



Sustaining Media Reforms in Transition Politics – A Study of Three Southeast Asian Countries

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1. Introduction

Media and communication scholars as well as proponents of media freedom and independence suggest that media, as an important tool for political expression, is crucial to create and sustain functioning democracies and to serve as a catalyst for human development. This is captured in the definition provided by UNESCO, a UN-led intergovernmental body with the specific mandate to promote freedom of expression:

“Free, independent and pluralistic media empower citizens with information that enables them to make informed choices and actively participate in democratic processes. They can help enhance transparency and accountability, by facilitating dialogue between decision-makers and the rest of society and by exposing abuse of power. They also play a crucial role in improving the public’s understanding of current or emerging issues, events, priorities, and policy pronouncements and options” (Unesco, 2008).

But, indicators developed by many non-governmental organisations on freedoms and freedom of the press often describe countries in Southeast Asia as not free or low in the global ranks.¹ Even in countries that have undergone democratization because of peoples’ movements to bring down the undemocratic regimes, and media reforms, such as the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia, academics and observers are critical of the outcomes. They are cautious that after a decade or so of openness and relative freedoms, there have been signs of reversals back to authoritarian practices.² Up to the early 2000s, critics were sceptical of the potential changes in Myanmar, but in 2012, a less hawkish leadership of the military regime announced a series of reforms, which included relaxing restrictions on the media and journalists. Laws on news media and publishing have replaced older ones, with only slight improvements for journalists and owners, while dailies have replaced weekly journals of the past. Observers still take a cautiously optimistic outlook on the changes taking place in the country and especially whether the new media landscape is sustainable or if it will return to the controlled and repressive environment of the past (Brooten, 2016; PEN America Centre, 2015; Rogers, 2012). The political, legal and institutional changes made during and after the transitions may be inadequate to guarantee that the conditions for media to operate and for citizens to access information or express themselves would not be overturned or be captured by other forces, thus returning the situation to one of more repression. The resulting impact could be the loss of personal freedoms and a significant deterioration in the quality of lives of the peoples. This research proposes to study the factors that are needed to ensure that the gains made are not reversed, not only for the media, but also for the public in general. It is prompted by the questions of ‘whose media reform is it’ and ‘how can it be sustainable’. It will be tested in three countries – Myanmar, Indonesia and Thailand – to represent a selection in Southeast Asia.

To answer the questions above, the research will first have to establish what the goals or objectives were politically and the related media reform processes, when societies

¹ Examples are the US-based Freedom House Freedom in the World and Freedom of the Press indicators and the France-based Reporters Sans Frontiers that measures and ranks countries for their levels of press freedom.

² Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility. (2004). *Press Freedom in the Philippines: A Study in Contradictions*. Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility and the Southeast Asian Press Alliance.

underwent the political transitions, presumably for a more democratic governance because of the benefits it would have for the people. This would be necessary in light of the contesting ideas of democracy and the related field of transition politics, where debates are ongoing about whether democracy is a universal value and if its prescriptions and procedures are adequate as a system of governance in non-western societies. Related to this would be the need to unpack some of the assumptions about democracy and market capitalism, where some proponents of media reforms suggest that transitions to democracy would readily make the markets the best arbiter of media systems. There is significant work done by media scholars in the global south³ who challenge this presumption and instead caution that markets in post-authoritarian regimes retain strong links with the old forces and emerge as new sources of controls and censorship. Finally, the ongoing criticism of media in transition politics that there is monopoly of voices and interests in the so-called liberalised environments, warrant an inquiry into how inclusive the media reform processes were or have been. Subsequently, one should investigate if this would be a critical requirement to ensure that media and other forms of communication are accessible to all segments of society and that it can play the role to facilitate discussions and find resolutions to conflicts. Based on these, the research aims to fulfil these objectives:

1. To critically analyse the concepts and expectations of, and strategies for media reforms by stakeholders
2. To determine how inclusive the media reform processes have been in its representation of the different interest groups and individuals and beneficiaries
3. To investigate factors that would be critical to ensure that the reforms in the media sector are sustainable

As such, the research questions will be:

1. What are the objectives and expectations of the media reforms?
2. To what extent is the media reform process inclusive?
3. What are the factors that can sustain the media reforms?

³ For the purpose of this research, the works of Argentinian scholar Silvio Waisbord (2010), who has analysed the media reform movements across a number of countries in South America, are instructive and provide critical insights on the role of social movements, political timings that influenced reforms and the impact of globalisation. Examples of the critical analyses regarding media reforms in the Central and Eastern European states are by Mihai Coman (2000), Andrew K. Milton (2001) and Zrinjka Perusko (2013).

2. Literature review

This section discusses the literature related to the topic to introduce the ideas and debates as well as the possible frameworks that can be applied to the research. My research is situated within the framework of media during political transition processes; in particular, to document the changes that have taken place, either initiated top down or bottom up to reform the media environment and how stakeholders and the public have responded to the transition process. Because I am comparing several countries, it will be necessary to use an analytical tool that can identify the developments across different times and contexts. Here, I will refer to Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini's description of media systems and Katrin Voltmer's analysis of media in transitional democracies. Having said that, I will also apply a political economy perspective to discuss the political processes, the impact of politics and economy on the media and the media's impact on society, and the relationship between structures of politics and resources with the different actors and the public in the reform processes.

