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Foreign Donor Support to the Afghan Media 2002-2010

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the development of the media in Afghanistan 2002-2010 and in particular the impact of international assistance to the sector – funding, training and experts – in the post-Taliban period. The research was primarily qualitative, consisting of a survey of local media workers and longer interviews with some key players. The thesis argues that foreign donor support for media development in post-conflict societies can only work when key aspects of a democratic system are already in place and there is national security. It also argues that foreign support for the media in fragile societies like Afghanistan needs to be targeted, it needs to be in place for many years, and to be primarily focused on creating a viable non-state media sector.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The area of research

This thesis focuses on the impact and effectiveness of a range of (largely foreign-funded) support designed to promote press freedom and media plurality in Afghanistan in the post-Taliban period, i.e. from 2002. These initiatives include: the training of reporters, editors and technicians; the supply of broadcast and printing equipment; foreign expertise and knowledge; and capacity building in order to create a legal framework for independent journalism and freedom of speech in Afghanistan.

My interest in this subject stems from long professional experience in Afghanistan and Central Asia. I managed a UN news and information project in Kabul from 2002-2006. More recently I have run media development projects for OSCE in Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Witnessing the international initiative to give life to a free media in Afghanistan in the optimistic days after the end of the Taliban I was interested to see if the form of journalism we take for granted in many developed democracies could take root in Afghanistan. In addition, 2002 was really the first time that the international community funded such comprehensive efforts to build a new media culture in a post-conflict society. Usually, like in Cambodia and Rwanda, after the civil wars there,

media initiatives had not gone much further than foreign-funded radio stations supporting the election process. For these reasons the subject matter was chosen.

The thesis will attempt to locate initiatives to promote freedom of expression in countries with closed or non-existent media cultures, like Afghanistan, within existing theories of the media and its role in a democracy. The thesis looks at the trusteeship model of journalism and media-centric theory and asks how appropriate such models are when promoted and funded in places where the traditional institutions in a democracy - such as a freely elected parliament, an independent judiciary and a functioning government - are absent or in their infancy.

The idea of a free media in Afghanistan is a novel and recent one. When the fundamentalist Taliban movement was ousted from power in late 2001, Afghanistan had very little functioning media, other than state radio that had been renamed Voice of Shariah and reflected the values of the Taliban. Voice of Shariah only broadcast Taliban propaganda and religious sermons. Prior to the Taliban taking over in 1996, the Afghan broadcast media was state-run and the private press, when allowed to function under various regimes, was frequently censored by authorities.

Given this background, many of the developments that have occurred across the media sector in Afghanistan since 2002 should be seen in a positive light. Currently, in late 2010 in Afghanistan there are seven private television networks, more than 50 independent radio stations and at least 40 functioning newspapers and magazines. Radio is the dominant medium of news and information in Afghanistan due to low literacy levels and poverty. Radio reaches approximately 62 % of the Afghan population according to recent BBC and Asia Foundation national surveys.

Along with this growth in the quantity and variety of media in Afghanistan, work has begun on a coherent legal framework for journalism and the media, a press complaints commission, a media ombudsman, and a national training facility to boost professionalism and responsibility. A new press law passed in 2002 was one of the most liberal in the region and helped promote the country's divergence into private media.

Most observers view this rapid media growth as encouraging, and at least

in the early part of the last decade, played a role in promoting freedom of expression and public participation in political and social life. Shoaib Sharifi, a prominent Afghan journalist, told the author in an interview in 2010 that: “The new media was an important ingredient in trying to foster a sense of national unity and collective purpose after decades of conflict in Afghanistan. Journalists played a key role in informing the public about presidential and parliamentary elections in 2004 and 2005 and for the first time in history, politicians had to submit themselves to a degree of media scrutiny before, during and subsequent to the elections.”

Access to impartial news and information from a variety of sources has established itself firmly in Afghanistan and recent research by the BBC and the Asia Foundation shows there is strong public support for these developments. Despite these important changes, the Afghan media sector in 2010 remains fragile and in most cases is struggling to sustain itself. The non-state media sector, where most of the important developments have occurred, has been almost entirely supported by foreign donor funds to date. Most of the support - that began from 2002 - was predicated on the assumption that peace and economic development in Afghanistan would result in the private sector becoming self-supporting and financially independent within a few years.

Neither of these things has happened. There has been a marked deterioration in the past three years in security as the Taliban and other rebel groups have increased their grip on the south and east of the country. Without security, infrastructural and economic progress has been piecemeal at best. Afghanistan is the second poorest country in the world according to the UNDP's Human Development Index for 2009. Efforts to develop appropriate and sustainable media business models have begun, and include attracting advertising to radio and magazines, as well as sponsorship. But the poverty, insecurity, ongoing conflict, and lack of infrastructure and investment mean most media in Afghanistan look set to be dependent on outside assistance for some years to come. This underlying constraint suggests that further consolidation and growth in the sector need to be guided by targeted, strategic, longer-term support.

This thesis seeks to contribute to the debate on the best way of sustaining the fledgling media sector in Afghanistan by seeking out and presenting the views of those currently working in, and shaping, the media in the country.

The thesis draws on exclusive research qualitative carried out by the author in conjunction with the Afghan media NGO Nai. The research in Afghanistan took place in early 2010. The methodology consisted of a questionnaire survey of Afghan journalists supported by a series of interviews with key actors, including NGOs working to promote media in Afghanistan, UN staff, and leading Afghan media workers.

1.2 The research problem

While many countries, international organisations and NGOs have funded a variety of projects and programmes assisting the media in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001 there have been few studies on how effective this support has been. The need for research into the Afghan media sector is pressing; eight years on, foreign donor commitment to the country is decreasing and US support for nation building is being wound down.

Shrinking foreign interest in Afghanistan suggests that donors need to target their resources more carefully and need to demonstrate that their funding and expertise, in areas like media promotion, is being put to the best use possible. Accessing credible independent studies on how and

why donor support has made a difference is thus important if foreign support to Afghan journalism, the media and press freedom is to continue.

The studies that do exist on media development in Afghanistan since 2002 could not be described as independent: most have been commissioned by donors, or take the form of statistical audience research by international broadcasters keen to demonstrate Afghans are listening to their output. The research that does exist, particularly that which is funded externally, tends to focus on the views and opinions of foreign officials and development workers, often failing to convey the experiences of the Afghans working in the media. These are the people who will have to sustain and manage the media sector in the future - long after the donors have left.

So this analysis focuses on the Afghan view, though not at the expense of relevant external parties. It highlights what Afghan journalists think about outside assistance to the media sector, what they believe works best (when, for example, is imported foreign expertise more useful than training locals?) and at what stage in the development process it is most appropriate. For example, one respondent asked what use is there training journalists to act as society watchdogs if there is no democracy, no

system of justice, and no laws protecting them in their work.

1.3 The objective of the thesis

One key outcome of this thesis is that the findings be accessible and relevant. One hopes the results and conclusions can be used to inform and shape policy on media-related foreign assistance to post-conflict countries like Afghanistan. The objective of the questionnaire, interviews and analysis of existing research is to be able to offer a comprehensive understanding of how the media scene has developed since 2002 and how, as far as those interviewed are concerned, donor assistance has helped shape that development. The thesis then uses the research to try and draw some distinctions between foreign media support that has done little to promote the sector, and foreign media support that has genuinely contributed to the development of the quality, quantity and diversity of the Afghan media since early 2002.

Media development and related programmes designed to assist freedom of speech and expression in post-conflict countries is a growth area. The promotion of a diverse and free media by donors and international organisations is becoming an increasingly popular dimension of the wider goal to promote peace, stability and development in many countries that have emerged from war and civil strife. If this research can contribute to

better targeting of foreign support to local media in fragile, conflict-ridden nations in the future then it will have achieved its objective.

1.4 The most relevant previous findings

Because Afghanistan is changing so rapidly, media and journalism surveys, research projects and studies carried out before 2007 have become rapidly obsolete. But referencing such studies is educational, if only to better chart the journey that Afghanistan's media have made since in the first decade of the 21st Century. Recent research carried out into the media in Afghanistan in the post-Taliban era can be broadly divided into three sectors: audience research surveys trying to find out how Afghans are consuming media; research into media freedom and freedom of speech under President Hamid Karzai; and project evaluation by donors and other interested parties into how money and human resources pledged to assist media in Afghanistan have been used.

1.5 Personal motivation for choosing the topic

I have worked as a journalist for nearly 18 years and have had a professional interest in Afghanistan and Central Asia for more than a decade. I have worked in Afghanistan and managed a UN news and information project there from 2002-2006. I have good contacts with Afghan journalists, as well as foreign and local media NGOs and

programmes. These contacts have facilitated access and made field research easier.

When I arrived in Afghanistan in 2002 to establish the UNOCHA IRIN humanitarian news and information service, it was encouraging to see international NGOs like USAID-funded Internews setting up a series of radio stations across the country – radio being the most appropriate medium of information in Afghanistan, given the poverty and illiteracy. But I began to question the usefulness of such foreign assistance when it was clear that the programme was not designed to be sustainable and merely part of a short-term plan to inform voters about the forthcoming presidential election in October 2004. In 2002, there were over 900 foreign NGOs operating in Afghanistan, the country was the flavor of the month for donors, and even the Afghan Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) was unable to prevent the competition, in-fighting and duplication that came to characterize the aid effort at that period.

USAID's media aid programme, and many similar projects, were highly politicised and appeared to many Afghans as part of promoting Washington's contemporary foreign policy objectives in Afghanistan (quickly fix the security problem, hold an election and declare the country a democratic "success story") and not designed to promote media

diversity. By 2007, most of those Internews radio stations had closed as Washington withdrew funding and focused increasing resources on stabilising Iraq. Another controversial pre-election media initiatives involved training reporters for just a week and then sending them out to produce quality journalism related to the poll. Most journalists in modern developed societies either serve an industry apprenticeship or undertake a university course of at least three years. Sultan Mahmood Massood now works on communications for an Afghan NGO, but in 2004 he trained with Internews on election reporting. “Of course I did learn many things that I did not know on the [election reporting] program, but one week did not in any way prepare me to be a journalist writing on this big election,” he told the author in an interview in 2007.

So the kind of donor funded initiatives mentioned above led me to question how effective foreign aid for the media in Afghanistan actually was. I began researching the topic with a view to incorporating some of these ideas into a lecture series I put together for the UPEACE Media, Peace & Conflict master’s degree course in April-May 2008. When I found there was little contemporary independent research I decided to conduct a study myself.

1.6 Research method in brief

The thesis is based on original research by the author and researchers from the NAI support Afghan Open Media project in Kabul. The majority of the research was carried out in spring 2010. The research consisted of a structured survey questionnaire targeting Afghan journalists and media workers operating in the capital Kabul, as well as other cities and rural locations. The questionnaire was devised by the author and translated from the original English into Dari and Pashto. An example of an English version of the completed questionnaire used in the survey can be found in Appendix 1.

