interference or counter-statements from the government, as all three Head of News confirmed: “[...] when for example the KIA helped our journalists and took them to the frontline of the war and the government doesn't even give out a statement, we feel like it is the government who have helped the KIA”²⁸⁹.

Two alternative strategies to gather information were mentioned: First, the reliance on cronies as “sources within the system”. Secondly, Sann Oo from Myanmar Times has shifted towards reporting on the administration's reluctance to get involved: “No answer is often also an answer”²⁹⁰.

6.2. Media as a platform for democratic discourse

In reference to *representation and service to society* (Category 2.1), the Myanmar Times journalists described the readership of their English edition as “foreigners, NGO people

283 See Appendix I, p. 24

284 Appendix I, p. 13

285 Appendix I, p. 32

286 Appendix I, p. 19

287 Appendix I, p. 7

288 Appendix I, p. 56

289 Appendix I, p. 47

290 Appendix I, p. 4

and experts” and of the local edition as “Burmese upper-middle class²⁹¹” and “one of the leading papers among officials and politicians”. On the other hand, the journalists from 7Day News and Weekly Eleven said they thought they created a product for “everyone²⁹²” of all demographics. Journalists of the latter two stressed this broad aim of appealing to a wider audience by emphasizing a wide variety of sections in their paper.²⁹³ Interviewee Ahr Man cited a market research his paper 7Day News carried out which found that 40 percent of all readers were based outside of Yangon.²⁹⁴

In terms of political alignment and partisanship, all journalists stressed the need to stay as neutral as possible, but interviewee Ko Ko of Eleven Weekly felt there was a general tendency of all journalists to align with the NLD, “because every other opinion, apart from the junta's, was so long oppressed”²⁹⁵.

Covering religious topics, the journalists gave conflicting statements. Nilar felt that there should also be coverage of the Christian and Muslim population, while Ko Ko felt that the readers had an expressed desire for Buddhism as the predominant religion to be reflected.²⁹⁶

In addressing feedback issues, establishing a connection with their readers was an important point that all interviewees brought up during the dialogue. Wai Phyo, Ko Ko and Nilar all mentioned Facebook as positive means for readers to communicate feedback, but also as a place where rumors and misinformation spreads quickly. The journalists attributed this to their audience's lack of education.

Ahr Man said he got negative feedback from readers when he published pictures of members of the Rohingya minority (or 'Bengali' as they are known in Myanmar): “Most of our readers were very angry that we put photos of Bengali²⁹⁷ people in. But we know that we have to have fairness and balance. But sadly, most people can't understand that”²⁹⁸. Also in reference to reporting on the Rohingya population, Eya mya Kyaw said they received angry calls from both Muslim and Buddhist readers, accusing the paper of

291 Appendix I, p. 2

292 Appendix I, p. 56

293 Appendix I, p. 27

294 Appendix I, p. 26

295 Appendix I, p. 55

296 Appendix I, p.57f

297 A term that identifies the Rohingya minority as being not Burmese, but Bangladeshi.

298 Appendix I, p. 23

bias towards the other side.²⁹⁹

They felt they had to take on the role of “educators” in some situations. Wai Phyo: “The cronies are trying to increase their influence. But many people would not know what that means. So we wrote a commentary and background piece on how these cronies were related to the previous regime, donating so much money to them. Now, they are giving out this money to the opposition party because they are expecting the NLD to win the elections in 2015”³⁰⁰.

Ko Ko addressed the changes in the audience since the abolishment of censorship: “So when you are censored, you write for what you think they want to hear. (...) Now it's different. It's more like I want to know what the readers want to hear, but I'm not sure”³⁰¹.

In terms of critical reporting, Wai Phyo said his paper publishes a lot of critical pieces about “cronies and the government – and how they mingle”³⁰² as well as stories about corruption in tender processes. He confessed that as a tactic to maximize reader interest in corruption stories, he tends to wait until the details about the project in question are about to be finalized and handed over to the public before printing his story.³⁰³

Criticizing the president and also advertisers was possible³⁰⁴, according to Aye Mya Kyaw, whose newspaper published a critical piece about the ticket pricing policy of a local rock concert: “We were the media partner. (...) So the advertisement company didn't really like it. But we have our policy and we have our trust. We are not related to the advertisers, but the readers”³⁰⁵.

The readers generally embraced the new openness of the papers and appreciated the media's new freedoms. Most of them felt well informed on daily news and found the topics covered were very interesting. In terms of representation, readers did not feel that the papers could reflect the ethnic diversity in the country properly, although all of them

299 Appendix I, p. 39

300 Appendix I, p. 51

301 Appendix I, p. 55

302 Appendix I, p. 49

303 Appendix I, p. 49

304 Appendix I, p. 43

305 Appendix I, p. 43

appreciated the coverage on ethnic conflicts that wasn't possible previously. Reader 2 felt the journals still “lack some experience”³⁰⁶. Reader U Aung Zyi said: “We have a lot of ethnic groups and there are some groups that I have only started to read about now. I remember learning about them in school, what their clothes look like and what languages they speak. But I don't think they can be represented very well, just a little bit”³⁰⁷.

All readers that were interviewed expressed a *desire* for more political coverage in several dimensions. Reader 2, who worked for the government himself, along with Myo Thu would both like to see a more critical attitude towards those in power. Zin Phyu wished for more coverage on politician's future intentions before the upcoming election.

Three of the readers interviewed identified corruption as the most important field that still needs to be addressed in the journals. Myanmar Times reader Myo Thu refers to the transitional process the country is in:

“Personally, I would like to read interviews with the government. Interviews where they ask critical questions. For example, there are new laws, but people are still very poor. How will they change that? I think that in a system going towards democracy, this kind of questioning should be standard. Currently, I think mostly they are still just issuing statements. Media might be too shy because in the past there have been a lot of arrests”³⁰⁸. Readers also addressed a number of topics of daily life they would like to read more about, most common issues being health, education, business news, religion and telecommunications.

In addressing issues of self-regulation (Category 2.2.), all journalists interviewed described their decision-making processes in the newsroom as being based on three principles of responsible reporting: Balance, neutrality and fairness. This includes finding two sources to confirm information whenever possible.

In systemizing and standardizing these principles, Weekly Eleven and 7Day News each developed their own guidebook that they adhere to for reporting and in their

306 Appendix I. p. 63

307 Appendix I, p. 60

308 Appendix I, p. 75

newsrooms³⁰⁹³¹⁰ but also use as a manual for the training of new journalists. Wai Phyo of Weekly Eleven said the development of these guidelines was one of the prerequisite conditions to fulfill in order to apply for a daily newspaper publishing license.

The journalists commonly acknowledged the increased responsibility that comes with greater media freedoms. Sann Oo of Myanmar Times said “A responsible media should not attack people and abuse their power. It should be for the good of all the people”³¹¹.

Still, other journalists felt that the sensibilities of the audience should sometimes be prioritized³¹², as Ahr Man explains: “We are a developing country. If we were to report in a very open and direct way, some readers wouldn't understand. So they misunderstand and then they become emotional.”

Religious topics were defined by all six journalists as a highly sensitive area, to be treated with extra editorial care.³¹³³¹⁴ Here, all journalists apart from Wai Phyo of Weekly Eleven explained they would editorialize quotes or withhold information on faith-related issues entirely if they felt it could spark violence, hurt sensibilities³¹⁵ or increase levels of conflict in the public. This practice was described as self-censorship³¹⁶³¹⁷ by most of the journalists apart from Sann Oo, who referred to this as “editing”³¹⁸.

Wai Phyo said the reporting on this topic and other sensitive issues such as corruption and the military were usually discussed internally before publication, but he explained his paper would sometimes just withhold information for a certain period of time instead: “The thing is: This is Myanmar. We are undergoing a transition and we are just opening up, so we have to take care with our reporting. (...) I mean, there might be a fight and we escalated it. There might be a right time for an important topic, but not any topic at anytime. I think, timing is quite important”³¹⁹. On a larger scale, the media

309 Appendix I, p. 42

310 Appendix I, p. 50

311 Appendix I, p. 8

312 Appendix I, p. 13

313 Appendix I, p. 46

314 Appendix I, p. 57

315 Appendix I, p. 13

316 Appendix I, p. 13

317 Appendix I, p. 21

318 Appendix I, p. 7

319 Appendix I, p. 49

representatives saw themselves as being responsible³²⁰, professional and trying to avoid bias. However, in parts they felt they still needed to “learn to think for ourselves”³²¹.

When readers talked about the level of *public trust and confidence in the media* (Category 2.3.), they explained that they did not trust the media entirely because of certain biases they felt their writers had³²² and because of the amount of propaganda that had been in newspaper content over past years. Most readers used content from the state newspapers as a negative examples to illustrate what had changed for the better.³²³ The current news coverage was generally described as being more free in many regards, but not entirely free, which was mostly accredited to fear³²⁴³²⁵. Daw Ei Ei thought the journalists sometimes spread rumors and had to “learn to write better and face the government with our problems.” Reader 2 felt in the current political coverage there was “still something missing... it is not like they can write everything about the government”³²⁶.

However, readers generally found the newspapers after the lift of censorship more trustworthy and reliable, feeling more informed³²⁷ but acknowledged a growing political orientation of newspapers on the political spectrum³²⁸. Some readers said they could now gather different information from different papers to form their opinion. One reader described his cross-medial strategy: “When I read here at the newsstand of my friend, what I do sometimes is take two papers from the same day and read articles about the same thing. And then I notice that the articles are very different, they are not the same at all. So I don't really trust them so much, we have to think for ourselves to find out what can be true”³²⁹.

Concerning the physical *safety of journalists* (Category 2.4), the interviewees took their own precautionary measures such as organizing group reporting for dangerous situations, but said there were no laws or institutions to back them up in case of

320 Appendix I, 13

321 Appendix I, p. 50

322 Appendix I, p. 63

323 Appendix I, p. 65

324 Appendix I, p. 73

325 Appendix I, p. 74

326 Appendix I, p. 62

327 Appendix I, p. 66

328 Appendix I, p. 75

329 Appendix I, p. 66

emergencies³³⁰³³¹. In contrary, some journalists accused security forces of just standing by and watching when reporters were attacked with torches and sticks in Meiktila: “If we had taken more pictures they would have threatened our journalists' lives - so that is a part of freedom that is still missing. But the authorities said, they were simply angry people who were enraged because they thought the muslims had killed a monk”³³². Myanmar Times' Sann Oo says he doesn't want to assign women to dangerous areas and plans on hiring more men, but despite this new applicants and staff in his newsroom were overwhelmingly female.³³³

6.3 Professional Capacity Building and Support

Regarding the *access to media training* (3.1.), journalists claimed to have been either trained by a senior editor on the job³³⁴ or have started the job without training after working perviously in another position in the company. Aye Mya Kyaw also highlighted a lack of any adequate formal training opportunities provided by the state.³³⁵ Reporters Nilar of Myanmar Times and Aye Mya Kyaw from 7Day News both attended short-term training programs in Thailand. Nilar spoke of the difficulties experienced when trying to return to the country: “I had to put a lot of holiday stuff in my bag, like swimsuits to pretend I am going to the beach. And when I came back, the trainer gave me some books, so I ripped the cover off where it says journalism or media or something and put the cover from another magazine on it. So they wouldn't see at the border control what I was doing”³³⁶.

Most journalism training opportunities for the interviewees were provided by international organizations outside of the country, for example in Thailand or, most recently, in the United States.³³⁷ Although training is now provided by some international organizations like Internews within the country³³⁸, interviewee Nilar is still

330 Appendix I, p. 5

331 Appendix I, p. 49

332 Appendix I, p. 41

333 Appendix I, p. 3

334 Appendix I, p. 15

335 Appendix I, p. 47

336 Appendix I, p. 10

337 Appendix I, p. 43

338 Appendix I, p. 43

reluctant to take up further training due to financial concerns. She lamented that it is difficult because training would mean taking unpaid leave from work³³⁹ and she is considering applying for grants instead.

Concerning the *access to academic media courses* (3.2.), three journalists referred to the Yangon University as being the only institution in the country to offer a course on journalism education, but as it is operated by the Ministry of Information, they felt it did not provide adequate teachings for the job of a journalist. The journalists who spoke about the course all described their teachings as “propaganda”³⁴⁰, Ahr Man attested it “isn't any good”³⁴¹. Aye Mya Kyaw elaborated: “For example, they told us to write opinion pieces about Aung San Suu Kyi, calling her a dog and a whore and really bad names. Then they published it like it was an opinion piece from a famous writer under a fake name. (...) I think this is not journalism, they didn't teach us anything important like being balanced”³⁴². Ko Ko said she was planning on taking up academic training at university in Thailand³⁴³, just as Nilar had.

Reader Myo Thu and journalist Aye Mya Kyaw identified further shortcomings in the Burmese university system and attributed it to repressions, like the repeated closure and relocation of campuses over recent years following student protests³⁴⁴ and she offered some suggestions for tertiary journalism education in her country: “I would have real journalism training, conduct good interviews, write, well, legal stuff”³⁴⁵.

In reference to the *availability of trade unions, professional organizations and NGOs* (Category 3.3.), Wai Phyo from Eleven Media said the only way to stop state-sponsored cyberattacks on his reporter's e-mail accounts in January 2013 was to complain publicly to international organizations Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Without Borders. As the chairman of one of the three journalist's associations in the country, he sees his task as being to lobby the government for greater press freedoms. He was also highly critical towards the government-staffed Press Council: “Because what is the

339 Appendix I, p. 43

340 Appendix I, p. 15, Appendix I, p. 43

341 Appendix I, p. 15

342 Appendix I, p. 43

343 Appendix I, p. 54

344 Appendix I, p. 87, Appendix I, 54

345 Appendix I, p. 44

point of complaining about the government to an institution for the press when there are also officials sitting in there?”³⁴⁶.

6.4. Infrastructural Capacity

Access to technical resources (Category 4.1.) was identified as being rather difficult by Ko Ko, who recalled she often had to bring her own computer to work or wait to take turns on other's equipment.³⁴⁷

In reference to *Press, Broadcasting and ICT penetration* (Category 4.2), Ahr Man of 7Day News stated his paper sold 150,000 copies a week but had 2,5 million readers. He addressed the problem of distribution to subscribers in Yangon: “The problem is that we can't reach the locations to deliver - only very early in the mornings or late at night, due to the transportation problems. So there isn't much room for growth there”³⁴⁸.

Readers acknowledged and expressed interest in the new newspapers and magazines³⁴⁹ on the market in Yangon but did not always buy a copy of their trusted newspaper just for themselves. Newspapers are generally shared and have a wider circulation, of sometimes up to 20 people in remote regions, according to Ahr Man.³⁵⁰ Both readers of the more expensive Myanmar Times and Weekly Eleven confirmed this³⁵¹³⁵²³⁵³ and said they would take turns in the family or among colleagues to buy the paper.

Readers also used additional means to get their information, through interpersonal communication, TV reports from Democratic Voice of Burma³⁵⁴ and, as student Myo Thu said, Facebook and Youtube.³⁵⁵ Reader U Khin Sein said that he used to listen to the BBC Burmese Service, but sees almost no need for this anymore since the lift of

³⁴⁶ Appendix I, p. 53

³⁴⁷ Appendix I, p. 55

³⁴⁸ Appendix I, p. 27

³⁴⁹ Appendix I, p. 62

³⁵⁰ Appendix I, p. 17

³⁵¹ Appendix I, p. 62

³⁵² Appendix I, p. 68

³⁵³ Appendix I, p. 72

³⁵⁴ Appendix I, p. 74, p. 71

³⁵⁵ Appendix I, p. 74

censorship.³⁵⁶ Reader 2 embraced the new variety in the news market: “Honestly, I read all kinds of newspapers. (...) I think it is really interesting to read the different perspectives on topics. And just yesterday, the first daily newspapers came out. I bought Golden Fresh Land, because I remember the publisher from way back. [...] He was not allowed to publish for a long time and now he can publish his own paper”³⁵⁷.

6.5. Development of Press Freedom

Interviewees used comparisons and recounted *past experiences* (Category 5.1.) on censorship, media freedom and working conditions to illustrate the level of improvement and to identify shortcomings.

When prohibited content was previously published, two means of repercussions were described by the interviewees: In most cases, the editors were interrogated and verbally abused³⁵⁸³⁵⁹ at the Ministry of Information and forced to sign a retraction. For more severe transgressions, the paper was banned from printing for one or two weeks. Journalists were threatened with losing their positions or to going to jail for having contact with particular ethnic organisations or foreign broadcasters³⁶⁰ or for defending a certain opinion, although often these threats were not carried out. According to Sann Oo, news had to go through a four or five day revision period, after which some thirty percent of content was rejected by the censors and the remaining news was therefore already quite outdated when finally released.³⁶¹

In dealing with past restrictions on reporting, the media has shown creativity and humour to overcome censorship. Ahr Man from 7Days News described an unresolved murder case in Yangon from 2008 that sparked huge public interest. A wealthy family was gunned down at their home in Yangon with bullets made exclusively for the defense ministry, but for unknown reasons the police was not able to investigate the murders.³⁶²

356 Appendix I, p. 66

357 Appendix I, p. 62

358 Appendix I, p. 48

359 Appendix I, p. 34

360 Appendix I, p. 40

361 Appendix I, p. 35

362 Five years later, the case is still being tried.

For the lack of official statements, 7Day News sent a reporter to the funeral and wrote a feature, in which they quoted the police chief giving his prayer at the temple. They managed to slip some important information about the case into the story using the text of the quote: “He said '[...] please just help me arrest the murderer”³⁶³ thus illustrating the ineffectiveness of the police administration. The journal was sighted by the censor for the breach and subsequently banned for the following week. When Aung San Suu Kyi was released, Wai Phyoe's Eleven Sports Journal hid the message “Suu Free” in their headlines by highlighting several letters³⁶⁴ and was subsequently banned for two weeks.