2.1 Media systems

The 1956 *Four Theories of the Press* by Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm dominated the study of media systems for a long time to explain why the press is the way it is in the different political systems. They divided the global media systems into four models: authoritarian, libertarian, Soviet and social responsibility, clearly against the backdrop of the Cold War. While the models may have explained how the press operated and how the political systems influenced them, they did not present a comparative approach across countries and contexts. The four theories also seemed to assume that the media or press merely reflected society and were not in themselves, political actors. In 2004, scholars Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini introduced a different set of systems to understand and explain media across much of North America and Europe, partly disputing the work of Siebert et.al in *Four Theories of the Press*. They use four dimensions in media systems to conduct discourse analysis and case studies of 18 countries:

- 1) Structure of media markets and in particular the development of a mass press,
- 2) Political parallelism or the extent to which the different media reflect distinct political orientations,
- 3) Professionalisation involving dimensions such as levels of autonomy of journalists, distinct professional norms, public service orientation and the instrumentization both by state and commercialization, and
- 4) Role of the state, primarily focusing on the public service broadcasting, or state owned media, as well as use of subsidies for the press, postal and telegraph services, tax breaks and state advertisers; and the use of laws as state intervention (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

They propose three models based on the analysis in which the countries gravitate towards based on the units of analysis: Mediterranean Pluralist (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain), Democratic Corporatist (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland), and Liberal Model (UK, US, Canada, Ireland). Most importantly, they find that the clusters of countries do share certain characteristics in the media systems and these are often interrelated. They concluded that there is no one system

of media in any given country but the media is composed of sometimes separate, at other times, overlapping elements. Variations do exist even among the countries they studied, and when applied to non-western countries, the distinctions become less clear and actors in the media ecosystem are far more malleable than predicted. Duncan McCargo takes this model for Asia but warns that there are so many exceptions to the rules and models and that they tend to obscure and not explain the nature of the media systems (McCargo, 2012). Nevertheless, I find the dimensions are a useful point of departure and like McCargo, take a critical approach to the variables to explore historical, political and organisational contexts to understand decisions taken by the media and other political actors.

Hallin and Mancini's dimensions provide the backdrop in which Katrin Voltmer conducts a global study on the media in transitional democracies (Voltmer, 2013). Voltmer's study is interdisciplinary as she brings together the divergent strands of political science and communication studies, an effort that certainly enriches the scholarly and practical knowledge on media and politics across different times and cultural contexts. She raises questions of what the priorities for the transition should be and who would set them. This point can be further researched upon to unpack the ways in which different groups or interests negotiate or contest in the spaces for media reforms. Voltmer notes that the liberalist perspective is to put the watchdog role first while others argue that a corporatist media may not provide space for different views, and that some form of regulation is necessary for quality public communication. She proposes two standards of democratic media, which resonates with many proponents of media freedom and activism – *independence* from state and other powers, and internal and external *diversity*. I agree with Voltmer's rights-based approach in the book in using freedom of expression and press freedom as part of the key values and concepts in media reforms, as these can be a useful starting point to compare the countries in Southeast Asia. To add to this, I propose to analyse the power of non-political communities to influence policies and to problematize the presentation of reform agendas as commonly accepted goals.

2.2 Democratisation and the transition paradigm

The study will have to begin by addressing many of the contentious terminologies and concepts, and recognise that they should not be treated as givens, starting with the premise of this research that transition into democracy is a desired form political governance and that media is a critical force in political transformations and has the potential to empower citizens. Essentially, changes in the political and media landscapes towards rule of law, competitive politics, less state control and a more active citizenry would lead to a more just and fair environment for the enjoyment of political, economic, social and cultural rights. From a normative standpoint, political theorists have expounded the virtues of democracy and democratisation as the best form of governance. These refer to the citizens, who are able, through competitive processes, hold elected rulers accountable. There are minimum conditions in terms of procedures; for example, the decision-making and implementation of public policies is done by the government and public officials, conducting free and fair elections at regular intervals, rights of citizens to seek for information and express themselves without facing punishments and rights to be part of associations and political parties. Theorists such as Seymour Martin Lipset, Robert Dahl, Samuel Huntington, Larry Diamond and Arendt Lijphart are widely referred to for their

work on the forms of democracy, including the principles and procedures, as well as the studies on transitions.⁴ On the latter, which developed in the 1950s to explain and prescribe the changes from authoritarian or fascist rule to a democratic one, it is suggested that there are phases in which societies and political actors go through to put into place the systems or processes to institutionalise democracy. These have been criticised as being teleological and not useful in non-Western countries that have different experiences with colonialism and conflicts. Critiques suggest democracy needs to be seen as a gradual process rather than as an end project; or that it treats as given the ability of all citizens to participate on equal footing when inequalities are known to have been deepened as market-based economies develop; feminist scholars question whether it is even an adequate political system as it continues to exclude a majority of the population in decision-making (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005). The transition paradigm has been losing its relevance and accuracy, according to Thomas Carothers, who argues that the three-part process of democratisation – opening, breakthrough and consolidation – is not often followed and most developing and post-communist countries described as being in transition, are commonly in between a full-fledged democracy and an outright dictatorship (Carothers, 2002, 2007). Having said that, literature on politics are still dominated by the theories of democratisation and transition. Those writing on Indonesia debate the political stages, the influence of the military and those from the Suharto era, while retaining the assumption of a linear development (Abdulbaki, 2008).