In addition to the survey a number of interviews were carried out with journalists and media workers in key roles in Afghanistan during the period in question. These interviews include the views of those involved in substantive local media development initiatives, such as Internews, AINA Kabul, BBC World Service Trust and the NAI support Afghan Open Media project.

Chapter 2. Presentation of the Context

2.1 Current Security Context

I have begun this chapter with an overview of the current security situation in Afghanistan deliberately. Projects designed to promote the media and free speech (along with any other development work: education, infrastructure, women's empowerment, health etc.) only have a chance of sustainable success where there is peace and stability. As aid workers often remind the military, "there can be no development without security" – a phrase I have heard too often in the context of Afghanistan. At the end of the first decade of the new millennium, Afghanistan in many ways remains as precarious from a security, criminological, political and social perspective as it has been at any time in recent history. Even the relatively straightforward post-9/11 international military objectives – that need to prefigure the majority of real developmental objectives - i.e. capturing Osama Bin Laden, defeating Al Qaeda and neutralising the Taliban movement, are far from having been achieved.

A new president in the White House in January 2009 acknowledged the growing unpopularity of the war at home and the limitations of US military power in Afghanistan. Faced with these realities, the new

strategy announced in December 2009 of a troop surge followed by withdrawal in 2011, is unlikely to have any impact on the resurgent Taliban.

That timetable has already slipped back due to realities on the ground. By November 2010, US withdrawal had been revised to 2014, with air support and special forces remaining long after that. NATO leaders emerged from a Lisbon summit mid-November and announced a formal timetable aimed at ending combat operations and leaving security duties in local hands by the end of 2014.

There were 150,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan by August 2010 as the last of 30,000 extra US soldiers arrived, along with smaller numbers of additional forces from other nations. Troops are based in various parts of the country, but their efforts chiefly target the insurgency-wracked south and east.

Observers say the Taliban will be content to play a waiting game until foreign troop levels are low enough to allow their return in strength to Kabul and the major cities. Taliban finances, troop strength and local support are all in the ascendancy and the international community's

failure to tackle the opium trade (currently supplying 93% of the global opiates market, according to UNODC) ensures they will have a ready source of money to continue to fund the insurgency for years to come.

The current international security strategy for Afghanistan is to train, fund and arm the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) to take on and defeat the Taliban and other rebel groups, leading to a restoration of law and order. The coalition aims to build and train an Afghan army of up to 171,6000 personnel and for the number of national police officers to reach 134,000 by October 2011. Being able to create a national force of this kind, in the short period of the projected foreign troop current surge (2010-2014) does not appear realistic. If 150,000 of the best trained, equipped and led soldiers in the world cannot defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan, what chance will a hastily-constructed, badly paid army and police force, have?

The failure of the international community to defeat the Taliban, to achieve national security, and to extend the reach of President Hamid Karzai's weak government beyond Kabul, means that many of the development objectives for Afghanistan have not been met. The country continues to feature at the very bottom of the UNDP Human Development Index and billions of US dollars of aid remain unspent

because comprehensive reconstruction and development work cannot take place in a climate of poor security. The UN, that has been leading the development drive, has virtually ceased work in southern Afghanistan because of the ferocity of the insurgency. The UN's presence in the country is growing increasingly marginal. A suicide attack on a UN hostel in Kabul in November 2009 resulted in hundreds of international staff being relocated to neighbouring countries. Another such attack could cause the UN to pull out of Afghanistan all together, as it did in Iraq for a while after the August 2003 bombing of its HQ in Baghdad.

So many international and national ambitions for Afghanistan in the post-9/11 era remain largely unfulfilled. President Obama appeared to accept this reality when he unveiled his new strategy for Afghanistan in mid-2009: it does not have much to say about development assistance and nation-building and is mainly focused on preventing the Taliban from taking power through the temporary deployment of increased US military muscle.

2.2 Media landscape in Afghanistan before the Taliban

In a country as undeveloped as Afghanistan, one could be forgiven for thinking that the post-Taliban media are the first to enjoy a degree of autonomy, but in fact the first experiment with an independent media

sector began in the late 1940s and was restricted solely to newspapers. Prime Minister Shah Mahmud allowed relatively open elections and the establishment of a fairly liberal parliament. The new legislature soon passed a press law – the first of its kind in Afghanistan - that led to the launching of several newspapers, most of which were in opposition to the monarchy, the prime minister, or both. Conservative religious figures and their supporters in the government were the most frequent targets of attack. The experiment ended abruptly in 1953 when Mohammad Daud became prime minister and ordered the closure of independent newspapers.

The country's second major experiment with independent media began with the 1964 Afghan Constitution by King Mohammad Zahir. That document ushered in what is commonly referred to as Afghanistan's 'Decade of Democracy'. The 1964 constitution basically guaranteed freedom of expression and said that every Afghan could print and publish without prior screening by state authorities. To rein in some of this liberalism though, the government soon brought in the 1965 press law to regulate the media sector. This law forbade obscenity and any "matter implying defamation of the principles of Islam or defamatory to the King". While broadcast media remained pretty much state controlled, the

number of independent newspapers mushroomed under the new legal framework.

The next media shake-up came in 1973, after Mohammad Daud led a coup that ended the country's monarchy. Under Daud and the Communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (1978-1992) government control over the press tightened even further. Under the Communists, listening to Western radio broadcasts became a crime. The media became the means to spread ideological propaganda and the government's version of the war against the mujahidin. The seventies were characterised by a series of coups and weak governments, with growing Soviet influence leading to the invasion in 1979. Afghanistan became a Cold War battleground with Western support for the mujahidin finally leading to Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Five years of brutal faction fighting followed as warlords and ethnic militias fought for control of Kabul and the tattered economy.

The reality during this period was that neither side liked journalists very much. Reporters feared for their lives, for example, Mirwais Jalil, a young Afghan working for the BBC's Pahto Service was brutally murdered in 1994. One of the mujahidin faction leaders ordered Jalil's

execution shortly after being interviewed by him on the outskirts of Kabul.

2.3 Afghan media under the Taliban

The Taliban are a Pashtun militia strongly motivated by a fundamentalist version of Islam. The Taliban were created and supported by Pakistan in the early 1990s and had their origins in the refugee camps and religious schools of northern Pakistan. Led by Mullah Omar, the Taliban seized Kabul in September 1996, installing a radical Islamist regime recognised by only Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Pakistan.

But the Taliban were never strong enough to control all Afghanistan, so the United Front (Northern Alliance), mainly a non-Pashtun opposition coalition, retained strongholds in northeastern parts of the country. By the time the hard-line Taliban took control of Kabul the independent Afghan media had been dead twenty years.

Contrary to popular perception, there was journalism in Afghanistan during the Taliban, but of course very tightly controlled. The Taliban Ministry of Information and Culture estimated that there were more than a dozen state-owned newspapers around the country. There wasn't much in terms of imagery in these newspapers: in line with the Islamic ban on

human representation, their pages had few pictures. News was limited to official announcements, accounts of Taliban military victories, and anti-opposition propaganda. Journalist Shoaib Sharifi edited the Kabul Times during the late 1990s. “There were times that I was really afraid, there was total control in those days. Once there was a typing error I missed and I had to run to the printers to stop the presses, otherwise I would have been imprisoned or worse,” he said in an interview with the author in 2006. There were no news stands in Taliban Afghanistan: the papers were really only available in government offices. Radio Kabul became the Radio Voice of Islamic Law and was inevitably heavily oriented towards religious topics.

The Taliban take-over led to the exodus of the country's urban professionals, including most journalists. The majority fled to Pakistan, Iran or Central Asia. In Pakistan, still home to more than 2 million registered Afghan refugees and a million unregistered, these exiles launched the closest thing to an independent Afghan press in the late 1990s. Two news agencies, Afghan Islamic Press and Sahaar News Agency, fed reasonably credible news bulletins to Western wire services, and the first Afghan-owned daily newspaper started in Peshawar in the mid-1990s.

2.4 The Afghan media post-Taliban

When the Taliban movement was removed from power in late 2001 the strong radio culture was the obvious foundation on which to build a new media network for the country. Radio stations are relatively inexpensive to operate and can broadcast to a wide area, pretty much regardless of terrain and security. Listeners do not need an electricity supply – something of a rarity in rural parts of Afghanistan – meaning radio can be accessed by almost anyone with a battery receiver.

2.5 Foreign support to the Afghan media

Resources from abroad began to arrive in quantity in 2002 for media development programmes. The State Department-funded US NGO Internews helped establish a string of local radio stations and other foreign organisations, such as the French media specialists AINA and BBC World Service Trust, focused on training and media management.

There was also foreign support for other kinds of media, but because of the limited reach of television and newspapers (only 13% of Afghans had

seen a newspaper in the past month, and 26% of rural households had access to a TV according to the Afghan media survey prepared for the BBC World Service Trust in 2008) for the reasons cited above, these have had limited impact. The same survey found that 88% of respondents had listened to the radio in the past month.

In many ways the period 2003-2006 was the golden era of Afghan media, the highlight being extensive local media coverage of the presidential election in October 2004. Of course the election had many problems, and significant fraud was widespread, but many of those journalists interviewed for this thesis pointed to the poll as a landmark in Afghan journalism. The 2004 election was followed by parliamentary and provincial council elections in September 2005, again covered extensively by the fledgling press and broadcast outlets in the country.

Washington was upbeat about the outcome of the two elections and declared that Afghans had experienced real democracy - the process aided and fairly reported on, by the nation's free media. Studies such as the 2008 *United States Institute of Peace Media and Conflict: Afghanistan as a Relative Success Story* tended to support this positive view of the Afghan media during this period.

But the US was already preoccupied with its war in Iraq, following its invasion in March 2003 and with the trappings of a democracy in place in Afghanistan, failed to put in sufficient troops to combat the resurgent Taliban movement. This, coupled with other factors, spelt the beginning of the end of the glory days for the Afghan media.

The Taliban government was ousted by US-led international military intervention in December 2001 following the events of 9/11. The establishment of an internationally backed interim government led by Hamid Karzai ushered in dramatic changes for Afghanistan's media.

What are those gains and success stories? Most of the important developments have been in the independent sector. The Internews network of community radio stations and the Salam Watandar production service (14 hours of daily programming available to a network of 35 stations in 24 provinces), The Killid Group (an NGO working to strengthen the media), the Pajhwok Afghan News agency (leading independent news agency), the Centre for International Journalism (a key trainer of journalists), the Good Morning Afghanistan programme and the Radio Arman and Tolo TV project are all noticeable achievements of the international media development effort and a clear demonstration of the

Afghan media's diversity and potential.

Efforts to transform the state-run media since 2002 have proceeded very slowly, if at all. Although there was government commitment to transform Radio and Television Afghanistan into an editorially independent public broadcaster, to date this has not happened. In fact the situation in state TV and radio has deteriorated in recent years as an increasingly autocratic government has sought to use the state broadcaster more and more as a mouthpiece for its policies.