The rules and scope of state censorship were described by the journalists as arbitrary³⁶⁵, nontransparent and often comical.³⁶⁶ Ko Ko recalled a time when one of her articles was banned for the use of the word “dirt road”³⁶⁷ to describe a country road. Ahr Man told of when he had to cut an interview on pop music from his paper, because a performer expressed their opinion in the article. War reporter Aye Mya Kyaw described immense frustration in having most of her work cut out by the censor.³⁶⁸

When the government gradually began to cease with censorship, it shifted content responsibility onto the media for which they could be held accountable. Aye Mya Kyaw recalled negotiations and deals with the censorship board on the size of allowed images of Aung San Suu Kyi shortly before the lift of restrictions.³⁶⁹ Ahr Man described a “responsible editor” mark when the paper came back from the censor office instead of crossing out the whole piece, describing a seemingly paradoxical situation: “If we publish something and (...) they get angry and complain, then we [the editor involved] are responsible for everything. It's kind of funny because all of the news is our responsibility of course. So essentially, it means be careful - you could be sued”³⁷⁰.

Most readers who described the level of media freedom in the past referred to not having been able to get information about Aung San Suu Kyi or ethnic diversity within the country in the press. Information on big international issues was only available

363 Appendix I, p. 25

364 Appendix I, p. 48

365 Appendix I, p. 36

366 Appendix I, p. 22

367 Appendix I, p. 55

368 Appendix I, p. 36

369 Appendix I, p. 36

370 Appendix I, p. 22

though foreign or exile media or interpersonal communication. Local news and its information value was described as poor, propagandistic, boring and alike in content. Zin Phyu described the general level of mistrust among citizens: “If I go back six years or so, people would still only talk silently. They whispered because they were not sure who is listening”³⁷¹.

In talking about *Present perceptions about press freedom (Category 5.2.)*, interviewees from both media and readers generally saw the country on the road to democracy and media freedom and attested to the government's progress, improvements and commitment to reform, although Nilar thought “that the government still thinks we are all little kids, naïve [...]”³⁷².

Ahr Man also attested a change in dynamics within parts of the army: “I think the higher levels in the military have already talked about this and they have decided that the truth is the best policy. Now we just have to be careful of the lower levels.”³⁷³ The media representatives described themselves as being in a phase of gradually testing freedoms³⁷⁴, sometimes waiting for other journals to publish before following up with their own information³⁷⁵. Wai Phyo referred to Thailand's *lèse-majesté* when he explained the need to adapt general universal ideas of freedom of the press to a country's peculiar sensibilities: “[...] every country has its own identity, background, history, differences. So it might be adapted. I would say, when you are in Myanmar as a journalist, you have to adapt to certain sensibilities. (...) look at Thailand - their press is considered much more free than ours, and I think that is true. But try to say something against the majesty in Thailand and you go to jail... that's what I mean by sensibility. With Myanmar, we have the problem with ethnic groups”³⁷⁶.

No interviewee from both sample groups perceived the press as currently entirely free and perception on the degree of press freedom varied widely between almost free, “trying out what's like to be in control”³⁷⁷ and only “30 percent free”³⁷⁸. Reader Myo

371 Appendix I, p. 69

372 Appendix I, p. 11

373 Appendix I, p. 24

374 Appendix I, p. 47

375 Appendix I, p. 2

376 Appendix I, p. 52

377 Appendix I, p. 8

378 Appendix I, p. 65

Thu, who still identified some “taboo topics” explained a personal means of verification for the current development in media freedom: “I think for most Burmese, Aung San Suu Kyi is kind of a test. If she is free, if her speeches are in the paper, then something must be going okay. Now on this last issue that I bought, the NLD party conference was the main topic on the front cover. So that is giving us confidence. The problem is, we are still careful who to trust. We Burmese hope that the freedom will last, but it has been very different for so long”³⁷⁹.

Three tendencies among the reader's perspectives about current media freedom can be identified. Firstly, most readers described the content of political news as more discursive than before: “It feels more like ideas are being discussed instead of just announced”³⁸⁰. Secondly, they felt the scope of topics has changed and expanded³⁸¹ to include formerly prohibited areas such as environmental issues, opposition parties³⁸², protests and minority ethnic groups. In connection to this, the readers also noticed and appreciated that a larger spectrum of voices³⁸³ in society were being heard. Thirdly, the readers felt more engaged and interested in what was happening, closely following up on political developments and stories that affected them and comparing various reports on a topic.

In Category 5.3, interviewees shared their perceptions about the *future of media development and press freedom* in the country. Interview partners believed that the government would learn how to interact with the media and hoped to experience further improvements. In turn, readers hoped for the journalists to professionalize and wished for the new current freedoms to last. Two readers expected the elections in 2015 to be accompanied by newspaper coverage, while Reader 2 hoped that the media would one day help to “bring justice to everyone³⁸⁴” by uncovering corruption. Sann Oo wished that “one day, our reporting will even have influence on the government's decision”³⁸⁵.

Both 7Day News' and Myanmar Times' heads of news were optimistic about the future.

379 Appendix I, p. 74 f.

380 Appendix I, p. 74

381 Appendix I, p. 69

382 Appendix I, p. 65

383 Appendix I, p. 62

384 Appendix I, p. 60

385 Appendix I, p. 8

They explained how they were preparing to increase staff numbers in remote regions³⁸⁶, were carrying out market research to “stay on top³⁸⁷” and moving towards publishing a daily paper.³⁸⁸ Nilar however worried about the economic sustainability of the fast-growing daily newspapers market: “There are so many journals that have applied to publish a daily paper, I can't really believe that they will all manage to stay. Because it is expensive to print a paper every day, and you also have to sell it, right? So then maybe they fight for readers by trying to surprise them. I think maybe it will be like in Thailand, you have newspapers and they try to sell their paper with violent pictures on the cover, to attract readers.³⁸⁹”

Ahr Man worried about possible “legal action³⁹⁰” in the future for overt criticism but perhaps more importantly, about the pace and effect of reforms and the implications towards the perceptions of democracy for the people: “But the country is still not stable. [...] I worry that the people will think that somehow democracy is not good for their daily lives. That democracy somehow doesn't work.³⁹¹”

Aye Mya Kyaw expected the further softening of rules regarding conflict reporting and said she would never have dreamed that the current developments taking place could have happened three years ago: “Now we hope we can be more professionalized, we can report very professionally, and we hope we, the media people, can find an environment where we can be more and more mature, and our reporting, too. Trying to be better - that is good for the future³⁹²”.

6.6. Media in Conflict and Reconciliation

In describing conflict reporting, the interviewees defined inter-communal, ethnic and religious violence as main areas of interest with specific challenges and limitations.

In reference to the 60 year-old Kachin conflict, journalists acknowledged that reports

386 Appendix I, p. 27

387 Appendix I, p. 17

388 Appendix I, p. 2

389 Appendix I, p. 12

390 Appendix I, p. 7

391 Appendix I, p. 31

392 Appendix I, p. 42

had just recently been made possible, as contacting the insurgents and representatives of ethnic armed groups was no longer illegal. The parties fighting against the Myanmar army were commonly described as very open, cooperative and media-savvy, even enabling embedded journalism on the front lines. In contrast it was much harder for the journalists to balance their statements with viewpoints from the Myanmar army, as they do not employ any relationship at all with the media. Wai Phyo however was cautious and saw a connection between the cyberattacks on his paper's website and e-mail accounts that took place one day after publishing pictures of airstrikes in the north of the country, an offensive that was denied by the army.

Perceived even more problematic was the reporting on inter-communal violence with a background in religious conflicts. Journalists covering the recent riots in Meiktila, in which 40 people of mostly Muslim faith died, were harassed and had their lives threatened by angry mobs. The journalists were forced to hide in private homes of residents for their own safety after their cameras and memory cards were destroyed, making the identification of the attackers impossible. The attacks specifically targeted journalists to prevent coverage, as Aye Mya Kyaw reports:

“Then the locals tried to break all the cameras because they thought they would upload all the pictures they took to the internet and that everybody could know what was happening on the ground”³⁹³. All three heads of news attested to the lack of law enforcement by security forces³⁹⁴³⁹⁵ and no subsequent political action by the administration: “Some feel that political parties and government officers that are handling the situation are not doing anything about it. But we don't have any evidence to go on of course”³⁹⁶.

Three problems related to the escalation of this conflict as defined by the journalists were poor education, hate speech towards Muslims spread by an influential monk³⁹⁷ and the easy manipulation of rumors circulating on Facebook which increased hostility: “Just find a picture, blame the Muslims and everybody goes crazy”³⁹⁸.

393 Appendix I, p. 41

394 Appendix I, p. 49

395 Appendix I, p. 4

396 Appendix I, p. 21

397 Appendix I, p. 13

398 Appendix I, p. 14

Subsequently, the journalists interviewed locals and officials in the Rakhine district but said they tried to minimize the conflict potential of their reports. Apart from self-censorship as a means of deescalation, Ahr Man described the angle his paper took in reporting: “Here (indicating to another article) is a story about Buddhist woman whose life was saved by some Muslim people. [...] We approached it from a humanitarian angle. It worries people, these religious conflicts. We are all Burmese. It is a kind of peace journalism. (...) We don't want to make it appear as if religion is a problem. It is just a fight, just crime. Some people are just trying to make more out of it”³⁹⁹.

6.7. Self-Reflection on the Research Process

The research process carried out in Myanmar in March and April 2013 coincided with three events that should be mentioned here because they might have affected the results: The first legal nationwide party convention of the National League of Democracy, the first appearance of private daily newspapers in over 60 years, and intercommunal clashes in Meiktila, leading to week-long curfews and violence against Muslims in the city center of Yangon. This was inarguably a time of great changes for all Myanmar citizens, for the better or for the worse. When analyzing the Myanmar media, one neglected factor seems especially pivotal to the researcher: Throughout Yangon, DVDs and brochures with hate speech defaming Muslims, channeled through an influential and formerly persecuted monk were copied and disseminated abundantly. The entirely unregulated media that the radical group 969 was able to distribute can slip through research instruments mapping the freedom of news media but can nevertheless influence public opinion.

In conducting the interviews, social desirability may have played a role in the journalist's answers, when interviewees felt they could rally for their cause and present themselves and their editorial practices in a desirable way. This is also a factor that should be taken into consideration when interviewing citizens on the street.

One of the limitations of the research process that should be acknowledged is a possible

³⁹⁹ Appendix I, p. 17

language barrier. Interviewees conducting the interviews in English may have had sometimes trouble articulating in a different language than in their mother tongue and this could have been helped if a permanent professional translator would have been on site. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to financial restrictions, but as a way out, it was offered to the interview partners beforehand.

As already stated in Chapter 1, the content of the actual media text was unknown to the author. A multidimensional approach combining content analysis of news text, interviews with journalists and audience research would deliver a much more detailed and confirmable picture of the scope and tone of reported topics and the angles taken on especially in conflict reporting. This should also include the communication processes between readers and journalists on Facebook since the interviewees addressed this channel as their main platform for feedback and discussion.

Lastly, the amount of text to analyze turned out to be quite overwhelming since the length of answers differed widely.

As a final remark, the problem of generalizing findings to similar situations should be addressed. The findings may show some limitations in scope due to the small sample size and cannot be extrapolated to be applicable for all Myanmar journalists and readers, since coverage in rural areas could not be taken into consideration.

7. Conclusions

As stated in Chapter 1, this study aimed to examine the current state of freedom of the press in Myanmar one year after the censorship lift as perceived by local weekly newspaper journalists and readers of these papers.

In conclusion, some correlations for the sample as a whole can be drawn. Political journals do carry news and information to provide a channel of information and act as a facilitator for democratic debate, although the scope of reports as defined by journalists and readers does not reflect all pressing issues. Furthermore, the research has shown that the media could reflect the political spectrum sufficiently but according to readers, the societal diversity was only partially reflected.

Journalists have confirmed that they could access members of society that the readers could not access through the media before, debating ideas and different viewpoints. Thus, it can be concluded that the media can partially fulfill its function as a platform for democratic discourse.

“How did I fulfill that aim in chapter 1? How can I address the Rqs?”

Correlations between Journalists and Readers

Implications towards the Research Questions

The first research question this study aimed to answer is “Where are the limits of press freedom for the media in Myanmar?”

The results have shown that after analyzing the answers journalists have given and mirroring them with the reader's answers along a combined framework of UNESCO Media Development Indicators and two additional categories examining the development of media freedom and the role of media in conflict, there are five main areas to be identified in which the media has limitations that run counterproductive to the free flow of information:

Firstly, the press can not be free in fulfilling its democratic potential without a proper legal framework in place surrounding and safeguarding this right. The lack of

comprehensive press regulation in Myanmar, the corruption of the courts and vague or not narrowly enough defined defamation and libel laws lead to a climate of self-censorship that fails to expose power abuse in many regards as defined by the readers's expectations and the journalists themselves.

Secondly, since freedom of expression is a twofold right, the right to information is not guaranteed and respected in practice. The government is abusing its power to deny journalists access to critical information needed for their daily news reporting. The effects of this lack of evidence for the development of media are threefold: Firstly, it hinders the journalists to ensure professional standards of balance and fairness, on the other hand it strips them from a manifest defense against possible unwarranted legal restrictions and lawsuits. Thirdly, it reduces critical and investigative reporting as expected by the readers and required for media's function as a corrective to the “natural assymetry of information” and to enable the citizens to make informed decisions.

All these three effects curb the watchdog function of media towards government that can enhance transparency and public scrutiny and impact the function media can play in creating a platform for democratic discourse.

In conclusion, a shift of governmental pressure mechanisms diverting from pre-publication state censorship towards more subtle forms of repressions like cyberattacks or the drafting of a repressive publishing law can be observed.

Thirdly, the physical safety of journalists in conflict reporting can not be guaranteed even by security forces on site, raising questions on the degree of commitment to reform and democratize in regional representation.

A fourth limit are sensibilities in terms of religion. Journalists practice self-censorship, divert from the topic to escalate conflict but also start professionalizing by practicing responsible editing without interference from the government to take care of heightnend sensibilities in a country in transition.

The fifth limit this study has shown lies in the proper representation of marginalized voices dues to problems of distribution.

However, the study has shown major improvements since the lift of censorship in most aspects of media freedom as confirmed by journalists and readers. The main conclusions towards the positive development of media freedom are unrestricted access to insurgents, protesters, opposition parties and all online media, the protection of sources, the formation of journalist's associations and the absence of censorship. If the media can keep up internal discussion on editorial practices discussed in the newsroom and in strengthened bodies made up by media professionals themselves including marginalized voices, they are on the best way to responsible self-regulation.

The second research question to answer is “What do the readers expect from political news coverage in Myanmar?”

The results have shown that readers demand a thorough coverage on political issues that the government needs to address in the future. They expect political news to be critical, honest, unbiased and reflective of the diversity in society.

Futhermore, they expect the press to be a mediator in the dialogue between decision-makers and citizens for their demands towards the government and to address sensitive issues such as corruption that affects their daily lives.

If the media fail to deliver this due to policy restrictions and legal insecurity leading to self-censorship they will most likely lose the trust that they can gain with the readers now that they are free from formal censorship.

Therefore, the lack of state censorship does not equal freedom of the press in Myanmar. In order for the media to take full advantage of its democratic potential and enhance development, accountability and transparence, cooperation between government and media is needed. Both institutions have to gain back confidence with each other and the public and can only do so if professional structures for journalism are strengthened. This means the implementation of capacity building measures, an overhaul of the education system, strong journalistic institutions and, most of all, government transparency in all areas where the right to information is impaired as shown in the study.

Research Recommendations

The results have shown that the media has not given up during the times of censorship, but instead found creative, brave and unusual ways to get their messages across. Even in conflict situations, they tried to approach stories from a humanitarian perspective to uphold ethical standards and professionalism. This time is crucial to let the media practice their profession before they resort to self-censorship for a lack of laws and regulations.

The behaviour of the government is characterized by mistrust towards the media, hampering their daily work and their – and the public's – right to information. The government should employ a more open policy towards the journalists to ensure their own accountability as the country tackles important reforms and to strengthen democratic practices in the relationship between a pluralist media, a diverse audience and the country's administration.

It is therefore recommended to assess the entire media environment according to the indicators of the UNESCO Media Development Index as soon as possible to identify shortcomings and challenges thoroughly. In conclusion, a qualitative analysis with the UNESCO framework for media development indicators as a help in means of verification proved to be a valuable and adaptable toolkit for the study. However, without proper categorization it fails to examine thoroughly the dynamics of the role of media in current conflicts in Myanmar and their implications for the public opinion of citizens.

The changes in rural media use after the lift of censorship in Myanmar are an unexplored field worthy of examination. Especially crucial, from the author's point of view, is an examination on how best to make the voices of marginalized groups heard and how to ensure their access to media.

Media assistance and international organizations should provide help in capacity building, especially training opportunities for conflict reporting and investigative

journalism and provide legal and technical aid where necessary. The local journalism associations should be strengthened to provide an effective system of self-regulation. Most importantly, they should embrace inner plurality to reflect the diverse social makeup that makes Myanmar,.

New ideas and concepts in online news gathering and mobile journalism could help to bridge the information vacuum in areas with poor infrastructure in rural areas, where newspaper circulation is still patchy.

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Appendix I - Interview Transcripts

Interview Order Journalists:

JMT1 Myanmar Times (Head of News Myanmar Times, San OO)

JMT2 Myanmar Times (Reporter News Myanmar Times, Naw say Phaa Waa (Nilar))

J7D3 7Day News (Head of News 7Day News, Ahr Man)

J7D2 7Day News (Reporter 7Day News, Aye Mya Kyaw)

JWE1 Weekly Eleven (Head of News Weekly Eleven, Wai Phyo)

JWE2 Weekly Eleven (Reporter Weekly Eleven, Ko Ko)

Readers accordingly:

RMT1

RMT2

R7D1

R7D2

RWE1

RWE2

JMT1

Sann Oo, Deputy Head of news at Myanmar Times,

Male, 38 years.

Interviewer: I would like to ask you about the structure of the Myanmar Times.

Sann Oo: I am the Deputy Editor of the Burmese edition. We have two editions in Burmese and English and we plan on having a daily edition in English first. That would be the first private daily in English. Then, later, we plan to also publish a daily paper in Burmese.