In the study of the three countries, the transition phases are more discernible in some compared to others. Using Rozumilowicz’s (2002) explanation, and at this early phase of research, I try to show the developments over the years that may have led to the changes in the media and political landscapes in the three countries. Of the three countries, it could be said that Indonesia exhibits more characteristics of maturing processes with regards to establishing a freer and democratic media landscape when compared to Thailand, while it is still too early to have a definite conclusion for Myanmar. This effort at clustering will need to be supported by further research.

Country	Stages			
	Pre-transition	Primary	Secondary	Late or Mature
Details ⁵	Preliminary stage of media reforms usually comes before any political transition process has begun, and lays the groundwork for continuation of the process. The phase is signaled formally or informally by the regime in place or the “opening” up of economic, social or political arenas. At the most basic level, it could mean the regime is open to some criticism. But it can easily backslide as it happened in Poland until 1989. Yet, the possibility is always on the	Period of systematic change within the formerly authoritarian regime. Culminates in the destruction of the old system and the establishment of new institutional and regulatory structures. Characterised by willingness of regime to transit through formal or informal devolution of power or some part of it to the opposition forces. Through internally pact transition (structured), there is formal agreement between former regime and	Newly formulated structures will have been put into place - this stage then focuses on the fine-tuning of the media legislative framework. What can happen during this stage is immediate consolidation, authoritarian backlash, or institutional revision. First is least likely, what is likely is the capture of institutions by elites, which can then stifle the process towards non-democratic ends. Problems in this stage are inappropriate structuring whereby the	Defined by the emergence of a coherent new system. Different goals and problems emerge at this stage that need to be addressed in order to safeguard the newly emerged system. Main task in this stage is to consolidate commitment to this new system while drawing every larger segments of society into the forum.

⁴ These theorists are cited in Randall (1993), Rozumilowicz (2002), Voltmer (2013) and Jebril et.al. (2013) in the context of media reforms, and Whitehead (2002) and Carothers (2002) in their critique of the dominant paradigms of democratisation.

⁵ Rozumilowicz (2002:20-23)

	horizon and reformers can take advantage.	newly emerging opposition forces, and elections is one of the ways to achieve it. Externally pacted ones involve a third party like the UN intervention, and this is less stable. The last is unstructured, where ruptured transitions from revolutionary movements overthrow the previous regime (not to be mistaken for regime factionalism). Period is marked by enactment of media legislations and establishment of legislative framework for all media sectors. Policy making and implementation take centre stage for reformers.	political, legal, economic, social structures are incomplete or bear the remnants of the former regime; inappropriate utilization is when the structures are complete but implemented by dominant groups in a manner inappropriate to their reformist design.	
Myanmar	Political “openings” were said to be part of Than Shwe’s Seven Step Road Map in 2006 – known as disciplined democracy. In 2011, Than Shwe steps down and the newly named President, Thein Sein, made announcements of the importance of media. By 2012, his regime had abolished press censorship. Invitation to UNESCO to help draft media law and other international bodies for media development. Prior to this, licenses were slowly being opened up in the 2000s, although at crisis points, the regime resorted to its usual crackdown, for example, during Cyclone Nargis and the Saffron Revolution.	In 2012, the censorship rules were abolished. New laws are enacted by Parliament, still under the military government, in 2014. In 2015, the general elections were held, rather peacefully to put the NLD into power, and where the results were accepted by the former regime.		
Indonesia	Since the 1980s, parallel to the political authoritarianism was the development of a crony capitalist economy, which meant the privatisation of the media. New media licenses were issued, the broadcasting sector expanded with new television stations owned directly or indirectly by Suharto. In 1994, the ban of three publications led to the formation of media activist movements, underground media	In Price et.al’s book discussing media and democratisation, Indonesia was in this transition phase as it had just begun (1999-2001) to dismantle the old control structures and put in place new press laws guaranteeing freedoms. Politically, while Suharto’s style leadership was removed, the the transition president, B.J Habibie himself came from Suharto’s Cabinet, and the bureaucracy was largely retained. But civil society and the reformers groups were visibly strong in influencing legislations and independent media.	Four general elections have been held uninterrupted and it is timely to analyse if indeed the new system of governance and decision making is the “only game in town”. Scholars and activists note current challenges precisely in the context of media capture by big businesses and political elites, many who are not necessarily associated with the old authoritarian regimes.	At this phase now?
Thailand	Economic boom and technological advancement propelled the media to be a strong force ⁶ . Marked by a period of economic boom, and generally more democratic environment. Press community was able to pressure then Prime Minister Chatichai	While democratic practices were installed and legislations amended, the country continued to experience military coups that had		