Radio remains the most important form of electronic communication in Afghanistan. A strong oral culture, problems of distribution, and low literacy rates are some of the major obstacles for the print media. Because of this and the high cost of television in a country as poor as Afghanistan, radio is the most popular medium in the country. The BBC Trust survey from April 2009 quoted earlier found that 86% of Afghan households have a working radio in the home, and 88% report having listened to a radio within the past month.

Mindful of this, big donors, like USAID, turned to Internews, an international media development organisation, to build community radio stations in Afghanistan. To date, Internews has established 32 independent community radio stations estimated to reach 11 million people, or 37% of the population. The agency's "station in a box" package of technical start-up needs costs \$12,000 to \$70,000, depending on the needs of the locality. To distribute national content to local stations, Internews established the Tanin and Salaam Watandar distribution networks. Tanin delivers copies of compact discs of national content by car to local stations. The network used to distribute between 250 and 300 radio programmes each month, but now a combination of poor security in the south and east, and reduced donor funding, have reduced this to under 100. Salaam Watandar provides a digital feed of live news and entertainment programming for re-broadcasting. These distribution networks have created a continuity of coverage throughout the country, ensuring that Afghans, to some degree, hear similar versions of national news events that have not been co-opted by the Taliban or government factions.

But Afghans, like most of us, want entertainment as well as news and information, so FM radio stations - especially music stations - have gained significant audience shares. Arman FM - a private station that

began broadcasting in May 2005 - is now the most popular station among the youth of Kabul. Arman now broadcasts in four other provinces.

Having said this, TV is gaining ground, particularly in town and cities. The BBC Trust survey published in January 2008 found that 89% of urban households but only 26% of rural households reported having access to a television either in the home or in a neighbor's home. There are some broadcast and cable stations in the cities and some access to satellite television remotely but most Afghans do not watch television regularly due to the economic constraints. Only 47% of people had viewed a television within the past month, according to the BBC Trust survey.

Tolo TV is the country's first commercial television network. It has proved extremely popular and broadcasts a steady stream of programming, including music videos and Indian soap operas. Tolo TV has become best known for producing and broadcasting 'AfghanStar'. Many Afghans say this one programme, modeled almost exactly on 'American Idols' has done more to bring the country together than any other media phenomena, although the country's extremely conservative religious establishment are opposed to it on moral grounds. In November

2007, the channel received warnings from Muslim clerics and the Culture Ministry for broadcasting a concert of popular Afghan female singer Shakira.

Most of these new media initiatives were made possible after the fall of the Taliban with financial assistance and professional expertise from foreign donors and specialised training and support NGOs such as Internews, the Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), AINA and the BBC world Service Trust. Although most of the growth in television has been urban, there are examples of self-sustaining TV stations in rural areas. The success of the Ghurian television station, set up in Herat's remote district of Ghurian by an Afghan who returned from exile in neighbouring Iran, indicates the potential for growth of television in the countryside. The station is now beaming three hours of broadcasting into 500 homes around Ghurian. The hope is that as incomes rise in Afghanistan, so will the number of TV viewers and stations. New technology is impacting on journalism in Afghanistan, as elsewhere, and the Internet and mobile phones are becoming increasingly important delivery platforms, particularly for news.

Katie Soulé, in her 2009 paper *The Media in Afghanistan – Post-Conflict Development and Policy Implications*, quoted earlier, argues that the initial success of the Afghan media after 9/11 is today threatened by a number of current challenges. The first and most important is the deteriorating security situation (discussed above); the weak judicial system and lack of an adequate legal framework to protect journalists; and the unsustainable financial model underpinning much of the contemporary media.

The role of a free press is often seen as a critical component of the democracy package for export: ideally counter-balancing the legislative, executive and judiciary as well as promoting political accountability and exposing corruption. But like the other three “estates” that have evolved over hundreds of years in mature democracies, can a free press be conjured up in a relatively short space of time to play the same watchdog role in societies with no comparable traditions?

2.6 The Afghan media and nation building

So we can see that the renaissance of the media in Afghanistan is indisputable; its effect on reconciliation and nation building, however, is quite difficult to assess. While the significant success of media like Tolo TV, Radio Arman and Radio Killid have, overall, contributed to a greater

sense of nationhood and common ground, they have done so in a way that sometimes creates as many problems as it solves in a nation made up of a number of ethnic groups that been at war for decades.

Take Tolo TV: A show like ‘Afghan Star’, as we have already seen, brought the nation together. It was difficult to find anyone not glued to their TV sets on Friday nights when the programme was broadcast. Does this bring the nation together? In one way perhaps it does in that the country is sharing a common viewing experience. But in other ways Afghan Star is simply highlighting the deep ethnic divides inherent in Afghan society. Many Afghans I have spoken to say the audience voter system means that often favourites are picked because the Tajik, Hazara or Pashtun ethnic groups are able to mobilise their communities to vote. The show has also run into difficulties in this deeply religious and traditional country: the success of women like Lima Sahar, who won in 2007, although seen by many as a boon for women in Afghanistan, has also engendered anger and strong reaction, by challenging the strongly patriarchal status quo - just by being on the show and singing.

Ethnic divisions emerge elsewhere. Many Pashtuns feel that TOLO TV is anti-Pashtun; this is also one reason why many mullahs are so publically opposed to it. In 2008 TOLO TV has had serious fights with the Attorney

General (a Pashtun) and with the minister of information and culture (another Pashtun). These confrontations are perhaps inevitable in a nation as ethnically diverse as Afghanistan – with the media reflecting and even amplifying some of the ethnic tension that has fuelled bitter conflict for decades.

So these deep ethnic divides are mirrored in recent developments in the media. In 2010 there is Pashtun TV and Dari TV, Pashtun radio and Dari radio. Only well-respected media organisations that have a reputation for impartiality, like the BBC, seem to be able to bridge the gap in contemporary Afghanistan. So, the media by itself cannot resolve these problems; indeed, it can, and does, exacerbate them when powerful warlords or ethnic leaders use their own media outlets for political gain.

Media ownership is also a key issue in Afghanistan and has a bearing on the wider picture of journalistic independence and impartiality. In an intensely poor country like Afghanistan it is not clear less clear whether there is media that can remain independent of entrenched political interests. Until there is a viable commercial base for media, outlets will need sponsors, with all that entails. Also, perhaps inevitably, private media is more respected, because it is seen as more independent than the public broadcaster that has a long way to go before it could be called

balanced and no longer the voice of the government.

But much of the private media that has emerged over the past decade is far from impartial. Many senior politicians and power brokers have their own media outlets in contemporary Afghanistan - broadcasting or printing material designed to bolster their public image or vilify the opposition. Tom Glaysier and Katherine Brown provide an overview in their article from September 2010 *Warlord TV* that appears on the news website of the New America Foundation. “Burhanuddin Rabbani, a former president and now head of the Islamic Society of Afghanistan and the opposition coalition, the Afghanistan National Front, owns the Noor ("Light") [TV] network. His station airs an evening talk show called End of the Line, featuring guests who mostly call in to complain about his political rival, President Hamid Karzai.” The powerful Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum controls Aina (“Mirror”) TV along with his brother.

Some see these private TV networks owned by the powerful as evidence of the growing plurality in the media others see them as unregulated propaganda tools that could play a major destabilising role if the country was to return to civil war.

Chapter 3 Overview of Related Literature

3.1 Introduction

Because Afghanistan is changing so rapidly, media and journalism surveys, research projects and studies carried out before 2007 have become rapidly obsolete. But referencing such studies is educational, if only to better chart the journey that Afghanistan's media have made since the early 2000's. Recent research carried out into the media in Afghanistan in the post-Taliban era can be broadly divided into three sectors: audience research surveys trying to find out how Afghans are consuming media; research into media freedom and freedom of speech in the Karzai era; and project evaluation by donors and other interested parties into how money and human resources pledged to assist media in Afghanistan has been used.

3.2 Audience Surveys

The majority of audience surveys during the period in question have been commissioned by larger, well-resourced international organisations - either broadcasting to Afghanistan or involved in media development - such as BBC World Service Trust, and NGOs like Internews or the Asia Foundation. The BBC carried out a comprehensive audience research survey in January 2008 in conjunction with the Afghan Center for Social

and Opinion Research (ACSOR) (1). The survey, *Afghanistan Media Survey Report Prepared for BBC Trust*, is of interest as it was by far the most comprehensive of recent audience studies. Logistical, security, resource and cultural (particularly with regard to interviewing women) limitations in a country like Afghanistan clearly hamper data collection and research outside the cities, but this survey is truly national in that it was conducted in all thirty-four provinces of Afghanistan. In addition, the research team carried out forty-eight interviews with urban and rural residents of Kabul, Nangarhar, Herat, and Balkh provinces.

Of course, audience research such as this provides an incomplete overview: the study was designed and executed primarily to find out how Afghans listen to and watch the BBC and its output, rather than soliciting views on media as a whole. Despite this inevitable bias, the survey is perhaps the most authoritative and comprehensive of its kind and is clearly relevant in that it provides an insight into the tastes, preferences and opinions of those that Afghanistan's media aims to serve. This survey is also of interest to donor countries and organisations that wish to assist the Afghan media to better cater for its audience, because it highlights some of the key trends as well as leading inconsistencies in the media sector as identified by consumers.

One key finding of the survey is that Afghans want more diversity in their information, news and current affairs, particularly on the radio – the leading medium of communication in the country and likely to remain so for some years to come. Despite continued high brand loyalty to the BBC, 53% of respondents agreed with the statement: “Other stations provide news and information that is as good as the BBC in Afghanistan these days” – only 12% disagreed.

The survey illustrates how viewing and listening habits are changing in Afghanistan. International networks like the BBC, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the US-sponsored Radio Azadi are increasingly competing with indigenous media, even in areas where broadcasters like the BBC are traditionally strong, like news. Many respondents said they increasingly turn to new private radio and TV outlets, even for breaking news. The sentiment of one interviewee is emblematic of this change. “I tune to Radio Arman and Tolo TV [leading private radio and TV stations] for good entertainment and news programs. I listen to BBC news broadcast for better analysis and information of the news.”

This survey and others like it, suggest that there is support for and appreciation of the growing number of non-state media, particularly radio

stations, in Afghanistan. Coupled with the fact that there has been significantly less progress in reforming state broadcast services in Afghanistan in the post-Taliban era, long term international donor support for the private sector is perhaps one of the best ways of providing the diversity, accountability and variety that Afghans appear to be demanding from their media in the 21st Century.

Other recent audience research worth examination includes a national study by the Asia Foundation in October 2009 - a comprehensive assessment of national perception in several key policy areas including security, economy, governance, democratic values, and women and society - of which media consumption habits make up one section (p137-p142). The study, *Afghanistan in 2009 A Survey of the People (2)* is key because it has been carried out regularly every year since 2004 and therefore allows the tracking of changes in Afghan society, including use of the media.

The survey underlines radio's continued dominance as the leading medium of communication due to a combination of poor access to technology like TV, Internet and mobile telephony, and the low levels of literacy amongst the Afghan population as a whole. The Asia Foundation 2009 data show that the great majority of Afghans say they never use

newspapers (75%), magazines (78%), SMS text messaging (81%) or the Internet (97%) as tools for acquiring news and information.