Interviewer: What is your job?

Sann Oo: My main job is to edit stories and then to do layout pages. Then I coordinate with our chief reporters, assign them different news stories and give them ideas. Then I coordinate with the English edition too.

Interviewer: How different is the Burmese from the English edition?

Sann Oo: About 75% of the content is the same. Another 25% percent is different because we have a different readership, so it depends on our readers. The English edition is mostly read by experts, foreigners and Burmese educated people. The Burmese edition is mostly read by the Burmese middle class, so they have different interests.

Interviewer: What has changed in Myanmar in recent years?

Sann Oo: So you wanna know about the changes? Well, the thing that I found most striking and that we previously never reported on was on the insurgents of the Kachin state. Actually, it is a war. And now we can read a lot about it. It is like somebody is testing how far to go is okay, and then the other journals, us included, will follow up with information we already had but never really were able to use.

Interviewer: Could you describe your readership a little bit more?

Sann Oo: We can say it is the upper middle class. Some are government officials and according to our marketing department, most government officials have subscribed to our newspapers, so it is one of the leading papers among officials and politicians.

Interviewer: What does your financial model look like?

Sann Oo: We have some foreign investment in our ownership. The owner is Australian, and the other is a local partner.

Interviewer: If you put the Myanmar Times into a scope of political interests, where would you put it?

Sann Oo: We try to stay neutral. This is what everybody says, but if you look at the content, you can really see that we are trying to stay as balanced as possible.

Interviewer: How many people work in the company?

Sann Oo: We have about 300 staff in English and Burmese.

Interviewer: And how many of them are freelancers?

Sann Oo: We don't have any, we have some contributors as guest writers but not for the news.

Interviewer: When you think of the job you're doing, what are the main challenges you have?

Sann Oo: The main challenge is that most of the journalists are female, so if we want to send a reporter to the Kachin conflict, we have a problem. We don't want to assign our girls to dangerous area. So we have to be really careful. We try to get around the problem by sending two or sometimes three people to these areas. We try to recruit more male reporters, so far there are only three male reporters out of twenty reporters. But when we send out applications, all we get is answers from girls.

Interviewer: When you say you have to cover dangerous areas, how do you do that?

Sann Oo: We usually try to go in a group of all the local journalists of all the media, we gather a group and then everybody goes together to conflict areas. That is the best way to be safe. But the news outlets are not the same. The problem is that everybody sees the same. So we have to be clever! I don't know how for sure how the others do

it. But we have our own style, we have to be strong in sources, we have to interview at least two government officials and have three sources for each story. So I think our news reporting is a little bit different from the other journals.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about the style of your news reporting, how it is different from other journals?

Sann Oo: We have to have confirmed statements, at least two sources and we have to confirm every piece of information we put in. And we also have our own writing style

Interviewer: How exactly does your writing style differ?

Sann Oo: I don't know how to say, but some people tell me that our writing style is pretty boring. That means, we are not as juicy, everything is very factual and sober.

Interviewer: You mentioned you have to have three sources and also have to interview at least one government official. Now what happens when these officials do not want to give you information?

Sann Oo: We try as much as we can. If they don't want to answer us, we just write it as a portrayal. Or we try to contact them and if they refuse to answer, we put it in the paper. So people read it and then people will make up their own mind. No answer is often also an answer.

Interviewer: How do you do investigative reporting?

Sann Oo: To be frank, we don't do much of it. This is because of the difficulty to get information and because our journalists do not have the training for it yet. There is too much to cover as it is. So it is safer for all sides not to go into these areas (investigative reporting).

Interviewer: How did you, for example, report on the violence in Meiktila?

Sann Oo: At that time, we sent one of our reporters there who works for the Mandalay office. He went there, took some photos and talked to the locals as much as he could. Then he had some interviews with witnesses and officials and then, he wrote the story. Of course he also talked to the muslims. They said: These mobs attacked us and the security staff just stood there, they didn't help us.

Interviewer: And what did the officials reply?

Sann Oo: Of course, they said: "We are doing our best to protect all the people here, blah blah..." But what can you do? But on the second day, one of our reporters had to hide his camera at one of his friend's home, because the people also attacked other journalists, just everyone with a camera. There were some journalists of 7Day News, they had their equipment smashed and were really in danger. So our reporter had to walk away for a while, went down the road, changed his jacket and went back without equipment.

Interviewer: Who could be behind such attacks?

Sann Oo: I am not so sure. You should ask the journalists on the field, it could have been military in civilian clothes or not. It is hard to tell when someone is just violent.

Interviewer: Where are the limits now in reporting from government side?

Sann Oo: Right now, the only limit is to get accurate information. There are days when we can't even write the news properly, because we have to say: the government didn't comment on this, the official was not available for a statement, we are not sure because no one gives us an interview or anything we need for the story. So they deny us information.

Interviewer: How much can you rely on sources in the government who sometimes give you information but then don't want to be quoted?

Sann Oo: Yes, we know that. There are only a few. Very few.

Interviewer: How was it previously, when you wrote a story and it wasn't approved? Were you ever banned or was the newspaper ever forbidden to publish for one week?

Sann Oo: No, never, the censorship board just rejected our story. That happened so often, every week. About thirty percent of our stories were rejected.

Interviewer: Can you describe to me what happened in the first few weeks after the censorship was lifted?

Sann Oo: We were quite nervous. And we didn't know what to do - should we run a story or not? There was a lot of confusion. In the past, when the censor's board rejected the stories, we didn't have to think anymore. Now we have to take responsibility as well. After the transition we didn't know what would happen if we ran a story. For example, with a story that would have been surely rejected, we didn't know what consequences we would have to face. We really didn't know what would happen, so we were all nervous.

Interviewer: And how did you deal with it?

Sann Oo: Well, we tried to be more and more open. We did it step by step to test the waters. The first thing we did was about the censorship being lifted, we ran a big story. I think it has become much easier to be a journalist.

Interviewer: What is still missing for media freedom?

Sann Oo: I think what is missing is a proper law that we can all rely on. And also, proper institutions.

Interviewer: Have your journalists ever been called by someone in the government to not put a story in the paper?

Sann Oo: No, not really. I think there were some calls about accuracy, when someone wasn't happy with the story. But not really. It was more of a discussion.

Interviewer: How is the cooperation with the ministry of information?

Sann Oo: We work together well. The dynamic is changing, previously the censorship board would come back to us and didn't allow the story, but that has not happened in the last year.

Interviewer: How do you feel about self-regulation?

Sann Oo: We do that sometimes, in special occasions.

Interviewer: Can you give me some examples?

Sann Oo: Well, especially for such kind of violent conflicts like the one between Muslims and Buddhists, we try not to put the blame onto a certain group. We try to be neutral, so we have to sometimes cut off a quote or withhold information. But this is actually not censorship, it is editing.

Interviewer: What would be the implications for you if you criticized someone from the government or the military?

Sann Oo: So far, we haven't had any problems yet. But I think it could be a problem in the future if we are not careful enough. Then there could be some legal action.

Interviewer: How safe do you think your journalists are in their profession?

Sann Oo: Luckily, none of our journalists were ever jailed. But before the lift, there were a lot of threats, like: You will lose your position if you ever write that again or if you publish this opinion.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about your ethics when it comes to having to write one-sided stories and the other side does not want to comment?

Sann Oo: Yes, take for example the Kachin conflict. It is relatively easy to talk to the KIA, because they know how to get publicity. But it is much harder to talk to the Myanmar Army. If we only get a quote from the KIA and it is good for the story, we put it in. But of course we try to put in the government or Army side. So when we don't get anything after asking, we sometimes look for announcements or published documents to put in there. That's how we can tie the story together and aim for some balance.

Interviewer: And how free would you say is the media in Myanmar now?

Sann Oo: I think it is 90% free. We are free to write but can not get to the information.

Interviewer: Would you say that Freedom of the Press is a universal thing or should there be some adaptations?

Sann Oo: I think it is a universal thing.

Interviewer: How would you define Freedom of the Press?

Sann Oo: I don't know how to say that. But I think the media should be allowed to write anything. There should be no limits, but the media has to take responsibility. A responsible media should not attack people and abuse their power. It should be for the good of all the people. You know, some people say the government censored the media because they were afraid of its power. But I feel sometimes that we are just getting started in trying to get influence on the government, now that there is no more censorship. In the past we couldn't do much, the government just took control. But we are free now and we are trying out what it is like to be in control. And one day, our reporting will even have influence on the government's decision.

Interviewer: Thanks so much for your time!

JMT2

Naw Say Pha Waa (Nilar) - Reporter at Myanmar Times -

Female, 29 years

Interviewer: How did you get into journalism?

Nilar: I always liked to write and my English was pretty good, because I studied in Bangkok and that was an international course. I did a literature and media study course there. During that time, I went on an internship in Kuala Lumpur for a newspaper. And there, I met my husband, he was working for the Myanmar Times doing graphics and layout. So after finishing my studies, I went back to Yangon and applied for a job there. I have been here for about six years now. But actually, I found it was always a really boring job, it gets a little more interesting now. But before, I always felt so... I don't know. Maybe indifferent. About my writing and all. It is hard to describe this feeling, but I always thought „I would rather like to be a teacher“, you know?

Interviewer: Maybe you could tell me more about why you wanted to be a teacher to get to the core of this feeling...

Nilar: It is just more useful. For the kids and so on. When I know something because I have read it somewhere, then I can pass it on, teach them something they can use or make them think about other people. Since I have worked here, I have felt annoyed, because I knew about the writing style they expected from me.

Interviewer: Did this feeling change now?

Nilar: Yeah, it's okay now because I don't get cut all of the time. But I don't like the deadlines. Sometimes I still think I would like to teach, because I work really long hours and the pay is not great at all. I am also thinking about applying for a grant. There are some grant programs in the US that I found on the internet. Maybe I will do this.

Interviewer: What do you think are the challenges for a journalist these days in Myanmar?

Nilar: Well, first of all, not so many of us are really trained. And even if we want to be trained, there is no option but to take leave and that would be unpaid. My only journalism training was in Thailand, but unfortunately, it was only short-term. Four

weeks. At that time, the media was still not free. There were so many restrictions on us, on travel, literature, everything. So when I left the country, I had to put a lot of holiday stuff in my bag, like swimsuits to pretend I am going to the beach. And when I came back, the trainer gave me some books, so I ripped the cover off where it says journalism or media or something and put the cover from another magazine on it. So they wouldn't see at the border control what I was doing. Sometimes they checked everything you bring into the country, all media. Especially English stuff, but fortunately, most border officials can only speak Burmese or little English. But when something is in English, they already ask you: What is this? What did you bring in here? I had to discuss, it was really like... I don't know. Sometimes they got angry.

Interviewer: What happened when they got angry?

Nilar: Not so much, but you just have to explain everything and lie. You are guilty and you feel bad. In the end you just make something up.

Interviewer: And how has that changed?

Nilar: I haven't really travelled that much with books again. That was just the one time. But when I visited some friends in Thailand and in Cambodia last year it was okay.

Interviewer: How does the government affect your work now?

Nilar: They're still interfering, there are calls every week. It is not like before, where a story would just disappear. But the MOI still calls.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example?

Nilar: Just last week there was an incident with a story that I covered. It was about a press conference that the Ministry of Information was giving. They were opening up a little public library - well, it is more like a library corner with some books. You can rent the books. Then they gave a press conference and one of the officials said: "Blah blah blah, because not being educated is like being blind". Someone in the audience asked: "Does that mean you allow us to see from now on?" and everybody laughed. It is funnier in Burmese. He made a joke. I put both of these quotes into my story. The next day, we get a very angry call from an official from the Ministry: "I did not say that, you cannot put that into the story!" Actually, I didn't even talk to him, but my editor did. Then they agreed to take it off the Burmese edition, but keep it in the English one. I think that is bullshit. But it happens. And even the reporter who made the joke did not put the quote in. He was afraid.

Interviewer: Why was it taken off the Burmese edition?

Nilar: Because we have a very different readership in the Burmese paper. They are businessmen and middle class people from Yangon. Sometimes they are also from Mandalay or Naypyidaw. But the English paper is actually mostly for foreigners, NGO people and experts.

And have you ever heard about the 16 guidelines? That was like a manual for self-censorship. The government sent them around to all private media when the censorship was lifted. For example, number two was "Do not comment on the government in a negative way". Some of them are also really funny, like "Don't write vampire stories". It sounds like a joke, but it isn't. Then they claimed that these were just suggestions, like a code of conduct. But some of my colleagues and me too, we were unsure what to think of it. You know, we didn't know what would happen when we just disobeyed it. But then we tried and it was okay. But you can still see from these guidelines that the government still thinks we are all little kids, naive or something like that.

Interviewer: Do these censors still show up somehow? I mean, there were so many people busy with censoring news media every day, I wonder what they are up to now?

Nilar: Yeah, right? I sometimes work as a stringer for foreign media and I know many foreigners working in NGOs around here in Yangon. So sometimes, I am invited to their houses or have to fix interviews. They live very far away from the center close to Inya Lake, where the Lady lives. And just lately I have been noticing that the taxi drivers in central Yangon know exactly where to go when I tell them the addresses. That is not really common, it is very complicated to find these little alleys. So my friends and I really think, also from the way they speak, that a lot of staff from the secret service who were fired now work as taxi drivers!

Interviewer: You said before the reporter was afraid. What was he afraid of?

Nilar: When you put something into the paper, you are still responsible for it. They can sue you for defamation, and then it's up to you to prove you have proof of something being said. It is very difficult. There are many ways. I think journalists sometimes still think: OK, why should I get into trouble. Just keep the peace, It's easier.

Interviewer: How will that change?

Nilar: Maybe if we know everything is really okay to write. We have to be slow and try and try. Also we need laws, every time a journalist has gone to court he is the loser. It is because the government are more powerful. They can also pay the better lawyers and maybe pay the court. The court people are also afraid and will not decide against them. But we are more confident now. I am not afraid. If it is not a big case nothing will happen. I'm sure.

Interviewer: How do the media work with each other?

Nilar: I think in Myanmar, we are kind of a special case. In Thailand for example, you have a lot of freedom and also a lot of competition in the media. They fight a lot about who can get the story first or the best pictures. But here, it is more like we are a group, a family. We support each other because we all remember how difficult it was when we couldn't write anything.

Interviewer: Do you think this will change?

Nilar: I don't know. Maybe it will happen just like in Thailand in two or three years time, when we are still free. There are so many journals that have applied to publish a daily paper, I can't really believe that they will all manage to stay. Because it is expensive to print a paper every day, and you also have to sell it, right? So then maybe they fight for readers by trying to surprise them. I think maybe it will be like in Thailand, you have newspapers and they try to sell their paper with violent pictures on the cover, to attract readers. But I don't really like it. I think it is more important to have unity. You see, a lot of people in Myanmar have a very poor education. You can manipulate them so easily. That is dangerous.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example for that?

Nilar: There are so many examples. Just yesterday when the Muslim boys burned in their sleep in the school. They died, there was a fire. Did you hear about that?

Interviewer: Yes, of course, it was just around the corner from here.

Nilar: Yeah. And people are so stupid about it, they blame everything on the Muslims nowadays. Now it is really hard to say what caused the fire, and the official statement is that there was a short circuit and a fan cable burned. But you know... what if not? You cannot investigate, there is police and they don't let you in. I think it is really hard. But some people, you know, they know this was just two days after the violence around Mahabandoola (Mahabandoola road, where Buddhist mobs smashed shop windows

and threatened mosques and muslim neighbors with torches at night, DATE, the author). So maybe it is better for the families and everyone to not cause more violence with reporting. And we cannot prove anything else anyway. People should just become more educated to not act so stupid and to listen to everything what 969 (the fascist 969 movement and its head Monk Wirathu, the author) says. I mean, we have been neighbors for so long here in Yangon and suddenly all the Muslims are a threat to the country? Come on!

Interviewer: Do you think journalism plays a role in that?

Nilar: Of course, we should also be like educators. I don't mean like teachers, but you have to find a balance. Sometimes the balance is hard to find between something that people should know and also to take care of sensibilities. We are still at war with some ethnic minorities. And when you put everything in the paper, then it might anger some people and cause more violence. So sometimes, we have to leave something out, like self-censorship, when we think it causes more violence. Not lying, but be careful with what quotes you publish for example. And always hear both sides, that is really important. Especially in reports about violence. For example, I did not report every word that Wirathu used. He called the Muslims really bad names, dogs and so on. My friends are Muslims too, and I know they will be hurt.

Interviewer: What happens if you can't hear both sides, because one will not talk to you?

Nilar: Your story just gets boring. That is how we have to write most of our stories. Only Ye Htut, he is the president's spokesperson, answers sometimes. But often you cannot get anything or just what is in the government papers like "New Light of Myanmar".

Interviewer: Do you see how this will ever change?

Nilar: I think they should just let the media do their business. We are all responsible people, we are actually more responsible than other media in the region. We know where to stop, you know? I think that media can decide on content but the government should be a little cooperative with us and not use their power and close up. This is really important because I think when we don't get information from them, we only write about celebrities. But we are news, you know? How can we do our job when they don't talk to us?

Interviewer: What do you mean by „we know when to stop“?

Nilar: We are careful to not be biased. I think all the media should be like that.

Interviewer: But they aren't?

Nilar: Not everyone. Sometimes they write really stupid things or just let one side speak, like Wirathu. They say we are all Buddhists. I am Buddhist but we have also Christians and Muslims here. Like I say, all of my friends are Muslim. They don't show enough respect and that makes people react and talk about Muslims in a very bad way. Now, I think because most people are not educated, they believe that they are dangerous to us. But it is just because everybody says that. One of the biggest problems in Myanmar is rumours. Somebody says something and everybody believes it. It is very much dependent on who this person is. Everybody thinks: Oh, he is a monk, he must be right. But that is not Buddhism. Everybody should be ethical and kind. But it's hard. This is Myanmar, people believe what the monks say and what their neighbors say. It's sad. It also happens on Facebook a lot. Now not many people see that, but for example, a newspaper put a picture on Facebook of a monk, he was burning. And next to it, they said it was in Arakan state, so everybody reading it was very angry. They called for revenge. But the picture was from another country, from Nepal. I think it was a protest. Not somebody else who was violent. You know? Then you always have to comment and say, no, this is not the truth. But how can people tell? Sometimes, in internet cafés, they are also very young. They just believe everything. You can manipulate rumours on Facebook really easily. Just find a picture, blame the Muslims and everybody goes crazy.