⁶ Thitinan Pongsudhirak (1997)

	Choonhavan in January 1991 to repeal Decree 42 that gave powers to government for arbitrary shutdowns of newspapers.			
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2.3 Transition and media reforms

While scholars acknowledge the shortcomings of the democracy and transition paradigms, they do apply the general ideas as empirical tools to critically examine the role of and the impact on, the media, vis-à-vis the state, other political actors and the economic structures (Jebril et al., 2013; Milton, 2001; Monroe, Rozumilowicz, & Verhulst, 2002; Peruško, 2013; Rozumilowicz, 2002; Voltmer, 2013). The link is not always clear between having a free and independent media, and political freedoms and social justice (Jebril, Stetka, & Loveless, 2013), but it offers a useful framework to analyse the focus on and functions of the media in societies undergoing political shifts. In studies of political transitions in numerous countries, journalists and media organisations were part of the reformist groups or opposing forces that eventually brought down authoritarian regimes, and were later parties to, and targets of, changes in political rules, laws and policies. The results are mixed; in some countries that experienced transitions there have been increased and improved public participation in political and public processes facilitated by the media, but in others, old and new state and non-state forces have captured the media. The post-Communist eastern and central European states, once under the Soviet bloc, have had momentary successes through the legislations of new laws to protect media freedom and remove state monopoly of media outlets. Political participation improved through media coverage of public interest issues and investigative journalism, as well as the professionalisation of the journalism sector. However, there were pitfalls in the introduction of public service broadcasting that were modelled after the institutions in the UK and northern Europe, while a new class of capital owners and members of the old regimes have stepped in to take control of the media outlets and content for their own interests. These cases, as well as the media reform struggles in Latin America, have formed a substantial body of work on the topic of media reforms in transitional politics. They present a critical look at whether legislative changes and other policies and practices have increased and improved the access of citizens to information and expression important for them, and for the media to function adequately as the watchdogs of the powerful institutions.

The research will introduce these theories of media and democratisation and in particular, expand on the conclusions of scholars like Krishna Sen who writes in the context of Indonesia that one cannot generalise media's 'impact' on politics and that "the absence of coherent theoretical explanation of how the media operates in the process of transition from authoritarianism to democracy and debates about the diverse pace and process of democratisation through the 1990s underscores the importance of micro-level, careful, empirical studies of media structures, regulations and practices." (Sen, 2011:2) Observing Indonesia in the last days of Suharto, Sen and Hill wrote in 2000 that there could be no simple connection between the erosion of government censorship, the opening up of the media and the establishment of a pluralist democracy, as understood in the West. A decade later, they raise these questions:

- 1) How will the media operate in a post-authoritarian context while the rules and practices of democracy are being constructed?

- 2) Who controls the content of the media texts when the state ceases to censor?
- 3) How will journalists and other media practitioners relate to popular but not necessarily unified aspirations for democracy?
- 4) What in the end is the value of an open (that is, not state-censored or state-owned) media to the establishment of democratic governance in Indonesia? (Sen, 2011)

Duncan McCargo's works have been particularly relevant and influential in international comparative studies, as he explores the role of the media during political transitions. For example, he compares Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia following the toppling of the unpopular governments by mass protest movements, in which the media played an important role. He notes that a similar movement occurred in Myanmar in the late 1980s, but where it was unsuccessful in removing the military regime. The core assumption in most literature on democratization is that a more independent press with greater freedom will make a positive contribution to political change and support the democratic transitions. He concludes that in the cases of political upheavals, media serves as a sophisticated political actor in its own right, not simply to serve the state, the public interest or opposition movements, and that even individual publications or media outlets are often 'polyvalent'. Media tends to play a supporting role in political transitions but when the crisis is over, the media may decline in effectiveness as an institution of civil society (McCargo, 2003).

Writing about the political changes in post-Communist East states and the relationship between the political actors and the media, Milton argues that the democratic forces that come into power after the Communist regimes retain the media dependence that characterised the old regimes. Regardless of ideology (whether nationalist, Nazi or Soviet regimes), political actors "will use available political opportunities and resources to pursue their own political goals, and therefore institutional relations of media dependence will persist because this serves the agendas and interests of the political actors charged with granting media independence" (Milton, 2001). Generally, he observes that there is rhetorical consensus about the need for reform, but not practical agreement about what such reform should actually look like.

There are differences in the notions and agendas in articulating reforms or people's media. In Thailand, at the height of the campaigns in early 1990s, non-governmental organisations lobbied for the inclusion of people's media rights in the new law, while the business community insisted on the discourse of 'the free market', and the government pushed for a discourse combining centralized control and capitalism under the notion of 'national security.' (Brooten & Klangnarong, 2009) People's groups and communities took to the notion of a people's media, which was put forward by academics and civil society, following the 1992 Black May incident. This resulted in the drafting of the 1997 Constitution (widely called the People's Constitution) that had strong guarantees of freedom of expression, public's right to access the airwaves and media professionals' right to conduct their work free from interference. Yet, the constitution was not necessarily followed by laws to guarantee those provisions and protections – as exemplified by the delay and resistance in setting up the regulatory body for the broadcasters in the subsequent years that also became cause of conflicts under the present military rule.