However, the use of informal means of obtaining news and information remains very common, the survey suggests. “Nearly half of respondents use meetings in the community (53%) or sermons in mosques (47%) for this purpose,” the survey states. This demonstrates that traditional means of information dissemination continue to remain important in Afghanistan. The 2009 survey again assessed how Afghans access communications technology and found a dramatic rise in mobile telephone ownership compared to previous years. This has meant that for the first time the majority of respondents (52%) now has access to this technology. Such a finding clearly has implications for official and non-state information dissemination and entertainment in Afghanistan in the future.

3.3 Research into media freedom and freedom of speech

Local and international organisations and NGOs working in the field of human rights and media freedom have undertaken a series of studies in the post-Taliban period focusing on journalism in Afghanistan. The media rights NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF) undertook a fact-finding mission to the country and produced a detailed report in March 2009,

What Gains for Press Freedom From Seven Years with Hamid Karzai as President? The study is of note as it documents the decline in security since 2006 and concludes that the political and economic crisis, along with the ongoing conflict, is having a major impact on the work of the media. The report notes that the authorities are unable to provide even the most basic protection for journalists. The study found that there had been 24 physical attacks, 35 cases of death threats, 14 arrests and seven kidnappings involving journalists from June 2007 to January 2009.

The RSF study states that dozens of other journalists, above all women and provincial reporters, were forced to stop working because of threats and harassment. The study quotes Farida Nekzad of the independent Afghan news agency Pajhwok who gave an overview of the security threats faced by journalists: “Our first concern is the hostility of the armed opposition, above all certain Taliban groups. Then religion and tradition threaten the right of women to be journalists. The warlords, for their part, represent a threat to all journalists who in one way or another oppose their power. Finally, there are the international forces, which obstruct access to the field or access to information, especially information about all the civilian casualties.”

A similar study by the media NGO, the Committee to Protect Journalists,

looked at the safety of journalists in Afghanistan in 2007. That year there were a series of grisly incidents that underlined how vulnerable reporters and presenters are in the new Afghanistan. In April Taliban fighters beheaded Ajmal Naqshbandi in the Garmsir district of Helmand province, after the Afghan government refused demands to release jailed senior Taliban leaders. Naqshbandi had been abducted in March with *La Repubblica* reporter Daniele Mastrogiacomo and driver Sayed Agha. Naqshbandi, a freelance journalist with several clients, had acted as Mastrogiacomo's fixer on a trip to interview Taliban leaders. Agha, the driver, was beheaded shortly after the abduction; the Italian Mastrogiacomo was released some weeks later in an exchange for five Taliban prisoners.

A month later television news presenter Shokiba Sanga Amaaj, 22, was murdered in her Kabul home. As killings came to the forefront, harassment and threats remained commonplace. The CPJ assisted two Afghan journalists who went into hiding after receiving death threats from extremist groups or gangsters involved in the lucrative opium trade. "It is not possible to talk and write freely in such situations," Rahimullah Samandar, head of the Afghan Independent Journalists Association and the Committee to Protect Afghan Journalists, said in a note to CPJ that recounted a series of threats, seizures, and attacks. "The Afghan

government should take strong action to stop these acts,” Samandar added.

The CPJ study also highlighted the fact that in 2007 harassment of the media was coming from all sides in the conflict. The study said that US soldiers deleted journalists’ photos and television footage taken in the aftermath of a 4 March suicide bombing in which several Afghan civilians were killed by U.S. fire. Soldiers deleted photos and videos taken by freelance photographer Rahmat Gul, who was working for the news agency Associated Press, and an unidentified cameraman for Associated Press Television News; they also threatened other Afghan television reporters at the scene of the attack.

The CPJ study showed that in 2007 the Afghan government also acted to undermine media freedoms, including a raid on the offices of Tolo TV in Kabul following a news report that Minister of Information and Culture Abdul Karim Khuram did not like. The minister went on to sack without explanation 80 Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) employees who were newly hired by station General Director Najib Roshan. In doing so, Khuram effectively reversed a plan—developed by the government in cooperation with international media advisers and aid groups—to turn RTA into a full-fledged independent public broadcaster. One of the

acknowledged failures in the process of media development in Afghanistan since the Taliban has been the lack of reform in the state broadcast sector, with most of the new developments having taken place in the private sector. There's a clear lesson here for donors.

3.4 Evaluation by donors of media assistance programmes

The third type of research into the Afghan media during the period in question tends to meet the needs of donors and has taken the form of evaluating specific aid projects or programmes that have a media or freedom of speech component to them.

An example is the *USAID's Assistance to the Media Sector in Afghanistan* report of October 2005. The study states that in December 2002 in Afghanistan, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) provided assistance to state-run Radio Afghanistan to help inform Afghans about the latest political developments. But with tribal and regional leaders due to convene to agree on a new interim government and the terms of a new constitution, OTI soon realised that much of the state broadcasting bureaucracy was resistant to advice or training. According to the report, a bolder strategy was required, and OTI decided

to start at the grassroots. The office, with the support of its implementing partner Internews, helped launch community radio stations and assisted the production of quality current affairs programming aimed at a national audience. To break the monopoly of the moribund state broadcaster, OTI supported a countrywide commercial radio station with an attractive music format.

The report is upbeat and presents a positive view of the programme's achievements, whilst playing down or ignoring issues of sustainability, cultural appropriateness and local ownership – all key components of successful aid programmes. Here's a quote from the report: "Though faced with near insurmountable obstacles—both logistical and conceptual—USAID and the NGO implementing partner Internews managed to create, virtually from scratch, the beginnings of a radio industry and cultivate a fledgling cadre of journalists."

Despite this self-congratulatory tone, the USAID report does offer criticism of the way Radio Arman FM – Afghanistan's first private radio station – was supported by OTI. The popular music station received an initial OTI grant in 2003 and a second grant in early 2004. Although the Radio Arman project met its goal of laying the foundation for commercial

broadcasting, the station plays no journalistic or public role beyond broadcasting popular music. “In hindsight, it is regrettable that the original grant failed to require the station [Radio Arman] to air more current affairs and news programming. U.S. assistance to Radio Arman and its new television station should include specific obligations to carry a significant amount of quality current affairs and news programming,” the report said.

Research in 2008 by the Washington-based NGO, the United States Institute of Peace *Media and Conflict: Afghanistan as a Relative Success Story*, confirms the consensus that the media in post-Taliban Afghanistan has been relatively successful. The report, funded by the US Congress, comes to this conclusion by comparing the contemporary media culture in the country with both the Taliban regime and other countries subject to international intervention. It points to the hurdles that have been overcome in establishing free and responsible expression: the lack of electricity, harsh terrain, absence of viable media outlets during the Taliban regime, and a conservative religious society that subordinates women. The study notes that Afghanistan’s media development remains incomplete, that it still faces many challenges, and calls on the international community to continue to assist and support it.

The research is relevant because it identifies three main processes that have contributed to Afghanistan's initial media success: the proliferation of local media, especially radio; the government's increased capacity and willingness to communicate; and international donors that filled resource and human resource gaps that otherwise might have become problematic. The report suggests that this three-pronged approach in Afghanistan may provide useful lessons for other societies emerging from conflict.

Given that the report is from 2008, just two years old, it is able to chart the difficult road that the media in Afghanistan have been forced to travel in recent years and notes that cultivating a free media requires continuous effort and donor support. Afghanistan, the study concludes, offers a positive example of media development, yet also shows the inherent fragility of media in a post-conflict society and the rapidity with which early successes can deteriorate.

A more recent overview, and perhaps the most useful and relevant to this thesis, is a 2009 paper by Katie Soulé, *The Media in Afghanistan – Post-Conflict Development and Policy Implications*. This analysis goes into more detail about the current problems in the media sector and argues that the initial success of the Afghan media is today threatened by a

number of current challenges. The first and most important is the deteriorating security situation; secondly the weak judicial system and lack of an adequate legal framework to protect journalists; and lastly the unsustainable financial model underpinning much of the contemporary media.

Soulé concludes with a series of policy recommendations, the key one being that for the immediate future, the international community needs to sustain its financial support for the Afghan press and broadcast sectors, both public and private. The author believes that the infrastructure and knowledge capital developed after 2001 is strong enough to withstand the current challenges, if international funding is continued in the near-term. This view is premised on the fact that the country is likely to continue to be conflict-ridden and mired in extreme poverty for some years to come.

Addressing the lack of financial sustainability in much of the sector, Soulé goes on to suggest that in-depth economic analysis of leading media outlets be conducted to determine which ones could be supported with advertising revenue. The next step would be to determine which outlets are completely unviable without international support. Based on these analyses, the author advocates developing a long-term financial plan for each media outlet, where this is practical.

The paper also calls for the establishment of training programmes for journalists, radio broadcasters, and media business managers, something severely lacking currently, despite the efforts made by international and local media NGOs to offer training and support. Linked to this is the need to provide continuing education opportunities for the few trained media professionals in Afghanistan and to encourage networking among them. Another idea is to identify skilled expatriates who could be able to manage some of the viable media ventures identified. Soulé points out that the most successful radio station nationally, Radio Arman, was a joint venture between international funding and a group of Afghan-Australian brothers.

The author rightly acknowledges that Afghan citizens have shown enthusiasm for news and entertainment content, and that the vast majority of Afghans have integrated some form of media into their lives since 2002. With regard to the democratic process, the 2005 elections demonstrated the benefit of an open press when exercising the rights of citizenship. None of this can be taken for granted, as the previous report underlined, and in order to boost the popular legitimacy of the media, Soulé advocates the need to continue efforts to educate the broader public about the appropriate role of the media in Afghan society.

3.5 Summary of previous research results

In conclusion, this overview of related research highlights the fact that foreign donor support for the media in Afghanistan post-Taliban has been a qualified success story in a country where reconstruction has been hampered by a host of challenges. In terms of plurality, the media has come a long way in just a few years. Since the end of Taliban control, Afghanistan has, for the first time in its history, a variety of local broadcast and print media operating independently of state control.

The audience research cited shows that Afghans have become enthusiastic, yet critical media consumers, and welcome the variety of news and entertainment outlets previously denied them. Studies and fact-finding missions addressing the issue of media freedom in Afghanistan illustrate that the country has indeed made progress towards an open and diverse information culture, including a new law enshrining press freedom. But such progress has stalled in recent years as the insurgency has reignited and the government has sought to assert control over journalists and their outlets.

Research into donor support to the media, often because it has been commissioned by leading aid givers such as USAID or DfID, tends to be

upbeat, with the message that the money has been well spent, particularly in the period 2002-2006, when security had not yet seriously deteriorated, and donor interest in Afghanistan was high. The US Institute of Peace study and Soulé's paper (despite the fact that it relies on secondary sources and contains no original research) both have the benefit of hindsight and call for continued donor support for the media sector. These two studies point out that developing a sustainable media in a country like Afghanistan requires a long-term commitment and continued financial support, as well as training, and a legal framework that protects the profession and establishes accountability and responsibility from journalism. What appears to be missing from the current literature is an independent study that is based on research conducted with Afghans working in the media, this thesis may in some way contribute to filling that gap.