Interviewer: How can the press play a role in changing the situation?

Nilar: They have to be open and very clear. Just look at all the sides. Be balanced. Let all people speak and don't ignore people. Like in Thailand, everything is very... there is much opinion in interviews and people can have any opinion. But they are more advanced than we are. On the other hand, you can also make them very angry when you criticize the king. It is illegal. So you don't do it. Here, it also gets emotional very quickly. Our people have to learn, step by step. Everybody has to learn. I think we are also not critical enough. It is more like: Ok, we won't do anything and wait for people not to be so angry anymore. But I think we have to help people to understand life.

Interviewer: Thanks a lot for your time!

J7D3

Ahr Man, Head Of News at 7Days News

Male, 37 years.

Interviewer: How long have you been with this paper?

Ahr Man: Since March 7th, 2002, so eleven years and a month. I started to write in October 2002, so I have been around for almost as long as the paper exists.

Interviewer: How did you get into journalism?

Ahr Man: I come from the countryside, from Maungbobaw. When I arrived in Yangon I started working as a marketing distributor, but the boss then asked me whether I could also report. All I knew about journalists then was that they carry out interviews with famous people and are sometimes very famous themselves.

But my hobby was reading and writing and then I learned by doing. My editor taught me very closely, he trained me very well to be a good journalist.

Interviewer: There have been so many changes since you started, right?

Ahr Man: Yes, when we started we had 500 copies daily. 300 were actually sold – the readers didn't buy our journal. We think our circulation was about 2000 in the beginning.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little about how your news room is different now, in light of all the changes? Since censorship was abolished?

Ahr Man: Since Last year, August 2012, we have been able to write anything we want. At the beginning, we faced two very big challenges: The first was to educate reporters and journalists. You have journalism schools in other countries, journalism colleges and so on - we don't. The one institution for journalism education we have isn't any good. The tutors and professors all work for the government newspaper and they can only write boring propaganda.

When we started our office, the other journalists mostly didn't have experience, but we did, so we started out giving them training. At first we gave them short term training periods of one or two months. After that, we gave them assignments and the senior reporters helped them. We taught each other. Before the abolishment of censorship, the government controlled our space. We couldn't write everything that we wanted. So when we got a lot more freedom, it came with a lot more responsibility too. We didn't have clear ideas on how to write in a sensible and responsible way. So I would say the first challenge has been journalistic education and the lack of knowing the right way of doing things.

The second challenge has been dealing with the government officers. Most of them have not changed their mindsets. They are the same people. Very few people actually help journalists and give out information that reporters actually need. Most of the officers in the government don't even give out information. We only get the information if it is permitted. It's a huge challenge for us.

Interviewer: How do you gather information then?

Ahr Man: Well, when everybody says: "Well, I won't give you anything", what can you do? Most of our information comes from our sources in the system. That means they are not government officials but they are close to them. They are from civil society or businessmen, or even from business organizations. They are private - not governmental associations. Most of our sources are private business organizations. This way we can get a little closer.

Interviewer: But doesn't that mean you can do great reports on private organizations, when they are involved, but for reports on the government you have to stick with what they give you? If it is nothing but propaganda, what is your strategy?

Ahr Man: You are right. That's very difficult to handle, but we treat each news article according to our belief that stories should be balanced and fair, so we try to get information from both sides. If a government officer is not sure if they can give us something or not, we ask them for confirmation on information we have. But sometimes we ask for a comment and they just ignore us.

I suspect that the government officials are just not used to us. The biggest challenge is that they don't trust journalists. Not only that, they are also very afraid of punishment from their officials. If their boss gets angry, they could punish him very easily. We are aware of this and we are continually trying to develop good relationships with them, in order to get what we need.

Interviewer: I see here (newspaper lying on the table) that you have been reporting on the riots in Meiktila this week. How do you cover these kinds of stories?

Ahr Man: In this story (indicating to article) this man Nagrat, is trying to protect about 40 muslims. He saved 50 people by hiding them in their monastery. Here ((indicating to another article)) is a story about Buddhist woman whose life was saved by some muslim people. It's a different angle. We approached it from a humanitarian angle. It worries people, these religious conflicts. We are all Burmese. It is a kind of peace journalism. In this case, the first point is it is a very normal case: it is very common. A shop owner and a buyer discuss about a price, and after that, they fight with each other. We don't want to make it appear as if religion is a problem. It is just a fight, just crime. Some people are just trying to make more out of it. We had a lot of feedback from our readers because we took this angle.

Interviewer: How do you get feedback from readers, do they mail you?

Ahr Man: We have a Facebook page and link most of our news and articles to it. We upload them. Sometimes reader also call our office, but mostly to complain. We started uploading our articles to Facebook two years ago. Now we have 180,000 followers.

Interviewer: Do you know how many people read your paper?

Ahr Man: According to our surveys about 150,000 people. About 2.5 million read our paper, so a copy is sold but then the buyer gives it to other people. Especially in the more remote regions, one copy is being read by about 20 people.

We need to know who our readers are, we need to know who we are writing for and who is our target group. We want to stay on top. We have done a market surveys a few times since we started. These have been carried out by our distribution team. They hand out surveys with a simple questionnaire on the street which are then filled out by the readers.

Interviewer: How can you protect your sources or anonymize them?

Ahr Man: Yes, now we can. Every citizen has the right to vote and to access documents. And we don't have to give up names.

Interviewer: Where are the limits of press freedom right now?

Ahr Man: Access to information is the biggest problem, because the mindset of government officials hasn't changed. They are the same people.

Interviewer: Can you give me a concrete example of this?

Ahr Man: Most of the ministries are like this. The police ministry, the finance ministry and even the foreign ministries don't supply information. A perfect example is our president: he came to office in March 2011, but we (journalists) couldn't interview him for over a year. It was in September 2012 that he gave his first interview for local media. It was a press conference with very limited access. We could ask just one question per publication. Unfortunately, I made the mistake of asking two questions. He did answer, but then I was asked to leave.

But 2012, in October, he stopped these press appointments and U Ye Htut became spokesperson for the President. Today he works at the Ministry of Information. Fortunately, since then, since he was appointed it has been much easier to get information.

Before his post existed, it was very hard to get information. Especially for the Kachin war. The KIA (Kachin Independent Army) on the other hand is very transparent. And they know television and newspapers. When they (the KIA) fight the government, we only ask very simple questions and we can get an answer. They answer very openly and it's very easy to get information. But unfortunately when we ask the Myanmar military, they don't answer. If we ask the government, nobody replies. That's why it's so very difficult to write a story. The KIA are very free with information, but the government and military are not. It's very hard to achieve balance and fairness in our articles.

Interviewer: Is there also a spokesperson for the military?

Ahr Man: No. We just have had a spokesperson of the president since 2012. Before him, we would just get one statement, then we would ask more – and they would just run away. But when we went to the Kachin state and interview refugees and KIA troops, we discussed everything. They are very used to giving interviews.

Interviewer: So unfortunately you can only report on one side. Do you think the government will learn from that?

Ahr Man: Yes, I think so.

Interviewer: What happens when you need information from them, too?

Ahr Man: Sometimes we would just find an old government statement and use that to write a story. They give out statements very infrequently - two or three times a year. Some quotes are very long and some very old but we just had to refer to them sometimes in our articles. We used them to get balance, because we didn't have anything else.

Interviewer: When you write on very sensitive topics, such as the Kachin or environmental issues...

Ahr Man: or corruption... yes...

Interviewer: Right... what happens? What do your articles look like? What can you do?

Ahr Man: The most difficulty we have is getting evidence. Because we want to ensure accuracy, balance and fairness. But when we want to write about a very sensitive issue, the biggest difficulty is that most people don't want to talk. But now, since the changes last year, people can be very open and we are able to write everything we want. But some information is still hard to get and some key people, very important people, don't want to provide information. So writing about sensitive issues is still quite difficult. Especially concerning corruption.

Now everyone knows that corruption is the biggest challenge facing our country. It is corruption. But if we write about the issue we need to show evidence. That's what is so very difficult. Evidence is problematic because most people don't want to talk.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Ahr Man: It is because most of it takes place within the judicial system. They can take money and then you have a problem.

Interviewer: Oh wait - does that mean they can be bribed to sue you?

Ahr Man: Yes... exactly that. If I write a story about someone but I can't show evidence, then they can sue me. Even if what I write is absolutely true. The problem is

that it's mostly a societal problem. Most people don't want to fight those who are corrupt. They just want to do their jobs and stay out of trouble. They don't want to fight government officers. We are a very poor country.

Interviewer: If you have little evidence, couldn't you do more investigative reporting?

Ahr Man: Yes. But honestly, today we can write what we like, so the biggest problem remains getting access to information. Very few journalists and newspapers like investigative reporting - because it is so hard to get information.

Interviewer: What about the protection of sources?

Ahr Man: Yes, we can protect them now.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example?

Ahr Man: Yes. In 2011 we wrote a business story based on a personal report. A high-ranking business man was working in a bank. The bank rating was raised here, so a lot of foreign businesses came to our country to save a lot of money. Interest rates became much higher. They wanted to reduce bank fees also. We wrote about the story and the government was very angry. Many people in other countries read our reports. The government contacted us and asked "Who is your source?" and "How did you get this information?" but our reply was that we can not supply our source.

Interviewer: So you didn't give them away?

Ahr Man: No we signed it off then. We had an agreement. Fortunately about 2 or 3 months later the government changed the bank rates and the government minister changed after that. The deputy prime minister became responsible for all of the economy. Most of the bank officials are his men. He is a very hard-liner. Often we recommended a higher bank rate, but he wanted to reduce it. He thought we were fighting with him and he wanted to demonstrate his power. For two or three weeks his office put a lot of pressure on us. He asked again and again "Who is your source?"

Interviewer: What happened then, did you stay silent?

Ahr Man: Yes. Our source called us and said "Please don't give up our name" and we promised. We do not give away our sources. We have an ethics agreement. That

situation was very extreme compared with the current situation. It lasted for about a year. The situation was very tense at that time.

Interviewer: And how has it changed?

Ahr Man: Now it is very easy. It's much different now. But some people are still afraid of the government. They want to have an easy family life - avoid trouble.

Interviewer: Would you take any precautions against persecutions these days, like anonymizing articles?

Ahr Man: No, I don't think many journalists are still afraid. But they are becoming more and more responsible and careful when they write. Before they publish, they make sure of their sources and titles.

Interviewer: In this context, when would you say you need to self-regulate or limit your freedom?

Ahr Man: Sometimes we do self-censor. Because with a sensitive issue like corruption... Sometimes we have important information but we can't write about it because we need more evidence. In this Meiktila case for example, it deals with a normal crime case but it's become more complicated than that. Some feel that political parties and government officers that are handling the situation are not doing anything about it. But we don't have any evidence to go on of course.

Interviewer: So where do you get your information from?

Ahr Man: Yeah, if we have some kind of witness, we can use quotations.

Interviewer: But that is evidence in a way, isn't it?

Ahr Man: These texts are from before abolishment of the censorship ((referring to articles on the table)). We sent these to the censor. We sent these kinds of text continually for about 4 or 5 weeks. They read each very carefully – every sentence in each story. After that they sent it back you got to see their remarks. Here are some on this page.

Interviewer: And what does this one say?

Ahr Man: This is the "responsible editor" remark. It means it can be published if the editor can be held responsible.

Interviewer: And this one here (referring to article)? It looks like a check?

Ahr Man: Yes, it looks like a check. As you can see (shows the picture of a girl in a tank top, her exposed stomach is blacked out). They didn't want this paragraph here either. It was quite crazy. This here (shows article) is very funny. The singer was preparing a new album. Our reporter asked about one song that he didn't like. She gave her opinion, but the censor said we can't have this, too critical.

Interviewer: That's the "Me'n'ma Girls" - I know the group. Why would that not be ok?

Ahr Man: It is ok, if the editor takes responsibility for it (smiles and rolls eyes).

Interviewer: What does that mean, "responsible editor"?

Ahr Man: If we publish something and then we have some kind of problem...

Interviewer: What kind of problem?

Ahr Man: Maybe someone doesn't like what we say and they get angry and complain, then we are responsible for everything. It's kind of funny because all of the news is our responsibility of course. So essentially, it means be careful - you could be sued.

And this here (shows another news page crossed out in red)... We didn't run that story.

Interviewer: Why not?

Ahr Man: The story was about our last King. Do you know King Ti Bo - the story is about his grandchildren. I have no idea why they didn't allow that story.

Interviewer: Did you always understand why you were censored?

Ahr Man: No, sometimes we didn't know why we were censored. Sometimes it was very funny.

Interviewer: I mean, I can imagine you, of course, would get a feeling for what was allowed and what was not allowed, right? Then sometimes you wouldn't have wanted to do the work just to have it then censored and you had to stop writing it altogether?

Ahr Man: Yes, most of our stories were very simple back then. They just didn't allow them at the time.

Interviewer: Do you see any connection with the Meiktila conflict here?

Ahr Man: Yes, I would say yes, here we self-censored. You know in this case unfortunately our country is facing a very big problem. This here is in Meiktila ((showing pictures of houses on fire, people fleeing)) and the Rakhine conflict. Both sides are very emotional and it is a very sensitive topic. To be honest, sometimes we write something but, because both sides are so angry, we don't publish.

Interviewer: And could you explain why you do that?

Ahr Man: I think it is for the better or more professional not to do it. Our policy is to make sure that every story we have has fairness and balance. Last year reporting about the Rakhine conflict we added some photos to our reports. They were people that looked like they were from the Rakhine minority who we call the Bengali, but people in foreign countries call Rohingya. So we put in some photos of some people of the Rakhine majority groups and the Bengali people. Most of our readers were very angry that we put photos of Bengali people in. But we know that we have to have fairness and balance. But sadly, most people can't understand that.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Ahr Man: I think, the Lady - Aung San Suu Kyi - she said it best when she described how our education system works. It is a lot about fighting. People become very emotional and they don't think very deeply about the situation. Their knowledge is very poor.

Interviewer: So at some point they hear that the Rohingya were illegal immigrants and

they just believe that?

Ahr Man: Yes. So they are more likely to believe rumours. We have to be very careful.

Interviewer: So how would you, for example, go about reporting on allegations that military officials who own factories in Mandalay supposedly use forced labour? How could you prove that?

Ahr Man: Well yes, we could publish something like that. But we would just need to get some hard proof. We need to show samples, details and a lot of information.

Interviewer: So if you were to go down to the factory and take a camera along, what would happen?

Ahr Man: Yeah, we could get into trouble. Maybe the owner would sue us.

Interviewer: And the military, how have they changed their attitude towards you?

Ahr Man: They are very careful now. Compared with in the past.

Interviewer: Why is that do you think?

Ahr Man: Maybe because they are afraid of the media? I think the higher levels in the military have already talked about this and they have decided that the truth is the best policy. Now we just have to be careful of the lower levels. They are becoming more and more open though. The police for example. Now they have started certain information services. They have their own Facebook account and every day they upload their own news.

Interviewer: And when you ask them something on Facebook, what happens?

Ahr Man: Normally they don't. If we want to get a statement, we have to send an official letter. We write something saying that we would like to write a story or something like that. We have to write out our questions. Then in about 2 or 3 weeks we get an answer.

Interviewer: When there was still censorship, did you ever try to send messages between the lines? Try to trick the censors?

Ahr Man: Well for example, in Yangon a very famous case about 5 years ago. A murder case - some bad guys were killed. Three members of a family and a housekeeper. They were killed with guns. They were from a very rich background. They came from a very rich township called Bahan. Bahan is in the middle of the city. Most people and even some police can not hold guns. So people think it was someone from the military. Almost everyone in the country was interested in this story - there was a lot of interest, so we covered the story. We asked the police for information – but they didn't give us an answer. Even now, after 5 or 6 years, they still haven't arrested the murderer or murderers.

So we wrote a story about the case. After 2 or 3 days they had a funeral. We sent our reporter. Before they burned the body, the police chief arrived. He pushed into the temple and pulled out some paper and read out a sentence. Our reporter looked behind the sentence (interpreted what he was saying). The sentence was very funny. He said "don't worry, please just help me arrest the murderer".

It's very typical for the police. When they are facing a very difficult crime case. At that time it was very funny. It was very crowded at the funeral. Lots of people. He is not very loud, but our reporter could hear and managed to record some of his sentences. So we wrote about it. Everyone in Yangon was very afraid of the murder and also very interested.

They found bullets. And the police and the military cooperated, but they couldn't catch the murderer.

We wrote a story about the scene at the funeral. People were crying and shouting. The family members are very rich, so there were a lot of flowers coming and a lot of people. So we described the scene. And then described the police man with the sheet.

Interviewer: Was there a name on the sheet?

Ahr Man: I think U Dan Schwe. He was the officer of the Kammanyut township. I am not sure what he does now. At that time he was the police chief.

At that time, most people already knew the murder had taken place, but they were also interested in who the murderer was. People had heard gunshots.

So we wrote about the color of the funeral and everything that happened there, but still managed to slip in some information about the case. Everybody really enjoyed the article and found it very humorous. Because the story showed the “ability” of the police. So after that the police ministry was very angry. The government banned our paper for one week. Yes, it was very funny.

Interviewer: By banning the publication for a week, I am sure you lost a lot of money, but you also got some great publicity in the process. I am sure it would have got people talking.

Ahr Man: Sometimes we just manage to connect with the reader. We don't need to say everything, but the reader knows exactly what we want to say.

interviewer: Where are most of your readers based?

Ahr Man: According to our surveys, pre 2008 we had about 80 percent of our readership in Yangon and about 20 percent in other regions. In 2010, we did another survey and found that about 60 percent was in Yangon and 40 percent was in other regions.