Most work on media and transitions focus heavily on political communication and journalism. James Curran challenges the centrality of media as the intermediary institution in democratisation as it downplays the role of social groups, political parties, civil society, ideology and globalisation, making it disconnected from the ways in which contemporary democracy works. He further argues that the media and democratisation theories tend to focus on political journalism and not the wider fiction or entertainment media that make up the bulk of media content people generally consume (Curran, 2007). Furthermore, the focus of the role of the media is in monitoring the state but little on other forms of power, such as social, cultural and economic sources. He proposes that the democratic role of media entails strengthening the organised groupings of civil society and the political system, while the media systems are not a single entity and can represent different sectors or roles. While this research will not analyse all forms of content in the media, it will attempt to include the perspectives of practitioners from the wider communication sector such as the creative and digital sectors, known to be important sites of contestation. For example, the production and screenings of human rights short films or documentaries, the use of social media in political debates and the experiences of poets and writers during the political transitions.

2.4 Feminist political economy of the media

This research will continue in the tradition of many of the scholars who have employed a political economy perspective to analyse changes in the media landscape and the impact of the overall political, economic and social conditions. In particular, questions of ownership, access to financial resources of different owners, regulations that favour big businesses, the continued gender discrimination in media ownership, production and representation, will be investigated through the research. Political economists Graham Murdock and Peter Golding are the influential figures in defining the parameters of the field, and they view political economy as holistic, historical and concerned with the balance between capitalist enterprise and public intervention. Political economy “goes beyond technical issues of efficiency to engage with moral questions of justice, equity, and the public good (Golding & Murdock, 1991). In explaining the basis in which feminist political economy is also developed, political economy is primarily concerned with the allocation of resources within capitalist societies, and through the studies of ownership and control, they can document and analyse relations of power, class systems and other structural inequalities (Steeves & Wasko, 2002). The prevailing economic and social restrictions on women and sexual minorities would likely exclude these groups from informing the reforming agendas. Byerly and Ross explore the issues of feminist movements in media reforms, among others, looking at women in media activism. They explore the issue of media production and note the absence of gender specific language in the media reform goals. While focusing on the US, their survey of women activists in the media is a useful framework to understand the other regions as well.

"Feminist engagement with media reform in the USA has been slowly emerging alongside a media reform movement begun in the 1980s...But the absence of gender-specific language and specifically gendered concerns signals an underlying problem in the “traditional” media reform movement, and provides a compelling reason for a parallel feminist movement to articulate what women need from a more democratic media system.” (2006:93)

In reviewing the work done on gender and the information and communication technologies, Martin concludes that most look at how gender discrimination is experienced and less so on the reasons why it happens. While the ICT systems are slightly newer compared to the “older” media systems, the central argument is still applicable (Martin, 2002). She notes that since communication infrastructures are created by the industry and more or less controlled by the state, they are moulded by gendered structures of power already existing in society. Her idea of a truly democratic system of communication, in discussing ICTs, is that it should be concerned with local practices and needs, including those of women. “A critical approach to these systems of communication should take into account, in addition to the process of globalization involved in the expansion of the economy, the internalization of a political model in which women’s struggles for recognition and women’s right to communication within a transnational system based on complex forms of power relations would be integrated.” (Martin, 2002:56) She further argues for the deconstruction of the role of private capitalist interests that have been presented as general interest and essentially “annihilating the representation of disempowered groups.” Some questions she suggests that could be asked in the process of the deconstruction, related to power, that could be applied to understand the negotiations in media reforms are:

- 1) Where is power located in the infrastructures and processes of systems of communication?
- 2) Who has control within the social agencies related to these structures and what are their interests?
- 3) Are any shifts in power and control possible? If so, which ones? (Martin, 2002:58)

Sen has written on media in Indonesia from a feminist perspective, including on films and television. Her work on media and politics provides a useful foundation to employ a feminist political economy approach in my research. She writes in the context of the current situation where the “bureaucracy, politico-business families, corporate conglomerates and commercial properties interests” that had their roots in the New Order have prevailed, activists and researchers need different questions and analytical tools that were useful in bringing down the New Order, to understand, critique and re-form the media to serve democratisation. Among the key points are the rethinking of dichotomies such as national/provincial, commercial/community, and professional/amateur. I would add gender as another element in the analysis, not as a ‘men vs women’ in media, but in informing the ways in which reforms are conceptualised and framed. To put it simply, to what extent were the media reforms in Indonesia gendered, and what are the prospects for the Burmese experience to contain gendered reforms.