Chapter 4. Relevant Media Theories

4.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts an overview of some of the leading theories of media models in order to locate recent media development in Afghanistan, however imprecise, within this framework. After an

examination of some of the key debates around media models I intend to address the question of the appropriateness of the kind of media model that was promoted and funded in Afghanistan since 2002. Is a free and unfettered media in a volatile post-conflict society, under what circumstances can it do more harm than good?

Lastly I will look at media-centric theory that presupposes media as a semi-autonomous institution within a democracy capable of bringing about social change independently. This theory is then tested in the context of Afghanistan over the past eight years in an attempt to understand how the nascent free media sector has contributed to the post-conflict development of the country.

The overriding international goals in Afghanistan in the post Taliban period have been security and stability, along with the establishment and growth of a liberal democracy, preferably pro-Western. This premise was at the heart of the Bonn Agreement signed in December 2001. The Bonn Agreement was the initial series of measures taken by the international community intended to recreate Afghanistan following the US-led invasion in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks. “We share a vision of a stable, independent Afghanistan at peace with its neighbours and the rest of the world and on the road to a more prosperous future,”

US President George Bush said in May 2002 after the UN Security Council had endorsed the Bonn Agreement.

The creation of a nation in the image of the Western democracies was enhanced by the appointment at Bonn of Hamid Karzai as interim president. Karzai is a western educated Pashtun tribal leader who was subsequently elected president in 2004, and has remained in power ever since. Although there was, and still is popular support within Afghanistan for Karzai, he has remained in power primarily because of his close alliance with Washington. "If I am called a puppet because we are grateful to America, then let that be my nickname," he was quoted as saying in a CCN interview in 2008.

The political road map for Afghanistan laid out at Bonn included a permanent end to the conflict, presidential and parliamentary elections, an independent judiciary, respect for human rights, and a free press – most of the institutions normally associated with a working democracy.

4.2 Media and democracy

There are many definitions of democracy, but here let us refer to Huber, Reuschemeyer & Stephens from 1997. "By formal democracy we mean a political system that combines four features: regular free and fair

elections, universal suffrage, accountability of the state's administrative organs to the elected representatives, and effective guarantees for freedom of expression.”

The idea of the accountability of those wielding power is central to another attempt to define democracy by Schmitter and Karl from 1991. “Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.”

Most definitions of a democracy include the principles of checks and balances and accountability – to minimize the misuse of power and to protect society against political abuse. An elected government is accountable to the voters in a system of universal suffrage, but what about between elections? This is where the role in a democracy of a free press, or the “fourth estate”, as it is often referred to, is most critical. The fourth estate rests on the idea that the media's function is to act as a guardian of the public interest and as a watchdog on the activities of government and the powerful.

The most important democratic functions that we can expect the media to serve are listed in an often cited article by Gurevitch and Blumler (1990). These functions include surveillance of socio-political developments; identifying the most relevant issues; providing a platform for debate across a diverse range of views; holding officials to account for the way they exercise power; to provide incentives for citizens to learn, choose, and become involved in the political process; and to resist pressure from outside the media to subvert their independence.

Early on in the process of constructing a modern democratic state in Afghanistan from 2002, the role of a free press was identified as being a central component. A formal recommendation to enshrine the principles of free speech and free media in the new Afghan constitution was adopted in September 2002 following an international conference in Kabul organised by UNESCO, the BBC and the US NGO Internews. Following the meeting, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, Abdul Waheed Khan, said: “UNESCO is prepared to provide expertise and whatever help it can to assist the Afghan authorities in ensuring press freedom, allowing for the development of independent pluralistic media, and transforming the national broadcaster and news agency into editorially independent

entities.”

4.3 Market, advocacy or trustee models of journalism?

The next question is what kind of media model has been introduced in Afghanistan and how does contemporary theory help us make sense of that model in the context of Afghanistan? The standard theory of media models in a democracy is that espoused by Michael Schudson. In his article *What Public Journalism Knows about Journalism but Doesn't Know About "Public"* that appears in the 1999 book *The Idea of Public Journalism* edited by Theodore Lewis Glasser, Schudson outlines his three models: market, advocacy and trustee. In a market model, journalism and media houses, as the name suggests, are in business purely to provide audiences as defined by advertisers. Here consumer demand is the ultimate arbiter of what kind of, and in what form, news and information is produced. The market model is the most attractive to media owners who simply want to maximize profit. Rupert Murdoch's take over of newspapers where he scraps quality journalism and publishes nothing to offend advertisers come to mind here.

Often democracies have laws and regulatory bodies that attempt to rein in the worst excesses of market journalism. Media that resembles the market

model have sprung up in Afghanistan since 2002, particularly radio stations and magazines. Many of the journalists interviewed in the survey that was carried out as part of this thesis complained about the poor quality and irresponsibility of this type of output, where broadcast and press regulation is in its infancy.

The advocacy model is a form of journalism that is openly biased and partisan – promoting the view or ideology of a political party, an organization or a business. Whilst such journalism appears to be most at home in totalitarian societies (the pre-Taliban Afghan media displayed many aspects of the advocacy model, particularly during the Communist era 1978-89), in fact it was a leading form of journalism in the USA until the 1920s and in Denmark right up to the 1960s.

In Schudson's trustee model, journalists strive to inform the public of what they need to know to remain active citizens in a democracy. The news output is determined by journalists' professional decisions, based on a code of ethics, as well as their skills and experience. The trustee model is typified by balance, transparency, lack of bias and a commitment to holding those who wield power to account.

The trustee model has grown partly out of the professionalization of the work of journalists. In the same way as a member of the public would trust an architect or lawyer to operate honestly and honourably, so it is with journalists, who would suffer legal sanction and rebuke from peers by deviating from their professional duty. Trustee journalism established the tradition of objective reporting over commentary in the USA and UK in the early 20th Century and remains very much the yardstick against which other forms of journalism are measured.

Schudson's media models are a convenient starting point from which to develop a broad framework for comparative analysis of the news media, but a quick glance at the real world is enough to illustrate that most countries exhibit media cultures that are varying blends of all three models and not nearly as clear cut as he proposes.

This is the same weakness highlighted by Paolo Mancini and Daniel C Hallin with regard to the influential 1956 work *Four Theories of the Press* by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm. In their 2004 book *Comparing Media Systems* Mancini and Hallin point out that using models to explain

the differences in how the press operates in Venezuela compared to say, Iceland does not promote better understanding. “We will argue that one cannot understand the news media without understanding the nature of the state, the system of political parties, the pattern of relations between economic and political interests, and the development of civil society, among other elements of social structure.” [p8]

After arguing how difficult it is to successfully use media models (despite the appeal to scholars of a simple classification system for the world’s media), Mancini and Hallin then go on to introduce three media system models of their own: the Liberal Model – characterized by the relative dominance of market mechanisms and commercial media; the Democratic Corporatist Model – where commercial media coexist with advocacy journalism; and the Polarized Pluralist Model – characterized by a weak commercial sector, strong state control and a close relationship between the media and party politics. One is struck by how similar these three models are to Schudson’s classification. Admittedly the authors propose these models with caution, but try and show “that the characteristics that define these models are interrelated, that they result from meaningful patterns of historical development and do not merely co-occur accidentally”.

A key limiting factor with Hallin and Mancini's study is that it is only applicable to mature media systems in wealthy democracies and post industrial economies, in this case Western Europe and the USA, with the authors noting that this facilitates comparison of like-with-like.

Perhaps such media models are best utilized when thought of as a system of patterns to which media in different cultures, countries or regions can be held up against to see where they do and do not fit. The question is how can media models be of use in understanding the kind of media culture that has developed in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban and the role of foreign support in this process.

Based on the overview above, it becomes immediately obvious that the objective for the Afghan media since 2002 has been the emulation of the trustee model, combined with some elements of the market model. At the UNESCO media meeting in Kabul in 2002 the framework for a pluralist, balanced and free media in Afghanistan was established. I doubt if this was a conscious decision on the part of those present. I argue it is partly a mix of a belief on the part of delegates that such a model held out the best

prospects for bolstering Afghanistan's fledgling democracy, combined with the fact that the UK and US media cultures (with their strong traditions of trustee journalism) were prominent at the meeting in the form of the BBC and Internews.

Such an approach is not unusual in a post-conflict situation. In many cases, like South Africa after apartheid, Cambodia after the civil war and Rwanda after the 1994 genocide, national policy and foreign media interventions have tended to take the form of building a culture of trusteeship journalism as the best media strategy to promote peace and development. Whether a trusteeship model of journalism – with its implicit emphasis on a free press able to say what it likes - is in fact the best way forward in fragile democracies emerging from conflict is the issue I will now turn to.

4.4 The trusteeship model of journalism in fragile post-conflict states

So how responsible is it to import, implement and support a trustee style of journalism into a country without the social mechanisms and institutions that need to be in place to allow such a media system to function effectively? To put it another way, should journalists in post-

conflict countries enjoy complete freedom to report on what they want when they want? I remember in 2002 when mass graves were discovered around Mazar-i-Sharif in the north of Afghanistan. The discovery was widely documented in the Western media. The bodies were those of Taliban and Al-Qaeda prisoners, many executed by Northern Alliance troops.

The massacre allegedly took place in November 2001, when Abdul Rashid Dostum of the Northern Alliance took control of Kunduz, and accepted the surrender of about 8,000 Taliban fighters that included Al-Qaeda, Chechens, Uzbeks and Pakistanis. Almost 500 suspected al-Qaeda members were taken to the Qala Jangi prison while the remainder of the prisoners - about 7,500 -were loaded in containers and transported to the Qala-I-Zeini fortress, almost halfway between Mazar-i-Sharif and Sherberghan Prison. Human rights advocates said that close to 5,000 of the original 8,000 were executed.

There was very little action taken by Kabul – this was at a time when Karzai was busy trying to build some kind of national political consensus involving the very leaders of those Northern Alliance troops. Putting those leaders on trial for war crimes when their support for the new

government was critical, would arguable have led to national disintegration and even a return to civil war. Remember, these factions had been fighting each other, as well the Taliban, for years.

So here you have a situation where journalists are doing their job, and conforming to the trusteeship model, but if the state and/or the peace process is fragile, the media can play a role in undermining such progress and even be a player in a return to conflict. In the case of the Mazar-i-Sharif massacre, the new government was criticized by international NGOs like Amnesty International for failing to act.

This point about a free Afghan media – largely untrained and unregulated – undermining the difficult process of nation building was underlined by Culture and Education Minister Yonus Anon. He was quoted in an interview in 2004 as saying the media could promote a new culture, the rights of women, and national unity as long as they do not undermine the government: the only hope for peace, in his opinion. This partly why the new government supported the extensive training offered by foreign NGOs and the founding of an ethics board: to reduce the tendency of journalism towards the kind of sensationalist stories that may sell papers but that could prove divisive in a fragile nation state.