Interviewer: So are reaching more people?

Ahr Man: Yes, and we produce a lot. We have about 15 sections. This here ((showing pages)) is dedicated to news of our country. We dedicate three pages to the life section. This part is about Japan. I went to Japan and interviewed some people there. This here is the health section, then we have the regional section, it has four pages.

Interviewer: So how many reporters all do you have all over the country?

Ahr Man: Now we have about 15. Around the country.

Interviewer: And in Yangon?

Ahr Man: About 50. No we need to have more journalists in the states. Now we are planning to employ more journalists for the state divisions. We need to have about double what we have - about 30 or 40 or so. This is a big opportunity, but you know, our country has unemployment issues.

This is a free classifieds section, but only for jobs. Then the education section, technology section and then an article. This was about the Meiktila issue.

Interviewer: So what happened to your pictures from Meiktila?

Ahr Man: As you can see, we managed to save some. But most of them were destroyed. We sent a good journalist. Here we have the business section - we have two pages. News analysis. Knowledge. Puzzle. Astrology. Environment. Cartoon. International and Asia news. Entertainment and then the sports section. More news. We have about 15 sections. Our goal is that everyone of all ages can read our newspaper.

The same with a daily newspaper. The difference is ((on the weekend)) we have the same sections as an international newspaper - about 7 or 8 sections.

Interviewer: After the censorship was abolished last year, what changes have there been?

Ahr Man: Especially circulation changed a lot. It's going up.

Interviewer: By how much?

Ahr Man: I remember in 2012, before August 20, our circulation was about 120 thousand. Since then it has gone up to about 150 thousand.

Interviewer: Where do people buy it from?

Ahr Man: Well, mostly from street vendors. We have also subscription service, but it is not very popular. Compared with the number bought on the streets. It's only about 20 thousand, because you can buy our paper easily on the street for about 300 Kyat. The subscription price is the same. The problem is that we can't reach the locations to deliver - only very early in the mornings or late at night, due to the transportation problems. So there isn't much room for growth there.

Interviewer: How does a work day look to you? What are your main duties?

Ahr Man: I am responsible for everything. We have one Editor in Chief, he is our boss, sorry, the chief editor is our boss. He is not a journalist though. He is an I.T. specialist.

The founder is Bian Mai, my old teacher, now he is 70. He is running his own business.

Interviewer: So the chief editor is I.T.?

Ahr Man: Yes. He never comes into the newsroom. Then we have two other editors. Me and my friend.

After this we have 4 news editors. Including Aye as news editor. We have a rotation system. This week I am responsible. Responsible means I edit all news and all articles.

Interviewer: So everything goes over your table when you are editor, right?

Ahr Man: Yes. Firstly, reporters send it directly to the news editor, then the editor edits the first draft and then sends it on to me.

Interviewer: Actually we have just the same system where I work.

Ahr Man: So I edit all the news and all articles. I also commission events with the designer. And I decide on which story is for which person. I decide everything. It's my responsibility.

Interviewer: That's a lot of responsibility.

Ahr Man: Yeah. And next week is my friends issue, so, if she understands, I might give her some advice and I might have some time to write a story and do some interviews. I can also share some news ideas.

Interviewer: Do you have a specialty, do you have a beat?

Ahr Man: Yes. Everyone has their beat.

Interviewer: And what is yours?

Ahr Man: I write on everything, but I write about politics, business and social issues in particular. And current issues. For example this week, I wrote two interviews, one main story and two HA news. Investment. I also wrote about investment news.

((Referring back to article)) Here we have two interviews with an officer from the JICA (The Japanese International Cooperation Agency). I interviewed him in Tokyo and asked him why the Japanese are so kind with their investments. I wanted to know what their ideas were? What is their plan? etc.

The Chinese have been the biggest investors in our country, but now the Japanese are very interested. Now they are planning to come to our country. So I am trying to find out, what their plans are. How should we seek opportunity and so on.

Interviewer: Do you know, I mean, I read that the Chinese have invested quite a lot in the country. So they have their hands on quite a lot business here. Do you have any numbers on how much of the business here is in the hand of Chinese investors?

Ahr Man: We have numbers, yes. I don't have the data right here. I could get the data for you though.

Interviewer: Yes, that would be great. Please if you could email me.

Ahr Man: Here, this week we have an old politician - Thein Sein. His government, came to power in March 30, 2011. Two years ago - the anniversary - so I wrote a story about that. Their success and what have been their failures.

Interviewer: How critical were you about that?

Ahr Man: We asked about 50 people throughout the country about the progress being made. We asked for their feedback to develop our story.

Interviewer: So you asked people about how they feel now? Two years on?

Ahr Man: Yes, we asked about progress over those two years - in political freedoms for example. Everybody can protest freely now, even in public if we want. We have media

freedom also. The government released a lot of political prisoners. And the events surrounding the lady - The lady Aung San Suu Kyi. Now that opposition leaders are in the parliament. It is very significant. And now she is in cooperation with the president of the house. Their cooperation is for the country.

But on the other hand, still, the army do a lot of bad things like in the brown copper mines. They destroy. They use people. They are very brutal.

Interviewer: Phosphorus mining?

Ahr Man: Yes. And the Kachin conflict also. It is now our country's civil war. A long one – now over 60 years. After independence. Our country's independence was in 1948. Very few men started to fight each other. I think our country, has the biggest, longest civil war in the world. Sadly, the new government can't solve the problem and both sides continue to fight. And the Rakhine conflict. And the Meiktila affair. Some people think that the Meiktila conflict is very normal. But if they handled the situation in a smart way, the conflict wouldn't just get bigger and bigger. But the police are very poor.

Interviewer: Do you think so too?

Ahr Man: Yes.

Interviewer: So what needs to be done?

Ahr Man: At the moment people are fighting with each other and killing each other but the police just stand by and watch. I think the biggest problem for the government is the political changes. We can see a lot of changes are very significant, but economically speaking, nothing has changed for the people. For some people it has just become more and more difficult even just to buy food.

Now moving into the third year, the people need to look forward, they need to show courage. Because all of the people are only interested in themselves. If their goal is to simply lift their standard of living, for themselves and their family, then they are not interested in politics. They are only interested in their money and their lives. The government can't develop without economic progress. And the government needs to make progress.

Interviewer: About this new international investment law, it also offers five years free of any tax, right. What is the advantage for the people of Myanmar when a company can

be 100 percent owned abroad?

Ahr Man: Direct foreign investment is at 100 percent, yes. At the last minute the parliament changed the law. At first, foreign investors could own up to 49 percent and local business people could own 51 percent. Last month the politicians changed this law to 80 percent for foreigners and 20 percent for local business people. Some businessmen think this is good because most of the business people in this country, don't have much money. They simply don't have enough. So the law changes are good for them.

But the country is still not stable. The issues are not sorted out, with Meiktila, a lot of the issues appear again and again. I think the foreign investors are just waiting and thinking.

So the people have not seen any investment yet. I worry that the people will think that somehow democracy is not good for their daily lives. That democracy somehow doesn't work. It is very worrying. Some people are starting to think, that democracy is not good for them.

Interviewer: Do you think that freedom of the press is a universal thing, or should it be adapted to each and every country?

Ahr Man: Actually it should be universal, but if I think of our country's situation, there are some things we have to adapt. Because some people are not ready for everything at once. People are not like those in the developed northern countries. We are a developing country. If we were to report in a very open and direct way, some readers wouldn't understand. So they misunderstand and then they become emotional.

Interviewer: How would you define freedom of the press?

Ahr Man: Freedom of the press means that we can write what we want. Some people say that we now have freedom of the press, but I think it's not 100 percent. We have laws but most laws are for the government and not for the generals. The government is now planning to publish a new media law, but that doesn't cover the generals. It's only for the government.

Another thing is that we need access. Now we can ask most of the current officers if we want to get something - we can ask whoever we like and we can write whatever we like - but like I say, we don't really have a complete freedom of the press.

Interviewer: So to sum it up, the rest of the framework it needs to be freer too, right? Because you need the judiciary and the legislation and when all of this is in place and the media is free, then there is freedom of the press.

Ahr Man: Yes, exactly.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time.

J7D2

Aye May Kyaw, Editor at 7 Day News Journal

Female, 27 years old.

Interviewer: How did you get into journalism?

Aye Mya Kyaw: I am originally from the central region of Myanmar. I lived with my parents. After finishing my high school I decided to attend a computer course in Yangon. I attended the computer course and a graphic design one also. Then me and my friend found out that 7 Day News were looking for new reporters. At that time, I was not even 17 years old and I didn't know what a journalist or a reporter did exactly. But we just wanted to try since we both loved reading and writing. So we tried it out and submitted our resume. We didn't expect they would hire us. After fourteen days my Editor in Chief interviewed us. Since I was only sixteen my editor asked me: Are you sure you want to try it? I said I was sure. So fortunately they replied with a "yes".

So I started working as a junior reporter, then later on as a senior reporter and now, ten years later, my position is editor and reporter. My beat is environmental issues and I also cover armed conflicts in the Kachin region.

Interviewer: What is your main duty nowadays? Your main task?

Aye Mya Kyaw: My main duty is reporting on the Kachin conflict. We have a conflict in the northern part of Myanmar and I have to cover it. I write "inter reports" (interview report) and sometimes also about environmental issues like the Myitsone dam that was suspended two years ago. These days, I often have to sit in the newsroom because we are preparing for the daily paper.

Interviewer: So you also got a daily license?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Yes. It (the paper) will hopefully come out by the end of this month.

Interviewer: So these topics you cover - the Kachin conflict, environmental issues - are very sensitive topics. What challenges do you face when reporting on them?

Aye Mya Kyaw: We cannot write what happened. The war started in 2011, June 9. At

that time we still had censorship, so we tried to tell the people what was happening on the ground. We were able to go to the war zone and we interviewed the leaders of ethnic organizations like the Kachin Buddhist Convention and the leader of the Pa-O tribe who was leading the peace talks. But unfortunately, those interviews and the story were all cut by the censorship at that time. I went to the Kachin state and I interviewed lots of people, I did some inter reports but they took them all out. They didn't allow them at that time.

Interviewer: How did it work during that time? Say you submitted the complete layout and the finished story...

Aye Mya Kyaw: I will show you some drafts. They gave us the red line. If they didn't allow or like something, they made crosses with a red pen.

Interviewer: And how many days before the paper was published did they do that?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Normally a week. For example, we publish on Wednesdays, but we had to submit the draft by Tuesday one week before. They would read it on Thursday and Friday, and it would come back on Saturday.

Interviewer: They took three days to read and to censor?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Yeah. And also, if we had some follow-up news, we had to submit everything... everything we published and put in the paper.

Interviewer: What would happen if at that time, if, say, they gave you the red marks, and then you did a second draft, but it still wasn't okay?

Aye Mya Kyaw: We had to sign. If the coverage was serious, they would call us in to come and see them - the censorship director. And sometimes, when things were serious, they would shout and yell - like a kind of mental abuse. Sometimes we had to sign in front of them, in our paper: "We won't do that again". And we promised. We used to use the same signage again and again in the censorship board.

Interviewer: So you have to sign and if you didn't what happened?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Nothing really, I mean no threats about jail. The most common punishment was, they would ban the paper. They'd ban the paper for one or two weeks

so we lost a lot of money in our business. We have a big circulation so we lost a lot of money. In our history, we've been punished twice by the censors: The first was when Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest. There we made a second cover. So they gave us as a punishment of one week. We were banned for a week. We were together with eight other people. Another time we wrote an inter story about five people who were shot. A rich family here in Yangon. The scene was very close to the rich community and also the army community who live around the corner. It's complicated but we reported about it in some feature-writing style - we have our own writing style. We described the funeral scene and they were really angry. They ended up calling us to... actually, the story wasn't allowed to be published in the paper, but we did anyhow. We got the punishment for that.

Interviewer: Why did you decide at that time to publish the story anyhow?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Because everybody was very interested in this case. But as you know, we could only publish once a week. So at that time, we didn't get the scoop because we were already late. Other papers got the scoop. That shooting happened on a Sunday, but we publish on Wednesdays, so another paper got the scoop - we are already too late. So we had to think and brainstorm some ideas that may interest our reader, so we decided to do something in an in-depth feature writing style and then just did it.

Interviewer: So when you published, the paper got banned, but how did decide to publish?

Aye Mya Kyaw: We all decided together in the newsroom: Let's do it anyway, no matter what happens. It was a try.

Interviewer: Why was it so important for people to know about the shooting?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Because at that time, we had a military regime and people all talked about that case. You know in our country, people are not allowed to hold a gun. So the shooting was very interesting. Not like in the United States, we're not allowed to own guns. Only the army people own guns, so that case was complicated and controversial. People were interested in it. They should know what happened and they also wanted to read our report, that's why did it.

The victims of the case are from five rich families, they are ordinary people, not related to the army - but kind of related to some back cadres. But we don't know for sure. The case is still going on. They didn't get punished and they are still in trial, because it's complicated. So some people are guessing there there will be some relation to the

regime. It happened in 2008.

Interviewer: How did you report on the release of ASSK from House Arrest?

Aye Mya Kyaw: We did a second cover for it. We also put a big picture on the front which covered two thirds of the page. They didn't allow that. Before her release from house arrest, they didn't even permit putting her name in the paper. After her release, they had limitations of the size of the pictures we could use in the paper. If we wanted to put her in the paper, we submitted in to the censorship, they would say: "OK, you can put it in this kind of size" (she folds her business card in half). Just a small picture, not any bigger. So yeah, deals like this... we used to make these deals with them. Censorship is crazy.

Interviewer: Were there any laws that they went by? When they negotiated the size of an ASSK picture on the cover, did they ever say why?

Aye Mya Kyaw: No.

Interviewer: So it's not like they would argue on the grounds of national stability or something like that?

Aye Mya Kyaw: No. They had a law, it was founded in 1962, but they made their own up also. Sometimes they made up new restrictions. Sometimes you could put it in, sometimes you couldn't. It depended on their mood, it depended on the situation. The law was always changing. The censorship board had their own rules. You got a feeling for something that would work, something that wouldn't work. But even then, even me, I was a female journalist, and sometimes I cried.

I cried once because they cut out my whole interview which was about the Kachin conflict. I really tried - I offered a lot. I went and asked my editor. I wrote two versions and they chose one. My editor said, "OK, we will risk putting it in the paper, but not the interview because we will get in big big trouble". So I had to say, "OK, I will keep it for my own resources".

Interviewer: And what happened to the one interview?

Aye Mya Kyaw: They also cut it. Sure.

Interviewer: And when you went to Kachin state, how did it work? How hard was it to get to sources?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Well, we didn't a chance to get in touch with the army. Last december, I tried to contact the KIA, the Kachin Independent Army. I went through the Chinese border and got into Lashio, which is controlled by the KIA. Then we tried again and again to get some information from the government army, but they didn't, they wouldn't, open up to the media. But after some serious fighting at the end of 2012 - start of 2013, they started responding to what was happening - finally. They knew they couldn't keep it secret anymore, because the military tried to get on the ground when international media were there, plus the local media. So they cannot lie to people anymore. They also used the air force for strikes and you could see the destruction on the ground.

So we didn't see the army's side. It was very dangerous so the KIA guys didn't take me to the frontline, but they did take me very close to the frontline. We had to observe what was going on. We could hear the explosions. That was all. So we were not really in the war zone. Otherwise the KIA couldn't protect us.

This was a historical moment. In previous years, if a journalist contacted these kinds of organisations, they could have been arrested. That was another law. The government considers them an illegal organization. They called them a rebel group. We would have gotten arrested. But now they have changed their rules and regulations, so we can go and cover the conflict and talk to them. They knew we were going to the area, but they didn't say anything. They just watched what we are doing. That's the government side. They still know we go there today. We would have been arrested before for going into a restricted area and dealing with and interviewing an illegal organization. But now they are okay with it.

Now they are having peace talks, they are negotiating with each other for peace. So I think, in 2013, these situations will become even more, or fully, relaxed, In 2012 it was possible for some situations already.

Interviewer: What were the major changes in your workplace in the last twelve months or since the censorship has been fully lifted?

Aye Mya Kyaw: I can write on the Kachin conflict freely now. I can report. They say to report on both sides, but the truth is, we can only ask the one side, the KIA. We cannot ask the government side. How can we get balance?. So we can write whatever we want, I can print it in the paper - I can see my efforts. That's the change for me. In previous years, everything that was related to the army was a censored issue. We could not touch these kinds of issues. So that's changing a lot.

Interviewer: How can you write about both sides when you can only talk to one side?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Sometimes they supply us with a press releases. They come in the newspapers. They now have a spokesperson for the president. He posts messages to his Facebook page and we can refer to them. Sometimes they have propaganda in the newspaper about what they're doing and when, so we can refer to the newspapers. That's how we have tried to get balance in previous years. We can only refer to their press releases or their propaganda. Now they have a spokesperson for the press and a president's office, we can also try to call them. We say " we're trying to write about this, do you want to give us a comment?" and sometimes they do. There has been some changes.

Interviewer: Would you say that the press is free now?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Not 100 percent free, but I can say it's over ninety percent.

Interviewer: What about the other ten percent? What would you say is missing?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Now we can write whatever we want, but we cannot write - that is our problem! We don't have the documents to prove things. For example, if we want to write about corruption or corruption in the army or some army torturing the people, we know what's going on, but we don't have a proof. So that's why we cannot write. We are still trying to get the evidence we need to tell the people the truth. That is our weak point. So I would say "almost free".

Interviewer: But if you were to do an investigative piece, and you knew something was true - like torturing people or corruption, would you be able to criticize the army?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Now we can. If the other papers also say the same thing. But the problem is, the other papers don't have proof. But us, we are trying to be professional and we try to get evidence and documents so we can prove it - prove that it is the truth.

Really, I'm not sure if you already know, but just recently the government has announced a new printing law for publishers, which also relates to journalists. The journalists think that this is another way to control everything. So now we are waiting and watching this law very closely. The MOI wrote it and now they are sending the draft into the parliament. It's the only one we really worry about.