2.5 Media democratisation

An interesting and potentially useful strand of analysis of media reforms is communication rights and media democratisation, which Hackett and Carroll define as “media-oriented activism that expands the range of voices accessed through the media, builds an egalitarian and participatory public sphere, promotes the values and practices of sustainable democracy outside the media, and/or within the media, and offsets the political and economic inequalities found elsewhere in the social system” (Hackett & Carroll, 2004). They assert the importance of critical social movements in the context of media reforms or

democratisation as integral to any radical politics to challenge the dominance and consolidation of corporate power in the global communications sector. The idea is not new, and was widely promoted among media reformers in the US, led by media scholar Robert McChesney, who has written extensively against the growing power and influence of media corporates and conglomerates. Among others, he has been a proponent of the need for capital power to be checked, more support for non-profit media and coalitions of people's and interest groups as a broad social movement to democratise society (McChesney, 1998). Thai scholar Ubonrat Siriyuvasak builds on these in exploring people's media and communication rights in Indonesia and Philippines (Siriyuvasak, 2005). She concludes from her study of the two countries that given the shrinking spaces for genuine public debate or alternative space for dissent, several people's media projects and use of digital tools have been able to:

“restructure the political economy of the communications infrastructure and the cultural environment to enrich themselves as active citizens. This would hopefully, pave the way towards the long-term concern of achieving their education, cultural autonomy and participatory democracy at all levels of a people's livelihood.”
(Siriyuvasak, 2005: 259)

Lisa Brooten and Supinya Klangnarong, writing on Thailand's experiences with people's media and reforms, argue that an important success in its development is the establishment of a discourse of people's media and communication rights. They conclude that there should be a small but very active network of people committed to promoting and maintaining these rights. In the context of community radio, laws are necessary to support people's rights to access the media and express themselves freely. However, the unstable political environment in Thailand (in reference to the 2006 coup) made that task difficult (Brooten & Klangnarong, 2009). They suggest that reforms that support people's media need two dimensions that should develop together: democratisation of the airwaves and decentralising media ownership, and promoting a deep-rooted concept of democratic, free expression. They conclude that if “civil society is allied with media groups in promoting communication rights, media reforms can be advanced even where legal obstacles exist.” Birowo's study on community radio stations in Indonesia that developed during the transition period showed the important role of coalition of civil society groups in articulating demands for the legal framework and in lobbying for the establishment of an independent regulatory body. In several regions, community radio networks were created that brought together academics, NGO activists, journalists, radio practitioners at seminars to promote community radio and create pressure groups for laws that would support such media – one of them being the Advocates for Draft Broadcasting Act (*Advokasi Rencana Undang-undang Penyiaran*) in 2002 to lobby for the inclusion of community radio in the broadcasting law (Birowo, 2011). Relatively new to reforms, Myanmar, is seeing different visions among the stakeholders in the reform process; journalists want the freedom to report without fear, the ethnic media want to be recognised for themselves as well as the voices they represent, the military still tries to limit media reporting and offers little access to information, while the government wants to convince the public of its commitment to media diversity and freedom (Brooten, 2016).

However, the euphoria that came with the successes of civic movements and internet activism have been threatened as new market forces start to capture the small, community and digital media platforms. In Indonesia, while the internet had some impact in supporting civil society during the immediate months leading to the fall of Suharto, big media replaced the smaller, community based independent set ups that spread the information related to the *reformasi* and the civil society then lost its momentum or a common agenda (Lim, 2003). The research will inquire about the role of civil society, or other stakeholders, in sustaining the reforms.

3. Research Design

3.1 Focus Countries

This research will focus on three Southeast Asian countries –Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand – to test some of the established theories and models around media in transition politics and to identify similarities and differences that could further explain why some media systems and processes succeed or fail. These countries were chosen because they currently represent the different poles of political freedoms and economic growth, but they will be compared on their respective phases of transition. To some extent, it can be argued that in the region, Indonesia’s experience with political change and media from a military rule is the benchmark in which to analyse a number of the countries in the region.⁷ Myanmar has only recently come out of decades-long military dictatorship and its political and media development should be studied against another country with some similar historical experiences of colonialism, internal struggles for self-rule, the presence of multi-ethnic, language and religious communities. Thailand’s back and forth experience with reforms provides the opportunity to study the various factors that allowed for reforms to take place and those that led to the dismantling of the gains. Ubonrat Siriyuvasak (2005) justifies her selection of Indonesia and the Philippines in a comparative study of people’s media and communication rights on the grounds that the two are important players in ASEAN, have varying degrees of media freedom and political transformation that could provide for a dynamic comparative perspective, share colonial histories with different western powers and both share a rich tradition of cultural diversity and natural resources. She argues that in both societies, the people and the media believed their rights to communication were essential for democratic rule and fought against the dictatorships using people’s media to transform passive citizens into political actors. Lisa Brooten (2011) uses the backdrop of the militarised states of Myanmar and the Philippines to study the impact on the media and journalists, where media reforms efforts have tended to focus on the rights to safety of the journalists instead of media as a public service and social force. Any similarities or differences would help explain common and/or unique features and characteristics that may develop into a model. In her proposed framework for media and democratisation that is used to analyse 10 countries in different regions, Beata Rozumilowicz used the method of greatest difference comparison. This is because a study “structured around the principle of greatest difference allows for meaningful examination among cases with vastly divergent historical backgrounds, levels of development, political

⁷ Freedom House. (2013). *Freedom of the Press 2013: Indonesia*. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/indonesia>

institutionalizations, and social, cultural, and ethnic structures. As a result, any commonality found among cases may reasonable be assumed to hold generally.” (Rozumilowicz, 2002:2) On a practical note, the comparison is deliberately confined to three countries due to time and resource limitations.