4.5 The case for restricting the role of the media in fragile states

Mariam Tutakhel believes that freedom of the press should be restricted in post-conflict countries if doing so serves stabilization and the process of nation building. Tutakhel wrote a study (only available in German) in 2006 on media funding in Afghanistan for the Institute for Development and Peace (INEP) at the University of Duisburg/Essen entitled *Medienpolitik in Post-Konfliktstaaten*.

Tutakhel argues that where the state, judiciary, legislature, civil society and democratic institutions are all weak, it is legitimate and even imperative to restrict the freedom of the press where it can undermine society and even provoke a return to armed conflict. She is saying that despite the best intentions of donors and international organisations, the trusteeship model of journalism can prove counterproductive when introduced into fragile states.

In an interview with the German development NGO Inwent in October 2006 she says: “I would go so far as to say that, in a post-conflict situation such as in Afghanistan, it is legitimate and even imperative to restrict the freedom of the press with the objective of stabilising the political situation. Neither the institutional, nor the legal conditions are in place for the media to responsibly assume their policing role.”

It is also the case in a country like Afghanistan that while society may have little protection from an unfettered press (such as libel laws, defamation, contempt of court, an ombudsman, press complaints council etc. that are present in some form in most democracies), going hand-in-hand with this is the fact that the media have no protection from those who wish to silence them. In Afghanistan in June 2007 for example, gunmen entered the home of Zakia Zaki, the female owner of a radio station in Parwan province north of Kabul, and shot her dead in front of her 8-year-old son. Zaki had apparently criticized local warlords, some of whom had been implicated in war crimes, who warned her to change her station's programming. Another example: Shaima Rezayee, a popular host for an MTV-style music show on Tolo TV, was shot dead in 2005 after clerics criticised her show as "anti-Islamic". I cite these two examples, and there are many others, to underline the fact that there are no real laws, and no law enforcement in an emerging nation like Afghanistan to protect journalists. This is particularly the case when journalists are trying to work in a trusteeship way – seeking the truth, questioning those in power and acting “in the public interest”.

Tutakhel says, as many others do, that the media in post-conflict nations such as Afghanistan should initially serve communication between

government, the people and the international community, and only late gradually maturing into the trustee model we are familiar with in mature democracies. Tutakhel does not suggest state control of the media as a solution, but advocates a third, external, party takes responsibility, during the vulnerable transition period to stability. In the same interview quoted above she says: “Inter-governmental organisations such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe should control the media – at least until the state is in a position to do so on its own. The Afghan government is itself still under reconstruction; it is a long way from becoming fully functional.” Such an arrangement, would, in her view allow the media to grow whilst maintaining a grip on the kind of journalism that could prove divisive for a new democracy like Afghanistan.

The dangers associated with a free press in volatile societies following conflict have been pointed out by others, including those actively involved in media development in Afghanistan. In an interview with the author in 2008, Adrian Edwards, a former journalist and UN official in Afghanistan, said lack of training and an enforceable ethical code contribute to bad journalism that could prove explosive. "When an article is poorly researched, sources aren't checked, loose opinion takes the place of hard facts, poorly founded claims and accusations take the place of the

truth, you end up with a cynical kind of journalism that is of little value to anyone,” he said.

4.6 Media-centric theory

For an introduction to media-centric theory, Denis McQuail, in the fifth edition of his work *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, provides a useful definition and some context. “Media-centric theory sees mass media as a primary mover in social change driven forward by irresistible changes in communication technology,” he states. McQuail sets media-centric theory up as being in opposition to, or in tension with socio-centric media theory that sees the media as a reflection of the political and economic forces prevalent in society. Media-centric theory bestows a large degree of autonomy on the media and views it as an institution that has the power, through dominating the means of communication, to drive society forwards (or backwards).

The problem with much media-centric theory is that it fails to acknowledge issues of ownership or control. Wherever a media culture exists, it is always heavily impacted either by the state, in the form of regulation, a legal structure or direct ownership, or by the market, or

both. If we look at two recent examples of where the media has promoted conflict: in Rwanda in the period before the 1994 genocide, and in Serbia before and during the Balkan wars, there is explicit state involvement – the media is used as a means to achieve certain domestic and international policies, in these cases, genocide in Rwanda and a greater Serbia achieved through military conquest, respectively. The latter extensively documented in the 1999 book by Mark Thompson *Forging War: the media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina*. The other key issue with media-centric theory is that it only seems applicable to media systems in developed, wealthy democracies. This will become evident when we examine media-centricity as it applies in a post-conflict state like Afghanistan later in this chapter.

In his review article, *Theories of the Impact of Mass Media*, John Street (2005) identifies recent theoretical positions that help us make sense of the complex and rapidly changing relationship between the media and politics (and by extension the society regulated by that political system). Most of these theoretical positions appear to be supporting the media-centric view that forms of mass communication have attained positions of power in democratic societies hitherto unseen. “What these different responses share in common is the thought that we are witnessing a

‘transformation’ of mass media's political role and with it a transformation of politics itself. The claims about these transformations are partly claims about power and its distribution and organisation: the influence of media moguls and newspaper editors usurping that of political leaders; they are partly about mass political behaviour: the ways in which citizens’ thoughts and actions are shaped and influenced by the output of mass media; and partly about political communication and the management of parties and governments: the emergence of ‘spin’ and the extensive use of the techniques and practitioners of advertising and popular culture.”

Street goes on to cite the Hutton Inquiry as an example of how the media in the UK now has undue influence on politics and society. But the lesson of the Hutton Inquiry for students of media theory and democracies must surely be that when a government’s credibility, or security interests, are directly threatened, it will rein in the media through reprimand, public rebuke or through the law.

The idea, central to media-centric theory, that new technology is playing a seminal role in transforming the relationship between media and the body politic, also needs challenging. We hear much about how globalized

satellite broadcasting renders the nation state weak and powerless. But when it feels its interests are threatened, the modern state is ready and willing to challenge the idea that the media can now broadcast anything anywhere with no consequences, usurping the nation-state in the process.

Prof Colin Sparks argues in his 2007 book *Globalization, Development and the Mass Media* that although globalization of the media is important, it is incorrect to argue that international media houses like Rupert Murdoch's News International are now all powerful. In October 2009 at the inaugural seminar of the Helsinki University Media and Global Communication Master's Programme "New Times, New Keywords – Media and Global Communication in the 21st Century" Sparks gave a couple of examples to reinforce this point. In the 1990s, London based Kurdish satellite channel Med-TV began making programmes in Kurdish and broadcasting them by satellite in Turkey. Ankara was unhappy about this, as broadcasts in Kurdish are illegal in Turkey. So diplomatic pressure was put on London and in 1999 the UK's Independent Television Commission revoked Med-TV's broadcasting licence.

Sparks' second point was that in the UK there are still restrictions on what can be viewed on television. This applies mainly to images of a

sexual nature. Someone saw a way round this and had the idea of broadcasting uncensored pornography from the Netherlands - Red Hot Dutch was the name of the channel - to the UK via satellite. The British government in 1993 moved to ban the decoders needed to watch the channel and Red Hot Dutch was forced to stop operating.

4.7 Media-centric theory and Afghanistan since 2002

Let us now take some of the ideas contained within media-centric theory and apply them to the media scene in Afghanistan since 2002. We must keep in mind that the media-centric approach to media modelling emerged as a way of understanding how mature media cultures work in established democracies, not in post-conflict, post-authoritarian states with little history of media independence.

Just to re-cap, eight years on, the country has a mix of trusteeship and market journalism models - this can be seen in its growing independent sector, mainly radio and Internet-based, plus a state sector that has undoubtedly broadened its audience, but has failed to transform into a public broadcaster (state-supported, but editorially independent). The media-centric approach places mass media at the cutting edge of social change and endows it with a high degree of influence and autonomy,

pursuing its role as the “fourth estate”.

The reality in contemporary Afghanistan looks very different from the description above. We find that far from forming into a dynamic, independent media culture, journalism in Afghanistan is almost entirely “dependent” and hampered by the economic and security situation in the country. Afghan radio and television remains largely a government mouthpiece and the small independent media outlets that survive have very weak commercial bases from which to assert their independence from government, warlords and foreign influence. This lack of autonomy in the private media sector is also underscored by the continued dependence of non-state media on foreign funding to keep them printing and broadcasting. The contemporary media in Afghanistan tends to disprove the idea of media-centricity and displays more signs of being a socio-centric system – where the media culture is a direct product of the political, economic and historical realities in a country.

Chapter 5 Research Results

5.1 Introduction to the Research

I chose a qualitative approach to obtaining the information that forms the basis of this thesis. I did this for a number of reasons. First, due to the fact that the evolution of the Afghan media is very much a new work in progress, there is very little existing quantitative data available in this field that would lend itself to analysis. The alternative would have been to find a way of constructing one's own data set, but this was not practical given the financial and logistical constraints I faced. In addition, conducting any kind of research in contemporary Afghanistan is very hard and requires large resources and plenty of time if it is to yield sufficient data to provide anything approaching a national picture. Some of the surveys quoted earlier in this thesis in the overview of relevant literature have tried to do this, but one needs resources on the scale of the BBC or the State Department to succeed.

I chose interviews as a research technique because the journalism community in Afghanistan is rather small – probably under 200, so a more personal approach was deemed more appropriate, with the idea of providing a range of opinions but looking forward through the eyes of the

local media. Lastly, as a trained reporter myself, interviewing is relatively straightforward and quick to complete.

The survey research was carried out in Afghanistan between March and May 2010. The research consisted of a questionnaire that was distributed in electronic and paper form to 55 local journalists working in various media both in Kabul and elsewhere in the country. In addition, the research featured a series of interviews I carried out with key actors in the Afghan media scene from 2002. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: the first part gathered information about the respondent and his or her occupation; the second part sought views on media development in Afghanistan since late 2001 and what role international assistance had played in that process.

The survey was kept fairly short – in the experience of the author, busy journalists are reluctant to take part in any kind of questionnaire, so the whole questionnaire only consisted of eleven questions. The research was carried out in conjunction with Nai, a leading Afghan media NGO. Nai has been working for the development of open media in Afghanistan since 2004. Nai offers training, support to the non-state media sector, campaigns for freedom of expression, and advocates for laws to protect journalists. I am tremendously grateful to the staff at Nai, in particular

Mohammad Saber Fahim, who kindly assisted in the research by helping in the compilation and translation of the survey. Nai also assisted in the distribution of the survey to journalists, and the translation of many of the returned surveys from Dari or Pashtu into English.

Some key foreign media development organisations are highlighted as significant by many respondents in the survey. There was particular praise for the work of USAID-funded Internews, BBC World Service Trust, the Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and the French NGO Aina. Background information on these organisations appears in Appendix II.

5.2 Overview of statistical information

Of the 55 questionnaires sent out, 38 were returned completed. An example of the questionnaire as distributed and an example of a questionnaire completed in English is attached in Appendix 1. Given the logistical and security challenges facing Afghanistan's new media sector, plus the busy lives most journalists lead, the response rate to the questionnaire was good. One other positive here is that the survey covers most of the major cities in Afghanistan, such as Herat, Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif, as well as the capital, Kabul. The danger with any such attempt to canvas national views, particularly when resources are finite, is

that the research ends up with the thoughts and opinions primarily of those in the capital.