Interviewer: So if the old law from 1962 has been abolished and the new law won't be back in parliament until July as I read, what is the law like now, in the time in between?

Aye Mya Kyaw: They haven't announced the new one yet. The 1962 law is still in place, but the censorship has been abolished. The draft is still being written.

Interviewer: So everybody is just trying out what works, how far they can go?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Yes.

Interviewer: Have you ever noticed any limits? Has anyone ever called your office?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Nothing serious, just a small case. It was no big deal.

Interviewer: What was it about?

Aye Mya Kyaw: We have a conflict in Rakhine state, not a government conflict, just a people's conflict. It's like a civil war. Some Rakhine people called us and said: "You guys are biased, in favour of the Muslims!" But from the Muslims, we also had some calls saying: "You guys are biased in favour of the Rakhine people!" That's all. That's why we're trying to be professional and balance our articles all of the time.

Interviewer: How threatening is that?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Not really, they just call in and complain. Shouting. Yelling. At that time, we were having a very difficult period, because we put both sides in whenever we covered the conflict. So each side was angry and they just said "You're so biased! We are coming to Yangon, to your office and we tell everyone on the street not to buy your paper!" That was it.

But when people complain, they can see we are balanced. The government is scared to complain because they know we are accurate.

Interviewer: When you report on environmental issues, which challenges do you face?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Quite a lot. We can say we are open, but it's still difficult to get

information from the government, like forestry and mining things, contracts and statistics and so on. They will not transfer it to us at all. No transparency at all. So we face a lot of difficulties in finding documents.

But also, the period after the lift of censorship is just one or two years. The government official is still the same person as in the military regime. They dare to tell the journalists: "If the journalists write about it, they will be in trouble! They will lose their position". That's still in their minds. They are afraid of telling the journalists. Sometimes they use journalists as a channel to tell people, like a propaganda instrument. That is not what we want. So in that, we are still facing some difficulties. The government office has not really opened up in the way they say the country has opened up, so...

Interviewer: Were you ever afraid because you were attacked physically?

Aye Mya Kyaw: No, not really.

Interviewer: How dangerous is it still in your opinion to be a journalist?

Aye Mya Kyaw: No, not anymore. In the past maybe, they could have put us in jail anytime, but not anymore. We're not afraid. I started in 2003, and at that time, when we went abroad for training, we couldn't tell the authorities what we were doing. We had to get a tourism visas. And if we carried around books or documents we wanted to read, about politics or Aung San Suu Kyi, we had to hide them in our clothes. If they had caught us, they could have put us to jail, just like that, without a cause. They have so many reasons.

For some journalists put in jail, the created reason is also that they contacted people from abroad to threaten national stability or something like that. For example, if we contacted people from the BBC, or VOA, we would have been in trouble. Not anymore. Now they (the newsagencies) are opening their bureaus in here!

Interviewer: How was it reporting on the violence in Meiktila and Yangon?

Aye Mya Kyaw: It was hard. We sent our reporter and a photographer to Meiktila on the day the violence broke out. They went with another group of journalists - eight or nine people altogether. So as soon as they arrived it was clear that they were obviously journalists, because they were holding big cameras and equipment, so at that time, people were angry and the situation was terrible. A group of people stopped them. They asked: Who are you and where are you from? So they said: We are 7 Day News and other media, we are trying to report. Then the locals tried to break all the cameras

because they thought they would upload all the pictures they took to the internet and that everybody could know what was happening on the ground.

Honestly, our country doesn't have a good education system, the people, their mindsets are different from ours. So they tried to break all the cameras and they threatened to kill our photographer with a weapon, like a bamboo stick.

So finally, they negotiated with them and our photographers had to give them their memory cards... instead of breaking the camera. They destroyed the memory cards and they were really afraid. They had to hide in a monastery with a monk, he protected them in a monastery. So we were very worried here in Yangon. We tried to call the authorities to rescue them from the danger zone. Finally, the security forces rescued them and they helped them to get out of town. So when they got back to Yangon, they stayed for one day here and the next day they went back again. That was a really critical moment for us because we had conflicts like Rakhine, but we journalists were not threatened like that.

Interviewer: Who were these people?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Well, we can't confirm yet who they were. If they had the chance to keep these pictures, we could have found out who they were. But now, we don't have any evidence. We don't know where they came from. If we had taken more pictures they would have threatened our journalists' lives - so that is a part of freedom that is still missing. But the authorities said, they were simply angry people who were enraged because they thought the muslims had killed a monk. Now the situation is getting complicated and even worse. It was just very unfortunate that the journalists had to meet these people on that day.

Interviewer: How is the relationship between different media?

Aye Mya Kyaw: The relationship is pretty good. Sometimes we exchange information - just not if we want to get a scoop! Nowadays, we have several journals, but we know each other and we have a good relationship with each other. We can ask each other if we're missing something.

Interviewer: How do you feel about reporting on other sensitive issues?

Aye Mya Kyaw: We are very careful with this religious problem, also the ethnic problem. If information is true, but the story could make a conflict bigger and bigger, we don't publish. Because the information is often not so important that everyone needs to

know about it and it could increase a religious or ethnic violence. But it is very rare that we do that. But we take a lot of care whenever we publish something about religion. Because we also respect other religions like Muslim or Christians.. even if we're Buddhists, we respect them all. All kinds of religion. Also with the ethnic conflicts - we have all different kinds of ethnicities here. There are very serious human rights problems - we wrote about it. But sometimes if information could do more harm than good, we keep it to ourselves. Same with religions. But it's very rare. We don't do that often, but we always take care. We are really careful.

Interviewer: Which guidelines does your newsroom have on ethical reporting?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Well, we learned it on the job. When I started working in 2003, the organization was just ten people - now there are almost 100 of us. Just recently, we made our own handbook on our principles. It's like a manual. We asked some veteran journalists and trainers and then we translated it into our language. It's for young journalists, very helpful.

Interviewer: What do you think will happen to the media in Myanmar in the future?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Well, who knows! We don't know. All we can do now is wait and see and hope for the best. In 2010 we didn't expect all the things we have now. It's like a dream, we can publish a daily! If you told me three or four years ago, I would have thought you were crazy. Now we hope for the best. If you told me we would publish a daily and the censorship will be abolished, I would have declared you insane. Now it's reality. It's the same for the future, now we hope for the best. Now we hope we can be more professionalized, we can report very professionally, and we hope we, the media people, can find an environment where we can be more and more mature, and our reporting, too. Trying to be better - that is good for the future. I think so.

But if... if... the military returned everything to the state before, that's our bad luck.

Interviewer: What are the people from the censorship board doing now?

Aye Mya Kyaw: In the censorship group, not all the people were bad. They had some good people, they had some educated people there and they knew we had to change for the good. Thanks to them, we are here now.

Interviewer: So where would you say the limits of press freedom are?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Not from the government, there are no limits at all. We can even criticize them, no problem, even the president! I'll give you an example. Tomorrow, our new paper will come out. In that paper, we have a story about the two year anniversary of the government and how they have changed. We point out that there is still a lot of work to be done. So we point out some weak points and points that still need to be done by them for the people. We couldn't have written that in the past.

Interviewer: What about pressure from advertisers?

Aye Mya Kyaw: We don't care about that. One example, just recently we had a 'Michael Learns To Rock' concert here. We are the media partner and we have an agreement, so we put a big advertisement in the paper. They arranged the concert. But the problem was, the ticket price was very high and almost no one could afford to go to the concert. So we wrote a story like: Michael Learns to Rock has a lot of fans in the country, but we are still a poor country so the majority of people can not even afford a ticket. So the advertisement company didn't really like it. But we have our policy and we have our trust. We are not related to the advertisers, but the readers. So that was just a recent example, tomorrow, I don't know what will come. But we did it.

Interviewer: Where were you trained?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Mostly in Thailand, we have an organisation that is called Indochina Media Memorial Foundation, that's a organization that trains journalists from South East Asian countries. Since 2010, we have also sometimes had the opportunity to go to the United States for two or three weeks of training. Now, they can also access training sessions inside the country. That wasn't possible before. Now, there are so many training organisations here, like IMMF or Internews. We don't have to go abroad like before. They have some trainers that we have a good relationship with. Not the MMRD and not the government-made training programmes. That is boring! The University, too. You don't learn anything and it doesn't work.

Interviewer: What would you change about what you learn in university?

Aye Mya Kyaw: Actually, there were a couple of years when the government even shut all the universities down. No one could go to university at all, even if you studied biology or medicine. Because they thought it would be too dangerous - the students were protesting and so on. After that, they moved a part of the campus very far outside of the city. They only taught us propaganda. For example, they told us to write opinion pieces about Aung San Suu Kyi, calling her a dog and a whore and really bad names. Then they published it like it was an opinion piece from a famous writer under a fake name. This was what New Light of Myanmar looked like, or the military newspaper. Every day. I think this is not journalism, they didn't teach us anything important like being balanced. What they published was not news, it was just what the military did, or

the government, but only good news. Then you read about who was attending an event! I would change this. I would have real journalism training, conduct good interviews, write well, organize, legal stuff. But before all this, we need laws to rely on. Without laws you can still get into trouble sometimes because no one knows for sure what to do.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time!

JWE1

Wai Phyo, Head of Weekly Eleven at Eleven Media,

Male, 50

Interviewer: I would like to start out by asking you about experiences of any interferences in your work from governmental side since the censorship was lifted.

Wai Phyo: Yes, we have experienced some. Two of our reporters who also cover armed conflicts have found some messages from Google in their inbox, it said that their account was hacked by the state. Maybe you read about it in the media. Our website was also down for some days, it was a hacking attack. I think it is called dDoS (distributed Denial of service attack, the author). Before the attacks we had some troubles with the officials, they did not want the reporters to go to these areas to report. We were shocked because we thought country has moved into becoming a fully democratic society. So if the media is attacked like that it is not good for the country because our country is just opening up and we are striving to be a democracy. At the time when we had been attacked, we have announced it publicly and reported it to the Press Council. And then - it stopped. Totally stopped. I think it was because we published it and sent a letter to the Press Council. And also, maybe mostly because we have talked to the CPJ and RSF.

Interviewer: Do you think the Press Council has fulfilled its role in this affair?

Wai Phyo: Actually, we could have saved the letter. I think what made the difference was that we published it and talked to the NGOs, because then, it stopped immediately and has never happened again. Just at that time, several accounts in our media received these messages of state-sponsored attacks. That was in January, when we sent two reporters to the frontline of the civil war where the KIA fought the Myanmar Army.

And then we published video clips from there, and also the articles from our reporters, in the video clips we also showed SMS messages. These messages showed how the airplanes were used in the war for airstrikes, and the government denies using them. We put this information on our Facebook Account and on TV. We already reported on the airstrikes in December, but nothing happened. When the fighting escalated in January, we thought that we should send out reporters from nearby Miyimha to Lhasio to see what's going on.

Interviewer: How many reporters outside of Yangon do you have?

Wai Phyo: We have 30 correspondents, in each state there is at least one, and two branches in Naypyidaw and Mandalay.

Interviewer: When the censorship was lifted, how did you proceed?

Wai Phyo: The government has lifted the pre-press censorship. But we still have the 1962 Press and Publication Law. In this law, if you violate one section of this law you could go to jail for at least seven years. It's still effective; it's not abolished yet. Even if the state has abolished pre-press censorship, there are still some people who don't like that. There are many hardliners who remain in the same positions and they still want to control the media, so they find many ways to press the media.

Interviewer: Can you tell me how and in which ways?

Wai Phyo: For example, the government has presented the draft of the new Press and Publication law to the parliament - and they didn't consult the media. Even though at that time, the new MOI said that to the MM Times. He said that before it was moved to the parliament, he would consult all the media organizations. But in fact, he did not, he just submitted it. After that, all of our media organizations and journalists were crying out, issued a statement and something like that, to express their dissatisfaction on this. So, the minister came and met the Press Council, told them he felt sorry and so on. But he did not take it back! So... nice words.

Interviewer: How do you feel about the new media bill?

Wai Phyo: Yeah, we are very worried that the new media bill will be just another tool of media control. The words in it are basically the same! It's the same because if the parliament passed this law, the old one would be abolished. But it's essentially the same! We are not stupid, we can read, too. They said it's a Publication Law, so that means we as publishers have to have a license and they can control it, take it away from us when we don't comply. So they are in fact trying to control us.

Interviewer: Are there any other ways that they can put pressure on you, for example, concerning sensitive topics?

Wai Phyo: Even though we can report on many topics right now, if we compare it to the 1980s or something like that... there are some people who are reluctant to talk to the media. They are not familiar with the media. So there is a bit of a problem, especially

from government side. If we write a story, if we want information confirmed - we can't get any answers, we can't get a quote, even if we call their office all week, many times.

Interviewer: How will that be in the future?

Wai Phyo: Well, we think the government will learn. We have already written about it in our articles. Actually, when for example the KIA helped our journalists and took them to the frontline of the war and the government doesn't even give out a statement, we feel like it is the government who have helped the KIA. You know? So our reporters took pictures of fires shot at the frontline, it was all clearly visible, there were rockets fired. We filmed it and then approached the government side. All we got was a "no". So we decided to publish it all. This was the day before the state attack! (government hacking of journalists accounts)

Interviewer: Do you have any idea who these attackers might have been?

Wai Phyo: Let's just say, the person who did this certainly does not like media.

Interviewer: Alright - that's for sure!

Wai Phyo: And also... Tyrants and dictators do not like the media.

Interviewer: You are very brave by publishing the airstrikes first. Have you noticed something like a domino effect where other media published sensitive information, following you?

Wai Phyo: Yeah, exactly - we are testing the waters for them.

Interviewer: How can you protect your journalists?

Wai Phyo: After the new government came to power, it is actually okay for us. Before, there were tons of restrictions, about taking pictures and so on. Now, we are mainly free to report. Actually, the weekly news journal was alright so far. Interestingly though, one of our Sports Journals got banned.

Interviewer: What happened?

Wai Phyo: At that time, Aung San Suu Kyi was just freed on November 13, 2011. So in our frontpage design of the sports journal, we put in a big headline somewhere in the middle: "Suu Free!" So the cover design was mixed with sports and people saw the cover and went "Wow!", took a picture and posted it on Facebook. The next day, we got a phone call from the censors: "We need to talk", we had to go into their office. Our journal was banned for two weeks.

We had to go down to the office all of the time. It was the same for all media, we used to get the drafts back, everything was crossed out. Then I had to go down to the censor's appointment, we had a long talk, sometimes he would scream at me and in the end I had to sign a paper saying "I apologize and I will never do this again." I had to do this a lot because I was the responsible one for the articles. They wouldn't put you in jail even if you have to sign for the tenth time. But it was very unpleasant, like a crossfire interview. I think it happened about 150 times in my career.

Interviewer: Has there been anything happen that you feel has been a step backwards? Apart from the media law?

Wai Phyo: Oh, we are very optimistic. Everything is going smooth so far, forwards. I am positive. The government has allowed over ten daily newspapers and we are also going to begin publishing one on May 3rd. We have never experienced that, it is exciting.

Interviewer: How did you report on Meiktila?

Wai Phyo: We have our own reporter there. Then we sent three reporters: from Naypyidaw, from Mandalay and Yangon. Together about four reporters reported there. At the time, they were harassed and attacked, they had to run away. One reporter went to the riots by the fire brigade and then, people screamed at them for taking pictures with torches, screaming "Why?" - so they had to run away.

Interviewer: Could they take their pictures?

Wai Phyo: Yes, they sent it via email and we published them on our website. And after that, we sent our reporters back to hide in our headquarters, because we were afraid they might get attacked.

Interviewer: Could you identify the attackers?

Wai Phyo: We thought that they are not from the town. They were strangers with different accents, said our reporter. We have also interviewed a lot of people during that time, and it seems like the security forces didn't do a lot. There were also not many police and security on site when the riot happened, so then the government had to send troops.

Interviewer: Are there any laws you can rely on, for example when a reporter gets beaten like that or harassed, or security just stands by?

Wai Phyo: No. In this case, you just run away - fast. Our reporter also had never experienced that before. Most of our staff is very young. It was a first time for him! And I hope it is the last time.

Interviewer: Where do you think are the limits on writing now?

Wai Phyo: Well, it is a little complex. Of course, when I look back to what happened two years ago, I can say that we can write about anything. But in any way? The thing is: This is Myanmar. We are undergoing a transition and we are just opening up, so we have to take care with our reporting. What our reporting might... I mean, there might be a fight and we escalated it. There might be a right time for an important topic, but not any topic at anytime. I think, timing is quite important. Especially in Myanmar.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example for that?

Wai Phyo: The relationship between the government and the opposition, especially when it touches on the army. We have the information, but we wait. We are storing them somewhere and we wait for something to pass, and then we publish them. That is important. Also, you see, we have published a lot of business stories that are quite critical towards the cronies. Very sensitive, I think! We have criticized the cronies and the government - how they mingle. Also for example, the government calls for tenders not openly. So for most of the projects, we can tell who got it, and then we see, they are well connected to the government. Our paper publishes a lot of these stories. And the timing comes in when we know who is going to get the project, but then we publish it just after the project gets handed over. It is the exact time when people should be interested in it, before, nobody would read it. It is also important for our sources, to double-check information and to see what story is important for the public at the exact right point in time.

Wai Phyo: Timing is also important because the government does not give out information. We have to rely on our inside sources and we have to find the right

documents. Otherwise, we might be sued!

Interviewer: How do you find these documents when no one gives them to you?

Wai Phyo: Well, we have to find officials who are willing to give us copies of the contracts. But there are very few.

Interviewer: What do these people who have previously controlled you do now, what jobs do they sit in?

Wai Phyo: We have to send the publications off to them, at least ten copies. So these people still read it and then they archive it. That means, in case we were sued, they have everything handy.

Interviewer: On what grounds could you be sued?

Wai Phyo: Well, for example libel or defamation. For example, the Voice journal has returned a story of corruption. At that time, the Ministry of mining sued them, because they had some wrong information in the piece. But now, they have submitted it after the censorship was lifted. They have put both stories on their website now. The original and the other version.