3.2 News media focus

The research will have a bias in favour of media that focus on news or political communication. This does not mean that the other sections of the media are unimportant; as pointed out by scholars like Curran, the public consumes more non-news content and are more likely to be influenced by them. To include all sources of media content will require a wider theoretical understanding and resources for the execution of the research. There will not be a distinction between those working for or on the types of media, whether they are broadcasting, print or digital. The media platforms will be important insofar as discussions about ownership, media legislations or public access to information and expression are concerned. The research design will take into account the perspectives of those involved in creative expression or curators and advocates of digital activism and media to represent different users and stakeholders.

3.3 Methodology and data requirement

The research will use ethnographic methods involving interviews of individuals selected for the topic and observations, and content analysis of documents and archived information related to the laws on or that affect the media and media ownership. This will be supplemented by secondary research of published works and interviews related to the topic. During the first year, I conducted a pilot study with individuals working on or are affected by changes in the media landscape during the political transitions in Myanmar, Indonesia and Thailand.

3.3.1 Pilot Study

Between October 2015 and May 2016, I conducted discussions and informal interviews with 45 individual stakeholders in the media development and freedom sectors in Myanmar, Indonesia and Thailand. The consultation dates are as in Annex 1. During this pilot study, I inquired about perceptions about the media reform processes (either ongoing or completed) and if these would have positive impact and for whom, what their expectations were of media reforms, the actors involved in the processes, and recommendations for interviewees. The pilot study was particularly relevant for Myanmar as it was used to gauge the availability of information and the willingness of people to speak without fear (as recent as 2010, researchers and journalists faced difficulties accessing information and conducting interviews openly in the country). Initial observations from the consultations are presented in the next section.

3.3.2 Ethnographic research

3.3.2.1 Interviews

For the interviews, participants will be selected based on their roles in media reform processes in the respective countries, using purposive and snowball sampling (Babbie, 2010). Similar to the study done by Brooten (2011) in Burma and the Philippines, an estimated 60-80 participants will be selected from among media groups, journalists, academics, policymakers, media development, press freedom activists, civil society and in using the snowball sampling, I will identify those who have been involved in the media reform process in the three countries. A tentative list of interviewees was developed based on suggestions from the stakeholder consultations, and these will be cross-referenced with other experts to ensure that the list encompasses relevant and a wide range of perspectives. As the research attempts to explore questions of inclusiveness and representation in discussions about media reforms, the selection of interviewees will

The interviews will be recorded as the responses will be used for the analysis and writing. Participants will be asked to state if they wish to remain anonymous. A background note and a consent form will be given to each interviewee. For the interviews, I will use unstructured questions that combines some specific questions and to allow the conversations to raise other questions. The questions as well observations draw from previous studies on media reforms, such as Siriyuvasak's study on people's media in Indonesia and the Philippines (2005), Byerly & Ross (2006) on women and media, Brooten (2016) on the media in transition in Myanmar, Tapsell (2015) on the experiences of the media at the subnational level in Papua, Indonesia, and Gazali (2003) on the perceptions of the reforms in Indonesia's broadcasting sector.

3.3.2.2 Observations at meetings and conferences

In addition to interviews, I have attended and will participate in conferences and meetings as well as visit selected newsrooms and training programmes to gain insights on the responses of the media community to the reform process (Brooten, 2016). In my previous position as a media freedom advocate, I have participated in media trainings, workshops and discussions with journalists, other advocates and donors. All these observations and information can provide a nuanced understanding of the role of civil society, challenges faced by journalists and the political developments in these countries.

3.3.3 Data gathering

I will gather and analyse data on media ownership in the three countries to highlight emerging or old patterns. Such data is easily available in Indonesia and Thailand while independent consultations and media development organisations have begun compiling information about media owners and circulation in Burma. I will analyse the laws that have been introduced during the transition period that have an impact on the media. Analysis of the laws will help explain the aspirations or goals for the legislative framework and what agendas were brought to the discussion table when laws were enacted. Primary research will also cover, where possible, notification of official policies and plans and archived documents on parliamentary sittings or ministerial meetings to provide the background and

context to the issues. In his PhD dissertation on analysing freedom of the press during the transition process in Indonesia, Lukas S Ispandriarno conducted content analysis of minutes of meetings from 1999 on the draft press laws to gauge the position and arguments made by different stakeholders on what the laws should entail,⁸ while scholar Herlambang Perdana Wiratraman's socio-legal study on *Press Freedom, Law and Politics in Indonesia* analysed the legislations to offer an understanding of the "context of social and political configurations that influence law and its implementation."⁹ Thai media scholar, Pirongrong Ramasoota used similar methodologies in her book on community radio to analyse the context and impact of the laws and regulations that came about during the different periods of media reforms in the country.¹⁰