Whilst the survey is by no means conclusive or comprehensive, and does not pretend to be, it does offer a flavour of how journalists in the provinces assess the last eight years and how they are making sense of the changes around them. Many foreign donor media initiatives realized the dangers of just working in Kabul (where conditions and security have always been more favourable), and have struggled hard to reach journalists outside the capital. This is reflected in the fact that many of those living outside the capital who completed the survey spoke positively about, for instance, media training in their own home towns and cities. “I have been on training, this has helped me and now I have an idea of what real journalism is,” was a typical comment from a radio reporter based in the southern city of Kandahar.

Of those who returned the survey completed, the majority (24) were working in radio, but there were significant numbers also employed in TV and newspapers. This distribution pattern is not surprising and reflects the dominance of radio as a medium of communication in Afghanistan for reasons previously discussed. Six of those interviewed were in the

online media business which reflects the growth in computer and Internet use in Afghanistan, particularly in the last three or five years.

With regard to the jobs they were doing, the majority of respondents classified themselves as reporters – by far the most dangerous and difficult job for an Afghan journalist. The next largest groups were editors, followed closely by producers in radio. Most of the respondents said they were employed full-time, but there were a few freelancers. As mentioned above, the geographical distribution of those who completed the survey means that, while the majority were journalists in the capital, a sense of what is going on media-wise outside Kabul did come through in the research.

Although the survey was anonymous and did not ask a question about gender, it's interesting that six respondents identified themselves as women in the survey. Some of these women spoke about the special difficulties they face in doing their job and the kind of support they need. One editor from Herat said: "Being a journalist is not easy, and being female some days I think I should have been a teacher or work in a hospital, but I do love this job, that's why I continue". Many Afghan women journalists have been attacked and a female radio station owner in Parwan province was shot dead in June 2007. In the same month a female

radio newsreader was also killed. So the information the survey has thrown up about women in the media could be of use to donors and international organisations when planning media interventions in Afghanistan in the future.

Despite this, there were those who felt strongly that there was no place for gender equality in the media in deeply conservative Afghanistan. At least two male interviewees complained that promoting women in the media in Afghanistan was counterproductive and dangerous, running against the cultural norms prevalent in society. “A reporter is a man’s job, it’s like, like fighting. Women do not fight, they should stay away,” one respondent from Kabul wrote when responding to the questionnaire.

5.3 What respondents said about the media in Afghanistan

The vast majority of the 38 who completed the survey were on the whole positive about the comprehensive changes that much of the Afghan media experienced since the Taliban were ousted in late 2001. Questions 5 and 6 ask for opinions on the contemporary media situation and on what has got better and worse in the last nine years. Many of the journalists said that the media in Afghanistan had been important in raising public awareness, particularly about the presidential poll of October 2004, and the parliamentary election held in September 2005. Some respondents also

said that journalism had played a role in holding politicians to account and had helped to introduce and develop the idea of free speech in Afghanistan. The pride felt by many journalists in not only documenting the birth of a nation, but in being part of that birth, shone through in the survey. One respondent from Mazar-i-Sharif summed up the euphoric mood in the media 2002-2006. “Well I was just so happy to go and do reports on the election in 2004, it made me think we are progressing as a nation. And some candidates were worried – they had to remember journalists were watching them, we reporters felt powerful.”

From an information-provider perspective, there was wide support for the fact that, for the first time in the country’s troubled history, the Afghan public could hear news from a variety of sources, including credible non-state news outlets as well as from a range of international broadcasters. Sultan Massood is a veteran reporter who somehow managed to continue working during the civil war and Taliban period. “Look, there is so far to go, but now our country has more [radio] stations and probably more truth on the airwaves than many other countries in this region, that is a real achievement,” he said in an interview with the author. Many of those surveyed also pointed out that Afghans now had greater access to a wider range of cultural and entertainment options through the media. So these are some of the main positive developments highlighted by the survey.

Despite this upbeat assessment, a clear theme among respondents was that there had been a decline since 2008, with many citing that facts that security had worsened and the government had become more hostile to the media in general. This tends to support the fact that many of the gains made by the media in Afghanistan since the demise of the Taliban remain fragile and vulnerable, with the sector still relying heavily on foreign donor support and under pressure from Hamid Karzai's government. "Everyone I know used to be happy about journalism – there was a lot of support for us externally after the Taliban, but our job is now so difficult, I mean going out to get our reports. When will it change? Nobody knows," was a typical response from the survey.

5.4 What respondents said about foreign support for the media in Afghanistan since 2002

But the main object of the survey and questionnaire was to discover what Afghan journalists thought of foreign support to the media over the period under discussion. So it is to this area that we now turn. The general consensus among those who responded to the questionnaire was that international assistance to media development had been largely positive and had enabled the non-state sector in particular to make huge strides never seen before in Afghanistan.

Although there was pretty much unanimity about the quantitative improvement in media, particularly in the period 2002-2006, a significant number of those surveyed said that many of the new media outlets were producing poor quality output. “What is not right these days is that maybe there is too much media. Many radio stations making bad programmes or not balanced. Assistance from the outside to these radios should stop,” one survey respondent said. The idea that foreign support should be targeted at particular media (such as an independent radio station that had consistent quality output) comes through strongly in the surveys. Many respondents were very clear that capacity building should focus on boosting professionalism and raising standards generally in the media.

The other general trend evident in the surveys is support for continued ongoing financial and logistical support for the media sector in Afghanistan, with many interviewees advocating strongly for the international community to remain engaged, despite the continued conflict, lack of economic development and donor fatigue evident currently in Afghanistan. In an interview with the author, Mohammad Saber Fahim of the media NGO Nai outlined the dangers: “Unless the independent media sector is able to sustain itself financially before

foreign donors turned off the money tap, it could fall into the hands of wealthy individuals or influential politicians with their own agendas.”

In addition, there was real concern, and in some cases despair, in the survey that Afghanistan’s private media sector in most cases cannot yet sustain itself. Journalists interviewed were short on workable solutions to this problem, other than advocating continued foreign support and investment. One respondent said the UN should sponsor a scheme among the Afghan diaspora to encourage Afghans with skills and money to come home and invest in the media. Around 25% of those interviewed outlined the dangers of the non-state media sector failing. “This [the private media sector failing] means we could easily also end up with the government being the only national voice through state media. This has to be a very undesirable outcome for Afghanistan’s development as a democracy,” one of the journalists said.

Another key theme in the surveys was questioning the wisdom of putting resources into, and capacity building, in state media. Many saw it as a waste of time, as such outlets would forever remain government controlled and influenced. “Just look at where there has been progress [in the media sector] in the past few years, it has not been in Radio Afghanistan, what a waste of money,” was the opinion of a journalist

working for the popular private radio network Arman in Kabul. On this point, three or four journalists called for organizations like the BBC to do more work with the Afghan government toward the creation of a public broadcaster (like the BBC) – publically funded, but free of political control.

In fact there have been a number of international initiatives to reform the state broadcaster since 2002. Perhaps the most significant was the initiative by BBC World Service Trust, in partnership with Deutsche Welle and Canal France Internationale, to work with Radio & Television Afghanistan (RTA) from 2002-07 to help build a culture of accountable, independent public service programming. This was after the interim Afghan government had signed up to the transformation of the state-run broadcaster.

The establishment of a genuine public broadcaster – perhaps akin to the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) that was remodeled by act of parliament after apartheid in the mid 1990s - seems a long way off at present, with Hamid Karzai’s administration seeking to tighten its grip on state media outlets. Since early 2009 Karzai has refused to ratify a law that would limit his control of state media. If it comes into effect, the law will shift control of Radio and Television Afghanistan (RTA) away from

the Ministry of Information and Culture, giving it independent status, the United Nations said in a 2009 report.

Despite the failure of RTA to emerge as a genuine public broadcaster in the post-Taliban era, it is clearly fulfilling part of its desired function:

RTA radio does offer something like national coverage with 70% of the population able to hear its broadcasts. RTA radio is the most-listened to local radio broadcaster with 38.6% of audience share and second most-watched local television station with 30% of audience share. These figures would suggest efforts to reform the state media sector have not been wasted and in terms of national broadcasting and serving the needs of minority groups, RTA has a key role to play – assuming it can move to establish its political neutrality.

The main point of contact between Afghan journalists and foreign media support programmes appears to be through training, and many of those surveyed highlighted it as very important. More than 30 of the respondents said that they had undertaken journalism or technical training organised by, or funded by, foreign groups. This includes NGOs, international organisations and foreign governments. Also, a majority, in response to question nine, said that the training of journalists was the one

foreign intervention that had had the most impact in the new democratic era.

Almost everybody interviewed spoke about the lack of skills and knowledge in the country with regard to journalism and how foreign resources had tried to address this knowledge deficit. One respondent's comment is typical: "The training we received, it's great, now we feel a bit like we know what journalism is about, how we should work and what our responsibilities are. We can't practice everything today we have been taught because of the war and other limitations, but at least we know."

Although Internews came out as one of the most popular organisations working to promote media freedom in Afghanistan, it also came under criticism for its short-term approach to the establishment and support of radio initiatives. At least eight of those interviewed were unhappy that Internews had helped set up radio stations in the run-up to the elections in 2004 and 2005, then let them close when their specific task of informing the electorate about the when, where and why of voting had been fulfilled. "This kind of initiative gives donors a bad name, paying for a radio then withdrawing the support after a year is unhealthy and does

nothing to promote sustainability – is this America’s idea of helping democracy here?” journalist Sultan Masoodi said in an interview with the author.

With regard to the institutional framework in which journalism is practiced in contemporary Afghanistan, some of those interviewed spoke about the need for better laws to protect journalists and to regulate the profession - this is to be expected in a country where reporting remains a difficult and dangerous occupation. But it is interesting to note that none of the interviewees said that foreign initiatives to establish press freedom laws, the establishment of an ombudsman, a press council etc. were good uses of donor money. “Laws for the media? What laws? This means nothing while we have no independent judges and a corrupt police,” was a typical comment. Perhaps this is because those working in the media have not seen any changes in their working lives as a result of such initiatives and that such institutional capacity building work inevitably takes some years to bear fruit. Many such initiatives have stalled because the other institutions that operate as checks and balances in a traditional democracy are absent in Afghanistan, or in their infancy. For example, press laws that protect journalists and facilitate their work are only meaningful if there is an independent judiciary to hear cases and police to

enforce such laws.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Summary of the problem, main findings and the discussion

The objective of this thesis was to examine media developments in Afghanistan since 2002, and the role of foreign support in these developments. The views of Afghans working in the media were sought through a qualitative survey to aid understanding of the successes and challenges of the past eight years.

While there have been many positive developments in the media since the end of the Taliban – most notably the birth of a vibrant independent sector, many of these developments in late 2010 are now threatened or stunted by growing insecurity, continued poverty and weak governance. Foreign resources and expertise have been central to media development, but there has been credible criticism of support for a “free media” while Afghanistan remains fragile, and the normal institutions and laws that protect journalists and the society they report on are absent.