Interviewer: What do you think is challenging for the media now?

Wai Phyo: Well, we have to learn to think for ourselves and professionalize. Our writing style is still a bit different from other countries. But I think we will catch up over time, especially now, when we can really write everything. But it is not easy!

Interviewer: Do you have a lot of internal debates and criticism about articles in the newsroom?

Wai Phyo: Yes, we have discussions all of the time. Especially in topics that touch on sensitive areas, like corruption, religion and the military. These are quite sensitive to the country, so before we publish, we have to discuss - if we publish it, what would happen to us. We also have a standards guidebook in Burmese and in English. Before we applied for the daily, we had to provide this about a month ago.

Interviewer: How difficult would it be to criticize anyone in the military or the government?

Wai Phyo: It's possible, but we do it step by step. Gradually, so we didn't want to go straight ahead... and we also changed our writing style and tone. For example, nowadays the cronies are donating money to the NLD, there is a fund for education and health. The cronies are trying to increase their influence. But many people would not know what that means. So we wrote a commentary and background piece on how these cronies were related to the previous regime, donating so much money to them. Now, they are giving out this money to the opposition party because they are expecting the NLD to win the elections in 2015, and so on.

Interviewer: What would you say are the major changes in terms of content in your paper?

Wai Phyo: The presentation of journal and especially news is very different. I mean, before, we had to write news for a week. That was always old news what you read, because everything had to through the censor's board. Now, we can even put something in that happened one day before printing. But our company policy is not different, just the presentation of news will be more and more critical.

Interviewer: How do you get feedback from readers?

Wai Phyo: We have our website in English and Burmese and put our stories on the website and on Facebook, after the journals come out. So through these channels we get a lot of feedback.

Interviewer: Who are your readers?

Wai Phyo: They come from all walks of life. We try to target not a specific group, but try to speak to everyone. I think that most of them are younger, in their thirties, because we have also a lot of topics that affect youth and young businesspeople.

Interviewer: How does the self-regulation work as part of your professionalization?

Wai Phyo: We think we are professional in what we write, so we can write what we want. But sometimes we have to balance articles. In terms of self-censorship, I don't think we do that. We write what the people need to know, so we don't care.

Interviewer: How free is the media in Myanmar now? Where are the limits?

Wai Phyo: It is still not completely free. Because we are just on the way to democracy. I would say, the current situation is about 40 percent free. The censorship is gone, but so many other things have not changed. The laws, the people in power, so we are unsure. We have to take time, we are on the way, but things go slowly.

Interviewer: Do you think press freedom is a universal thing or should it be adapted?

Wai Phyo: We are now on the road to a fully democratic country. So that means all people must try it. I think that freedom is a universal thing, but every country has its own identity, background, history, differences. So it might be adapted. I would say, when you are in Myanmar as a journalist, you have to adapt to certain sensibilities. For example, the Thai media and Myanmar media are very different. Same with Indonesia and Malaysia. But look at Thailand - their press is considered much more free than ours, and I think that is true. But try to say something against the majesty in Thailand and you go to jail... that's what I mean by sensibility. With Myanmar, we have the problem with ethnic groups. It is not always easy to represent them all. Right now, we have contacted the representatives of some ethnic groups officially. So we write a story on it. Before, it was not like that, you could have been sued by government for a violation of section 70a: "Unlawful contacting of illegal organizations", or something like that. We couldn't even talk to them, but now we can call the KIA and so on, that's okay.

Interviewer: What experiences did you have with interference to your daily work by officials in the last year?

Wai Phyo: None, calls from the MOI for example haven't happened in the last year.

Interviewer: May I just ask some general questions about the organization - how many people work here?

Wai Phyo: All the staff? About 300. And journalists, over 100, 120. We have 2 sports journals and 2 news journals, one is bi-weekly and one is weekly.

Interviewer: Where do you turn to for professional assistance?

Wai Phyo: We have a journalist's union, I think. The Myanmar Journalist's Union.

Interviewer: And what do they do?

Wai Phyo: I think they protect... I think that they protect. And we also have the Press Council, the one we complained to.

Interviewer: What do you think is the biggest challenge for you now?

Wai Phyo: News. I think it's news. Because in other countries, you can just visit the ministries and do a story, that is good for news writing. But in Myanmar? "What's that? Not admitted!" You make a phone call: No answer. That is bad. So we have to find a way, and that is a real challenge.

Interviewer: You are also an executive member of the MJU - can you tell me what the Union does?

Wai Phyo: We are trying to foster Freedom of Expression and to protect it. That means we try to issue statements to the governments, we collect information from the media and then face the government as an institution, to be stronger. For example, when the Voice journal was sued by the government, the Press Council issued a statement and they watch what's going on. Also, there has to be publicity for freedom of press issues.

Interviewer: Oh, a little bit like the Press Council?

Wai Phyo: Um, actually, we don't really like the Press Council.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Wai Phyo: Well, it was a government thing. It was recently reorganized, but previously, there were some government officials sitting on the Press Council. They founded it and we found it hard to trust them. We complained and now they changed it. Because what is the point of complaining about the government to an institution for the press when there are also officials sitting in there?

Interviewer: That makes sense. Thank you so much for your time.

JWE2

Ko Ko, Journalist at Eleven Media,

Female,

Interviewer: What do you like to write about the most?

Ko Ko: I like political news and also cultural topics, both are nice. When I was younger, I used to go to concerts or dance performance and then write about the music. I like that a lot. I also like to read novels. One day I would like to write about important books or maybe movies.

Interviewer: What keeps you from doing so?

Ko Ko: It's a mix of things. Firstly, I think that Myanmar readers are not that interested in it. They buy a paper because they want to know what is happening. Only some of the older people enjoy books, I think. It is about the language. Younger people like me are used to get everything in one package, if it is longer than a couple of sentences, they get bored. Secondly, there are so many important things happening here so I don't have time. I have to work a lot. And also I would like to go to university one day, maybe in Thailand.

Interviewer: What exactly are the important things that are happening right now?

Ko Ko: Well, the government is trying to reform. Thein Sein is trying to reform. But not everything works so well.

Interviewer: Can you tell me how that touches on your work as a journalist?

Ko Ko: Ok, for me, the media should be free. That means we don't have censorship today. Five years ago, that thought would have been impossible. Now we can write what we want, but it is not easy. We have to learn to think. We don't really know what will happen. I sometimes think the government also is not so sure. We have a lot of discussions about how serious they are. But for example, do you know U Win Tin?

Interviewer: He's the founding member of the NLD and served a 19-year prison term, right?

Ko Ko: Yes, I like him very much. He is good in his speech and he never is... (gestures with hand)

Interviewer: ...broken? Backing down?

Ko Ko: Yeah, exactly. He is very straight, he would never compromise. He has ideas and he says, I don't mind, I want to keep going for this. I think for many journalists, he is a hero. But I am not sure if everybody really acts like that. I think many journalists are coming from the democracy movement, so they tend to align with the ideas of the NLD, just because every other opinion, apart from the junta's, was so long oppressed.

Interviewer: Why did you become a journalist?

Ko Ko: I can write fast and I like that you have to write something different every day. But actually, I would like to do something else.

Interviewer: Why?

Ko Ko: Because to be honest, the salary is not good. When I started, we didn't even have enough computers for everyone. They asked me to bring my own, but I didn't have one, so I always had to wait. And you know, there are officials who are corrupt, they want money for what they do, then they do it faster. But I cannot pay! So I always have to wait.

Interviewer: When you say you can write what you want, how many changes have you noticed in your daily work?

Ko Ko: When I started, we were always writing for the censor. Because no one wanted to write, then get cut, then write everything again. So when you are censored, you write for what you think they want to hear. Although you never know. Once my article got cut because I used the word "dirt road" - crazy stuff like that. Now it's different. It's more like I want to know what the readers want to hear, but I'm not sure. It is not so easy because we don't have a media law yet. They introduced one but they did not ask the media how to do it. It wasn't any better than the first one. So we have to protest and we fought against it. Now the second draft is still in the making. It is still like we have to fight for our freedom.

Interviewer: Do you have any idea who your readers are?

Ko Ko: No, I don't know, I think everyone. Young and old. We report on so many things, I think maybe everyone can read a page or two.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example of a story that wouldn't have run before the lift of censorship but would be okay now?

Ko Ko: I wrote a story about the mine protest and the police - they fought against the protesters. And then the protesters were injured really badly. Then it turned out that they used phosphorus. They burned their faces. It is really bad.

Interviewer: How did you report on it?

Ko Ko: Well, we have to try to stay neutral. So we always include two sources and sides.

Interviewer: How exactly did that work?

Ko Ko: We asked the police and they said they don't want to give an answer right now. It is because they are still investigating or something. But two days ago, they spoke to another newspaper, New Light of Myanmar. If there is a quote in there it is basically like an official statement because the paper is government owned. They said the phosphorus grenades were found in an old army stock and the police had no idea what it was, so they tried using them. But in my report, I couldn't put that down, it came later. And not many people will believe it anyway. It reminds the people of older times when there were guns used against our people when they protest. It happened so often, they even beat the monks. So in this report, I had to reduce the interviews with the injured people. Otherwise, there is a bias. But we could take pictures of the injured people, no problem. That was impossible before.

Interviewer: What means of verification do you have if the claims of the police are true?

Ko Ko: I don't know. We can't do anything, only repeat. Because you know, the newspaper they spoke to is New Light of Myanmar. That is from the government. They are not criticizing the government. It's a very boring paper. But sometimes, we even have to use quotes from there, because they come out daily, so it is more recent and

when someone from the government gives a quote in there, it is faster than when I call. It is always no answer, no answer.

Interviewer: What is investigative reporting like?

Ko Ko: It is hard, we have to have evidence. We have to show proof. Otherwise, you can be sued, especially when you are talking to the cronies. So actually, you have to find everything to prove your story first and then you present it to them. It is hard the other way. I would like to ask many more questions, but then my editors say: What if people get angry and you cannot prove anything? So to stay neutral, I cannot report it.

Interviewer: What else have you noticed since the censorship has been lifted?

Ko Ko: It is nice now to write about politics. Much more exciting. Every day we are trying something new. There is so much changing right now, and it is nice to read a text the way you meant it. The government used to think they knew better. But now we are reporting, and our readers give a lot of responses on Facebook. Also a lot of rumours, and then they ask us: Is this true? Is that true? Unfortunately we cannot investigate most of the time, but we try to stay in contact with them.

Interviewer: How did you report on Meiktila?

Ko Ko: I don't know for sure because that is not my beat. But I think reporters went as a group, to protect each other.

Interviewer: What is your beat?

Ko Ko: I am a local reporter. I do reports around Yangon.

Interviewer: Where, in your opinion, are the limits of press freedom in Myanmar today?

Ko Ko: I think we have to be careful about religion. People are very emotional sometimes because this is what they know and do every day, you know? And it is also something that they want to keep. It is not like politics. It is important. People want to know that we are Buddhist and we report about Buddhism.

Interviewer: Only about Buddhism?

Ko Ko: I think almost all people are Buddhist, so when we report about the Sangha or about what monks say, people are really interested.

Interviewer: You said you do local reports. How did you report on the Muslim boys burned in the madrasa?

Ko Ko: Yes, that was also, I mean, I think you have to balance. I think we have to be for peace as journalists. So I reported on it, but didn't report on everything. Some information that you have, can lead to more violence. It is our neighborhood and we don't want that. We have to be very careful.

Interviewer: What role do you think you are taking in balancing the information?

Ko Ko: You know, sometimes people are very angry and they say very mean things. So I don't put them in my report. I try to include the interviews which are balanced. I don't want to get into trouble and we don't want trouble in Yangon.

Interviewer: How is the cooperation with the government?

Ko Ko: You mean the censorship board?

Interviewer: No, but that also...

Ko Ko: Oh, it's okay. We are free to write now. We can report on Aung San Suu Kyi and about the conflict in Kachin, also about environmental issues. So they don't say anything. The only thing is, there is no real law yet. Aung San Suu Kyi says we have to have rule of law. I think it is a good idea. So then you can say, this is my right and this is not my right. You have a law for you to back up. And you also need good courts that rule after the law. I think if this will change, we can be free.

Interviewer: Thanks a lot!

RMT1

U Aung Zyi - Reader 1

Male, 68 years

Interviewer: What do you like to read best?

U Aung Zyi: I like the reports about Aung San Suu Kyi best. I hope she will become our president.

Interviewer: How free is the press now, in your opinion?

U Aung Zyi: Yes, I have the feeling everything is free now. I am no expert so maybe you should also talk to the journalists. But it is really different now. And I hope it will last.

Interviewer: What did you read before the censorship was abolished?

U Aung Zyi: I read political news...I read mostly The Voice, I prefer that to other newspapers.

Interviewer: But you just bought Eleven Weekly, what do you like about it?

U Aung Zyi: Eleven is really good for coverage in other regions, and my family lives in Rakhine state. So when the riots in Meiktila were happening, I mostly read this.

Interviewer: How did you know what to believe when everything was filtered?

U Aung Zyi: Well, we couldn't know.

Interviewer: In the newspapers nowadays, what do you still miss?

U Aung Zyi: Everything is interesting these days. I have the feeling that I have to read it all. I also like the entertainment and sports pages, but I have the feeling I can trust in

the political reports a lot more.

Interviewer: How well do you think the press represents you?

U Aung Zyi: It is good. Here in Yangon, I read about what is happening. I don't know about the other regions though. We have a lot of ethnic groups and there are some groups that I have only started to read about now. I remember learning about them in school, what their clothes look like and what languages they speak. But I don't think they can be represented very well, just a little bit.

Interviewer: Why?

U Aung Zyi: Because they live very far away. Most of us cannot travel there. Sometimes a journalist also cannot go. I know this because I cannot go and you need permission from the government. You also have to pay money sometimes. Maybe they can do that now, because I can read about things in other regions.

Interviewer: What kind of things have you noticed?

U Aung Zyi: I can read about the Kachin Army and about KIO. I think before you couldn't talk about them, because they are fighting with the Tatmadaw. And about Aung San Suu Kyi. Two years ago, a newspaper printed her photo, and people liked it a lot. It was right before she could leave her house. But the next week, we couldn't buy the paper.

Interviewer: And do you think that this could happen today as well?

U Aung Zyi: Oh I don't know. I think Thein Sein wants democracy. We want democracy. We want elections. So maybe if he is strong enough he will not let this happen. I hope so.

Interviewer: When you said your family lives in Arakan state, have you read about the riots? What did you read?

U Aung Zyi: Yes, a lot. There were fires and the villages burned. I was worried about my family. It's not easy because now everybody is saying the Bengalis (Rohingyas) started it. I think the reason was that they hurt a monk. You cannot hurt a monk in Myanmar, you have to respect our religion, If you don't then people will also not respect

your religion.

Interviewer: Have you also read some quotes or interviews from the Rohingyas or were there only Buddhist people interviewed?

U Aung Zyi: No, the journalist also talked to the Bengalis. He went there and asked what happened. And the man said they came and burned our houses and they had knives. Even the journalist said he was very afraid of the mob, of the people. Everybody was so angry. I just think we have to respect each other's feelings.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you read that you found new and interesting?

U Aung Zyi: Oh yes, I also read about the mine protests. The police came and they were very violent.

Interviewer: Oh, is that the incident when they used white phosphorus to disperse the people?

U Aung Zyi: Yes, exactly. So sometimes, you have to think and know what is happening, you know. Because it was like this: The police gave a statement and said, we are not trained, and we found some weapons and we used them on the people to raise the level of security. But we didn't know it was so dangerous and that people now have burned faces and limbs. Sorry, but I don't believe this. It doesn't say anything about it in the press, they just presented the statements. But in previous times, the military was just as brutal. Very violent. If they didn't know, why did they use it? So I like that the newspaper can now print some interviews also with the locals. They don't have to give their name. But they can tell what has happened and you can think for yourself. That is better!

Interviewer: Thank you very much!

RMT2

Anonymous - Reader 2 (Translation by Nilar)

Male, 50 years

Interviewer: Why do you like to read this newspaper?

Reader 2: Honestly, I read all kinds of newspapers. I will go and buy 7Days News and Eleven Media, but then I also go to friends and borrow their papers when they are finished. Then I exchange the papers I have read after work with them. I think it is really interesting to read the different perspectives on topics. And just yesterday, the first daily newspapers came out. I bought Golden Fresh Land, because I remember the publisher from way back. He once lived close to my aunt's house. He was not allowed to publish for a long time and now he can publish his own paper.

Interviewer: What topics in political news are you interested in?

Reader 2: I read everything! I think everything is very interesting. But mostly, I like politics. We could not read about political topics before. There was only entertainment and sports, and now I like to follow up with what is happening.

Interviewer: In your opinion, how free is the media now?

Reader 2: Actually, I think the media can be free now, but I think they should write more sincere and honest. I still think that there is a little something missing... it is not like they can write everything about the government. There are many interviews now with people and I feel like they are very free and speak their mind, but you don't really read government interviews. I have a lot of questions about economy and the government and I would like the journalists to ask more.

Interviewer: Do you trust the journalists?

Reader 2: Fifty percent. It is not so easy to decide sometimes because we have had a lot of propaganda in the past. The only newspapers were from the government, and there were a lot of things in there which were either not interesting or not true.

Interviewer: Which newspaper do you trust the most?

Reader 2: Eleven Media is probably my favorite, it is quite reliable. They also have good local coverage. Apart from that, I try to read a different weekly everyday. On Sundays, I read the Messenger, and on Thursdays, I read The Voice. That is because they have new editions on different days, so I try to keep up to date.

Interviewer: What have you noticed in the press since last year?