The survey shows that despite the structural problems that have restricted expansion and consolidation of the media, journalists are enthusiastic about the changes and want international donors to remain engaged for the foreseeable future. The survey indicates that donors need to target their support more, and to focus on media houses that are producing quality journalism, as well as those that are commercially viable.

This thesis identifies the kind of media model that has been introduced into post-Taliban Afghanistan as being a mix of the “market” and “trustee”. The many external actors who have made input into the growing media culture in Afghanistan have largely focused on the development of the “trustee” model as being the most appropriate for Afghanistan and prescriptive for nation building. The promotion of a diverse and free media by donors and international organisations is becoming an increasingly common component of the wider goal of promoting peace, stability and development in many countries that have emerged from extensive conflict. A range of specialised NGOs has emerged in recent years to undertake this kind of media development work.

But the promotion of “trustee journalism” in a nation like Afghanistan, that does not have the regular societal institutions to underpin and

validate such a model, is fraught with danger and can, as we have seen, serve to undermine and divide society at a critical moment in its evolution into a stable entity. In addition, “trustee journalism” has proven to be very dangerous for Afghan journalists to pursue – there are too many examples of government, warlords, Taliban, and foreign forces attacking and silencing the nascent press.

Can the Western, liberal model of journalism (that has evolved over a long period in societies with very specific economic and political traditions) ever be successfully applied in environments of poverty, authoritarianism, gross inequality and religious dominance? The recent experience in Afghanistan would suggest that such a model may well be readily exported (there are now a whole family of specialized NGOs as well as substantial resources from donors and international organisations for post-conflict media development), but not easily imported in countries where conflict, poverty and corruption militate against an independent media culture. Media-centric theorists would argue that confident, bold journalism is fundamental to the development process and funding it will help bring about the kind of society where it can flourish and take its place as the fourth estate. Again, Afghanistan shows that a free media struggles to exist without the structures that keep our democracies working.

In my experience, when the international community takes on the task of rebuilding a shattered nation, timing is critical. What happened in Afghanistan in 2002 is that every UN agency, NGO and donor nation arrived at the same time and began their reconstruction work with little coordination or planning. For example, why donate 350 trucks to the government of Kandahar when there are no roads on which they can operate? There is a clear role here for the UN to take the lead and ensure resources to support the media for example, are coordinated and not expended until society has the basics in place – perhaps five years or so after the first election and the conflict is genuinely over. A lot of what appeared in Afghanistan that was labeled media support in recent years has been little more than window dressing to satisfy donors. Such enthusiasm on the part of NGOs to deploy “to show we are there and care” is understandable, but perhaps seriously misplaced or even counterproductive in the initial post-conflict period with regard to media development

6.2 Implications of the research for donors working in the field

The research in this thesis indicates that international donors need to remain engaged in Afghanistan’s fragile media sector, despite the very

real challenges to the democratic experiment currently under way in the country. The Afghan situation underlines the fact that there needs to be international priorities that are adhered to in post-conflict reconstruction work. There's no point in introducing new laws, for example, if there is no infrastructure to enforce them. The same goes for the media – establishing independent media cannot succeed in the early days of reconstruction because it cannot exist in a vacuum.

Journalists interviewed in the survey called for more training and the promotion of professional standards in the media. Much work has been done here by organisations like BBC World Service Trust, Internews and IWPR. Clearly those in the media want this to continue, but not in the piecemeal, “short course” approach to training that has been popular with some donors. Putting resources into a national journalism school that is independent of government and committed to raising standards would be a good use of foreign support, and such a move has the support of local media. There has been plenty of talk about forming such an institution in Kabul, but to date resources and the political will have not been forthcoming.

Donors also need to continue funding programmes designed to establish a clear legislative framework that defines and protects the media, along

with the public. But with the rider that until the police and judiciary function as they should, such initiatives will be a waste of money. The survey showed clearly that journalists want and need to be able to work in safety and to publish and broadcast in the public interest knowing they are not going to be threatened, injured, imprisoned or killed. The current media climate in Afghanistan means there is a high degree of self-censorship among journalists and this has to change if the profession is to flourish.

International support is also needed to define the role of Afghanistan's state broadcasting sector to set it apart from government. When a genuine public broadcaster is a reality in Afghanistan, donor support to ensure it is properly resourced and regulated could be a successful way of promoting free speech and pluralism in the country.

The survey also indicates that training and supporting media business managers would be productive – in order to assist private media to become self-financing and money making enterprises. Such skills building could take place in the context of a national media school, as discussed above.

Of course all the initiatives and potential future donor interventions

mentioned above will only have limited impact while the conflict continues. Afghanistan's media, as with media cultures everywhere, can only really grow and consolidate itself in an environment of peace, security, economic development and investment. That Afghanistan is still some way off.

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Chapter 7

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7.2 Appendix I – example of completed survey

AFGHANISTAN MEDIA SURVEY

30.01.2010

PART I – Journalists and Media Professionals

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this survey is to acquire information from journalists and professionals working in the Afghan media. I want information about foreign support and funding for the media in the post-Taliban period.

Your participation in this survey is important, as it will help shape future development aid to Afghanistan related to the media, journalism and the right to freedom of expression.

My name is Sean Crowley and I am conducting this survey as part of a research project at the University of Tampere in Finland. The research will contribute to a better understanding of how media in post-conflict societies like Afghanistan can be best assisted through funding, training, equipment & technology, mentoring and advocacy.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE SURVEY

In the **FIRST** section of the survey (Questions 1 – 3), please put an X next to the answer that is most appropriate. In the **SECOND** part of the survey (Questions 4 – 10), please answer each question as fully and

honestly as you can. Please take as much space as you need to complete your answer. I do not need to know your name, but you are free to include it. All responses will be treated as completely confidential.

SURVEY

PART 1

1) What type of journalism or media work are you involved in?

Newspapers, Magazines, Radio, Television X, Online

X, Cinema, Public Relations Other – please specify

2) What type of job do you do?

Reporter, Editor, Producer X, Presenter, Columnist/Reviewer, Layout,

Photographer, Technician, Other – please specify

3) What is your work status?

Employed full-time by a media organisation

Employed part-time by a media organisation

Self-employed or freelance X

PART 2

4) What city or region of Afghanistan do you work in? NATIONWIDE

5) What do you think about the contemporary media situation in Afghanistan?

The fledgling Afghan media is rapidly progressing in size as well as in quality. Afghans are practicing freedom of expression after three decades

of conflict and restrictions by different regimes the communists, mujahidin and then the Taliban. But the media has a long way to acquire the standards required for good journalism.

6) What has improved and what has worsened in the Afghan media since the end of Taliban rule?

The Afghan media has expanded in size significantly however there are more government lid restrictions and both government and none government threats now and almost one or two new restrictions emerge every year adding more complication and bureaucracy in day to day reporting.

7) Have you been involved in any training initiatives since 2001 that were organised or funded by foreign organisations or nations? If yes, what were they?

Yes, Print Journalism, Thomson Foundation UK 2004 funded by the UN.

8) What lasting impact do you think foreign assistance has had on the Afghan media since 2001?

The Afghan media started with almost no culture of paid advertisement and the only way it could continue without any income was foreign assistance. Now with flourishing business as well as presence of many international organisations good media organisations are doing well. But still some new emerging media outlets ie weeklies or local radio stations appear and after some time disappear due to lack of income and

marketing. There is still a need for further funding towards young emerging Afghan media outlets and training of Afghan journalists working with low income media outlets.

9) Of the foreign programmes that you know about designed to improve the media in Afghanistan since 2001, which do you think have had the MOST impact?

UNESCO/Internews as well as British Council's assistance towards Kabul University School of Journalism.

Please state your reasons

The assistance has enabled the Kabul University school of journalism to practice practical journalism and eventually have enabled journalists continue their profession after graduation. In the past journalists could not compete with experienced journalists when they were employed after graduation [BA] and in many cases journalists opted other professions that could help them earn their bread and butter rather media.

IWPR [Institute of War and Peace Reporting] IWPR has been one of my favorite one I know many journalists now working in senior positions in other Afghan media organisations had started with IWPR. Their approach is learning by doing and still there are some journalists contributing to IWPR, writing very good illustrative online stories which triggers story ideas for other media outlets.

10) Of the foreign programs that you know about designed to improve the

media in Afghanistan since 2001, which do you think have had the LEAST impact?

Short term funding and or short term workshops and training programmes by big media organisations like the BBC, the UN and some Embassies.

Please state your reasons

Very little lasting impact – seems to be mainly public relations for embassies trying to show what they are doing for local Afghans. Most of these projects are not thought through properly.

11) In the future, what other forms of foreign media assistance do you think would be MOST useful for Afghanistan?

Long term

A) An Independent College of Journalism that could provide long term media training even to certificate and degree level supervised by foreign and Afghan instructors. This is because the Kabul Uni school of journalism is governmental and there is a limit to how much reform you can bring to make the school up to date and efficient.

Short-term

Specific Advanced media training for Broadcast journalists TV. We have more than 10 private TV stations and it is increasing but unfortunately there is almost no quality journalism and no culture of investigative reporting and feature films and documentaries.

END OF SURVEY

Thank you very much for your assistance, your help is most important and is likely to have an impact on future external assistance to Afghanistan's media. If you would like to keep in contact with me and hear about the how this research project is progressing, please send me an e-mail and I would be delighted to get in touch.

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7.3 Appendix II – background on BBC, Internews, AINA & IWPR

BBC World Service Trust

The BBC is very well known in Afghanistan, having broadcast in Dari and Pashto since the 1960s. It was the only external broadcaster with a correspondent in the country throughout the Afghan civil war and during Taliban rule, and the majority of Afghans have been listening to the BBC radio drama *New Home, New Life* since 1994. The work of BBC World Service Trust (WST) in Afghanistan has focused on health, education, governance and human rights. WST works with the Afghan government, local broadcasters, NGOs and media professionals, to provide a range of

educational programming and support materials, as well as capacity building and policy advice.

Internews

Since 2002, Internews has set up 33 independent radio stations owned and operated by Afghan organisations, though many of these stations are facing tough times in 2010 to sustain themselves as foreign funding is cut back. Internews has also provided equipment and training to local journalists, produced independent radio content with local journalists; and established a satellite distribution system for radio programming. This distribution system used to be national, but ongoing insecurity in the south and east has restricted its reach in the past three years. Salaam Watandar (“Hello Countryman!”) is a public broadcast service for independent and community radio stations in Afghanistan, and was launched in 2004 by Internews Network.

Aina & IWPR

Aina was founded in 2001 by an Iranian photojournalist to promote press freedom. It is based in Paris with offices around the world, and it has supported an educational mobile cinema in Afghanistan, the first women's radio station, and the first school for photojournalists. The London-based NGO IWPR runs training programmes and publishes the weekly "Afghan Recovery Report," which uses stories written by student journalists.

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