Reader 2: Well, I feel like I can read more freely now, it is more interesting suddenly. It is more reflected what is written, and since the censorship had been lifted, I also want to know more about politics. This is where I start and these topics are what I read most. Before the censorship was lifted, I was not so interested in politics and read mostly about sports. But now I can see what is going on, for example also in other regions. We have a lot of ethnic groups in our country, and we could never read about them. But now there are interviews with tribes and independent army leaders from the civil war zones. If you don't have this information and you don't even know where there is fighting in your country, it is like you can't see. Or some other political parties, it is very interesting to hear their ideas for Myanmar and the future. I think it is good that the media is free and that they can report on them. For example, some ethnic group members are now appearing in the paper and you can think about what they say and mean. I never read about them before. But they are also Myanmar, so they should be in it. And I own some shops here and also am very interested in local economy reports. For example, there are some new rules on foreign investment in Yangon. Maybe there will be banks opening up. They also put a money machine next to the Trader's (hotel, the author), and I read about it before. I discuss a lot with my friends and my family about politics now. Actually, I feel like the news are somehow more up to date, but I think that is because there is a lot happening in Myanmar right now.

Interviewer: Do you think there is something still missing?

Reader 2: Just a little bit. I think that most of the journals lack some experience. So sometimes they don't represent everyone, they are unbalanced or they write in a very bad way. And about the ethnic groups again, I think that sometimes when I read about them, the journalists are biased. You can feel that they have an opinion and they just want to get it out to the people. And one thing that I am also missing is more coverage about corruption. In business, there is so much corruption on very high levels. But the journalists don't dare to write that, they just focus on small cases and middlemen. But someday, I hope we can bring justice to everyone with the media. But we first have to have rule of law.

Also, I think the journalists can use their power, so they should write about bribery from a grassroots level and treat everyone equal. I want the journalists to write about the

higher levels as well. If I could, I would also like to read international media to see what they report about Myanmar, but my English is not good enough.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. Can I please have your name?

Reader 2: I am sorry but I would prefer to not give you my name, because I used to work for the government.

RMT3

U Khin Sein, Newspaper Seller - Reader 3

Interviewer: How long have you been reading this journal?

U Khin Sein: I think about one or two years now.

Interviewer: So that means you know the paper from before and after the censorship lift. Can you tell me what is different now?

U Khin Sein: Overall, I think it is fair to say it has improved a lot. I think it is way more free, you can see that in the way it is written, but not 100% free. I would say, the news is 30% percent free.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what exactly makes you think that?

U Khin Sein: There are some topics that I missed for a long time, and that's very nice to read about it. I love reading everything about The Lady (Aung San Suu Kyi, the author) and it is really interesting to hear about the NLD and where she travels. I like her a lot, she is intelligent and eloquent. You couldn't read about any of that before, so politics were really boring. It was just what the generals said, without any other voices. Just like advertising. Now I can read about the opposition again, and that makes me happy. On the other hand, sometimes when I read an opinion piece I am not really sure what to think of it.

There are a lot of newspapers that are published by the government or the USDP and also from the military. It was not hard to tell where a paper came from, you know? It was easy because the private newspapers always write more news, while the government papers published more commentary and opinion. There was more of "do this, do that". Actually, I am also a newspaper seller, and I can sell much more private newspapers now because I think people are interested in what people think. You know? The only problem is that the government has more money, so they can sell their paper very cheap. But I don't know many people who really read it. The private papers sell so much better.

Interviewer: What exactly are you still missing?

U Khin Sein: I think we have to have reconciliation with the tribes. Only when there's peace is when we can go forward. But I don't really think that all the ethnic conflicts and tribes can be represented in the paper. That is because the journalists have to write about everything that is happening all around Myanmar, and there is just no room sometimes. Or wait - actually, there is one journal that covers ethnic issues. It is called Union Journal and it only writes about ethnic groups. But I think they should also be included in the political news journals that everybody buys, because it is important.

Interviewer: How much trust do you have in journalists?

U Khin Sein: When I used to sell papers or when I read here at the newsstand of my friend, what I do sometimes is take two papers from the same day and read articles about the same thing. And then I notice that the articles are very different, they are not the same at all. So I don't really trust them so much, we have to think for ourselves to find out what can be true.

Interviewer: During censorship, how did you get your information?

U Khin Sein: The journals we read were the same as before, but you just wouldn't see this kind of pictures here (points to coverage of NDL convention, Aung San Suu Kyi speaking). They just censored everything. Back then, when I wanted to get information, I listened to the Burmese Service of the BBC. Mostly, though, I talked to people who knew people outside of the country. A lot of the information back then was via word of mouth. But of course that was only for very big issues, we had no chance of getting good local political news. Now the difference is that we can read everything and also see all the pictures. I think what happens now is that we are living in an Internet era. It has come very fast! So I almost don't need the radio anymore, I talk to people from outside or when I really want to get some specific information, you can find everything on the internet.

Interviewer: How well informed do you feel?

U Khin Sein: It's good. We have a lot of political journals now, and they are getting more. I think that is a good thing. Because of Thingyan holidays they came out now and then there is a two-week break*. I really like Thingyan, but there is a kind of vacuum now. Because the weeklies have put a lot of articles on the holiday season in it, everything is entertainment and so on. That means, there is no real news for three weeks. But in general, I feel well informed reading private papers.

(*Thingyan, or Water Festival, is the name of the Burmese New Year, usually celebrated in April and encompassing a near-complete shutdown of all public life for

two weeks apart from celebrations on the street and in private homes.)

RMT4

Zin Phyu - Reader 4

Female, 39 years.

Interviewer: So I just saw you bought the Myanmar Times. Can you tell me a little about why you like to read this paper?

Zin Phyu: Yes, I usually buy it and then pass it on to friends and my father. I kind of started to read it because I sometimes read it at work when I'm bored. I work in a hotel and some of our international guests have to read it, because it's the only newspaper in English.

Interviewer: Oh, really? I thought there were two...

Zin Phyu: Well okay, there is the New Light of Myanmar, it is a daily paper but that is not really a good newspaper.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Zin Phyu: You know, people use it to clean cars or something like that. Because it is not really news, it is just like... propaganda. There is no real news in it, just the government's voice. It is also in Burmese.

Interviewer: How can you tell it's only propaganda?

Zin Phyu: You know... I don't know if you saw them, but on Pansodan (Pansodan Street in Yangon) very high up we have some of those big big signs in the road side. They are put up by the government and they have four objectives. Back about six years ago, they were everywhere in Yangon, also on television. And what they said was also in the newspaper.

Interviewer: What did they say?

Zin Phyu: Like... how can I say? „Destroy all enemy power“ and so on. Now when I

buy another newspaper, they are gone. There are sometimes job offers instead, especially in the Myanmar Times. Or advertising. It's better.

Interviewer: That's right, sorry we got sidetracked! We were talking about the Myanmar Times and why you enjoy reading it...

Zin Phyu: Yes, I read it because there is more to read. It's big. Like longer interviews and more people speaking. The only problem is that it is too expensive, so I usually don't buy it but read it in the hotel. And then I like the job offers and also I think it looks more like a professional newspaper. The pictures and the text look better. And just more pages, and also a little more international news. I think it is because the boss is not from Myanmar. But the reporters are from Myanmar. But most Myanmar people don't read it. They like 7Days or Eleven or The Voice because it is more close to Burmese people.

Interviewer: How exactly are they closer?

Zin Phyu: Hm, I don't know how to say it. Maybe it is because of the language. Or because they write more about singers from Myanmar and actors. You know, famous people. And then they use Myanmar words only, not English. You know, some people trust these papers more.

Interviewer: So can you tell me what has changed since the censorship has been lifted?

Zin Phyu: Okay, so firstly a lot of taboo topics are now openly discussed. That is very good. The environment for example. The Chinese have a big influence and they set up projects everywhere, but sometimes they move people for it. Then there are protests, and I can see pictures of the protests. And also hear people voice their opinion in the paper, people like villagers and why they are against it. If I go back six years or so, people would still only talk silently. They whispered because they were not sure who is listening. Now I feel that people are also openly discussing the stories in the paper. It is like a confirmation, you know? They think if something is in the paper, then it is okay to talk about it as well. Well, I don't know because I am not so professional. I just think now when I go to the newsstand, sometimes also the seller tells me what papers have which news inside. That is something he never used to do, you know?

Interviewer: Why does he do that?

Zin Phyu: Because before the papers only had the same news. You buy one paper

and you know everything. Because they were all the same. It's boring! Now it is more about politics in every paper, and I also think that the writers have more of an opinion than before. They are allowed to write an opinion and also to write about politics.

Interviewer: You seem really interested in the topic, how did that come about?

Zin Phyu: Well I read the newspaper and about the censorship, I remember reading about that in the Myanmar Times. It was a big article about how happy the journalists are and that they are going to test it and hope it will stay. And also, there are different pictures. We could never see a picture of The Lady (Aung San Suu Kyi) before. But in this year I have seen so many already. You see, just over there they are selling T-shirts with her picture. She had a party conference some weeks ago.

Interviewer: Yes, that was right here in Yangon! Can you tell me a little more about how the newspapers have changed?

Zin Phyu: Oh, there are also some new newspapers. Like Golden Fresh Land for example. They can publish now every day, just like New Light of Myanmar. But I don't know for example if they can really be free now because I haven't read them. I think it is much better now. But for example, in Myanmar there are many corrupt people. Corrupt is when you only do something for money. It is very much a problem also in hotel business and about the properties here in Yangon, the houses. In business, you should have a fair competition about who gets the permission to build or own something. We have a lot of problems with that here, everything is in the dark and in the end, only people close to the Tatmadaw get the license. But actually, I have never seen anything in the paper like this.

Interviewer: And is there anything else that you miss?

Zin Phyu: I like the local political news. I hope when the elections are next year, the newspapers will write about the politicians and what they want to do. And I also like to read about telecommunication news. I like to have a phone but it is very expensive. Now I think there will be some new SIM-cards coming soon so it will drop in price.

Interviewer: Now unfortunately I can't speak Burmese. What changes have you noticed in the tone and language?

Zin Phyu: It has changed, it is more... there is more opinion in it. I don't know how to say it. Like sharper? Less boring.

Interviewer: Where else do you get your news?

Zin Phyu: I also watch TV at work. I watch DVB sometimes at my sister's house. And then I also read other newspapers at work. But still, mostly I also talk to people, like neighbors. They also have news, you know?

Interviewer: So communicating with other people is also a good source. How well do you feel informed by the journals?

Zin Phyu: I think when I read the Myanmar Times it is like a good starting point, but then to get deeper and when I want to know more, I also watch DVB and talk to friends. A journal is fine, but sometimes I want to see moving pictures.

RMT5

Daw Ei Ei - Reader 5

Female, 58 years

Interviewer: How long have you been reading 7Day News?

Daw Ei Ei: I think about four or five years now. I don't always buy it, but I read it every week. Sometimes my son buys it, and sometimes I borrow a copy from my neighbors.

Interviewer: And what do you like about it?

Daw Ei Ei: I like it because they often have Special reports.

Interviewer: What are special reports?

Daw Ei Ei: For example, they report something about Kachin or about the Bengalis (Rohingya).

Interviewer: What do you like about that?

Daw Ei Ei: I like it that there is a topic that only this journal has. About three years ago, the newspapers had the same news every day. Not now. It is different. The journalists can also go to Mon state or Kachin to report. We had never read anything about these areas from there before.

Interviewer: In your opinion, how free is the media?

Daw Ei Ei: I think it is more free, but not really free.

Interviewer: Why not?

Daw Ei Ei: Maybe they are still afraid to write a little bit. Sometimes it is like they are writing only rumors and next week they have to correct it. They have to learn to write

better and face the government with our problems. Before we only had propaganda. Now we want truth.

Interviewer: What problems would you like to read about?

Daw Ei Ei: Maybe about corruption or why the mobile phones are still so expensive. And so often the power is out. But many things are changing in the press. We have more books now. And now there are also newspapers every day. Before, it was only every week and they were very much what the government wanted.

Interviewer: How well do you feel represented?

Daw Ei Ei: It's good. I sometimes think it would be nice to read more about Buddhist events and maybe about what famous monks say. It is inspiring.

Interviewer: What are you still missing?

Daw Ei Ei: I want to read more about politics. And I would also like to read some health issues. Have you eaten the food from the street here? Don't do that. Most of the vendors are not really educated about hygiene. You can get sick. I was sick so many times, then I stopped eating from the street. Only one lady on Anawratha... she is the one I trust. She uses a plastic cover for her hands and clean water when she washes the plates. But not everybody does that. I think maybe if we can read about good hygiene in the paper, the street food would become more clean because people know when to wash hands and when to cover food. It is dangerous for kids to get so sick. And when parents have to pay for drugs, they have many problems. So I think the journalists should write more about that.

Interviewer: And if you think about political news?

Daw Ei Ei: Well, I think also about the hospitals. They are not good and sometimes dirty. Maybe the politicians could buy more medication so people don't have to pay everything. Why is that? We are a poor country. We cannot pay for surgery. I want the press to ask the government: please help our people when they are sick.

RMT6

Myo Thu, male,

24, Student

Interviewer: So I saw you just bought the Mynamar Times. What do you like about this paper?

Myo Thu: It's more of a magazine style. I use it to practice my English and to look for jobs. But I share with my friends. Normally I will read bit by bit over the weekend, and news first.

Interviewer: What changes have you noticed since the lift of censorship?

Myo Thu: Well, first of all, there are more and more journals on the market. Then they have become more colorful, bigger pictures, more variety. Also, they can write about opposition parties. Aung San Suu Kyi is suddenly everywhere. I remember she was banned from public life. You couldn't mention her, not even in public. After she was released, it all went pretty quick. And I also noticed that the word democracy is now in the press. When I was still in school, I never read it.

Interviewer: And what about the content in the journal?

Myo Thu: My experience is that there is much more about politics in the journal. For example, parliamentary debates. That came along when Thein Sein became president. It feels more like ideas are discussed instead of just announced. Previously, the Myanmar Times had articles that were no articles. They were boxes with propaganda. Now I can even read critical articles. That is unusual because people say the paper is close to the government. So I suppose they allow that now.

Interviewer: What has changed about the freedom of topics you read?

Myo Thu: I can't really say. There are still things that are taboo to talk about but everybody knows. Like for example, how the military treats people when they need workers for their projects. I have seen it on DVB but not in the paper. But there are signs that they will get there, for example last week, there were protesters against police violence on the front cover. So I feel like I can trust the journal in these cases but not in everything, because they might be too afraid. So when I really want to know more I go online and look on Facebook and Youtube. The internet is not blocked anymore.

Interviewer: How can you tell that the press is free?

Myo Thu: I think for most Burmese, Aung San Suu Kyi is kind of a test. If she is free, if her speeches are in the paper, then something must be going okay. Now on this last

issue that I bought, the NLD party conference was the main topic on the front cover. So that is giving us confidence. The problem is, we are still careful who to trust. We Burmese hope that the freedom will last, but it has been very different for so long. So that is why people are careful.

Interviewer: What are you still missing?

Myo Thu: Personally, I would like to read interviews with the government. Interviews where they ask critical questions. For example, there are new laws, but people are still very poor. How will they change that? I think that in a system going towards democracy, this kind of questioning should be standard. Currently, I think mostly they are still just issuing statements. Media might be too shy because in the past there have been a lot of arrests. And I also want to ask ministers about education. Look, I wanted to study literature, but when I started I could only study business. Why is that? Why do I have to travel one hour every day to my campus? I think the answer is because the government wants to keep us apart, so we don't collect ideas and protest. And this is not democracy. If the media addressed this problem, more people would discuss it. That is my opinion. Education is important to everyone. If our country wants to progress, they need to connect us young people instead of being afraid of them.

Interviewer: How free do you think the media is?

Myo Thu: They can write what they want, so I think they are free. But some of them have restrictions on travelling to conflict areas for security reasons. To know what is happening there and what the ethnic parties want, they should be allowed to go there.

Interviewer: And how do you think the media did in reporting on the conflicts in Meiktila and Kachin?

Myo Thu: I think it was good. The Myanmar Times tried a balancing middle way. Everybody should have their say. And when you compare papers, you see how they are positioned in the conflicts.

Appendix II - Interview Guide

Introduce myself, about the thesis, what I'd like to do with it

Ask if interpreter is required?

Ask if confidentiality is required?

Ask if taping is okay?

Icebreaker Question:

Journalists:

How did you get into journalism?

Readers:

Why do you like to read (journal)?

Both groups:

What are the major changes you noticed since the lift of censorship?

In your opinion, how free is the media in Myanmar?

How likely is this freedom to last?

Readers:

How well do you feel represented by the journal?

What topics do you like to read about best?

What are you still missing?

Journalists:

How can you report on sensitive topics now?

Where are the limits of press freedom?

Where are the biggest challenges you face as a journalist?

How did you feel after the lift of censorship?

How is the relationship to the government?

How critical can you be?

+ Room for Ad-hoc Questions

Appendix III – Final Categories System

Dimension 1: System of Regulation fostering Freedom of Expression

Category 1.1. Legal and Policy Framework

Category 1.2. Defamation and unwarranted legal restrictions

Category 1.3. Censorship

Category 1.4. Government pressure

Category 1.5. Access to information

Dimension 2: Media as a platform for democratic discourse

Category 2.1. Representation and Service to Society

Category 2.2. Self-Regulation

Category 2.3. Public Trust and Confidence in Media

Category 2.4. Safety of Journalists

Category 2.5. Media Accountability

Dimension 3: Professional Capacity Building and Support

Category 3.1. Access to Media Training

Category 3.2. Access to Academic Media Courses

Category 3.3. Availability of Trade Unions and Professional Organisations

Dimension 4: Infrastructural Capacity

Category 4.1. Access to Technical Resources

Category 4.2. Press, Broadcasting and ICT Penetration

Dimension 5: Development of Media Freedom

Category 5.1. Past Experiences

Category 5.2. Present Perceptions

Category 5.3. Future Predictions

Dimension 6: Media in Conflict and Reconciliation

Category 6.1. Kachin conflict

Category 6.2. Intercommunal violence and religious violence

Declaration

I herewith declare that the present thesis is a product of my own work and I used no published or unpublished sources and aids other than those indicated.

All sentences or parts of sentences that have been quoted literally or analogously have been identified as quotations. This thesis has not previously been submitted either in whole or part to another examination board.

Place

Date

Signature