3.4.4 Secondary research

I will use secondary research to extract information from academic works and published interviews where access to the primary source is not possible. I foresee this to be particularly necessary to refer to interviews and analysis conducted in the years following reforms in Thailand in the 1990s and immediately after the fall of the Suharto regime in Indonesia in 1998. For example, the works of Indonesia scholars Harold Crouch¹¹, David Hill¹² and Vedi Hadiz¹³ and political economy analysis on the democratisation in Thailand by Kevin Hewison,¹⁴ would provide the necessary background and context to the discussions on the transition to democracy in the respective countries.

4. Initial observations

Interviews

During the pilot phase of stakeholder consultations between October 2015 and May 2016 that took place in Bangkok (Thailand), Jakarta (Indonesia), Yangon, Mandalay and Mrauk U

⁸ Lukas S Ispandriarno. (2008). *Political Communication in Indonesia: An Analysis of the Freedom of the Press in the Transition Process after the Downfall of the Soeharto-Regime (1998-2004)*. A Dissertation presented to the Institute of Media and Communication Science, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Science, Technical University of Ilmenau, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

⁹ Wiratraman, Herlambang Perdana. (2014) *Press Freedom, Law and Politics in Indonesia: a socio-legal study*. Institute for the Interdisciplinary Study of the Law, Van Vollenhoven Institute, Faculty of Law, Leiden University.

¹⁰ Pirongrong writes that between 1992 and 2010, there were several movements and government responses to media reforms, and these entailed: i) structural and regulatory reform of the media, ii) changes in the media content, iii) establishing public media and opening space for independent media, iv) promoting media literacy and v) self-regulation and promotion of media ethics. Ramasoota, R. (2013). *Community Radio in Thailand: From Media Reform to an Enabling Regulatory Framework*. Heinrich Boll Stiftung, Southeast Asia.

¹¹ Crouch, Harold. (2010). *Political Reform in Indonesia after Soeharto*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

¹² David T. Hill has written extensively on journalism, media and the internet in Indonesia, and is co-author and co-editor of several books and collections with another scholar, Krishna Sen.

¹³ In this article, Hadiz and Robison propose that the developments post-Suharto are best explained using a structural political economy approach that is relevant to understanding the shifting forces in the media sector as well. Hadiz, Vedi R. and Robison, Richard. (2013). The Political Economy of Oligarchy and the Reorganization of Power in Indonesia. *Indonesia*. No 96 (Special Issue): 35-57s

¹⁴ In this collection edited by Hewison, authors discuss the impact of the political change in Thailand after the 1992 Black May incident. Hewison, K. (ed) (1997). *Political Change in Thailand: Democracy and Participation*. Routledge.

(Myanmar), I interviewed 45 people of whom 27 were men and 18 women. A majority (26 or 57.8%) of the interviewees were journalists and editors. The others were media and other human rights activists or representatives of civil society groups (11 or 24.4%), journalism trainers (4 or 8.9%), media development (3 or 6.7%) and one media academic. The selection was based on recommendations and knowledge of their involvement or positions on media reforms and freedom, and efforts were made deliberately to seek out women respondents to test questions whether women were adequately represented in the processes. As this was a pilot study, the categories are not finalized and may be amended for the final list of interviewees. Responses from the pilot study may or may not be used for the final report but will form the basis of fine tuning the questions and to determine the respondents for the main interviews.

Issues

The stakeholder consultations and observations made so far have surfaced some themes across the countries, even though the political and media systems are at different stages. Indonesia transitioned into democratic governance in 1998, while Myanmar began the process about a decade later. Thailand is currently back under the military junta, which has undone many of the freedoms and rights to media and citizens introduced during the earlier transitions. These are only preliminary and are useful in framing follow up questions. During the consultations, the stakeholders were asked to reflect and comment on six themes: goals of the reforms, role of the media, the laws in place or the legal framework, media ownership, role of civil society and the inclusion of women in the reform process.

4.1 Goals of reforms

One of the questions in this research will be to inquire what the goals or objectives of media reforms are or were among the different stakeholders. The possibilities of competing goals are as likely as so-called shared ones. For example, in Indonesia, the participants of the *reformasi* movement had three goals – political freedom, freedom of the press and decentralization¹⁵ and both civil society and the new political leaders were guided by those goals. In Thailand, the first wave of reforms in the 1990s focused on the issue of media ownership¹⁶ but the visions were different among the stakeholders. Supinya and Brooten (2009) noted that the non-governmental organisations lobbying for the inclusion of people's media rights in the new law promoted the discourse of 'people's rights', while the businesses were using the discourse of 'the free market', and the government pushed for a discourse combining centralized control and capitalism under the notion of 'national security.' A media activist noted that in the previous waves of reform movements in Thailand, the public supported reform for media freedom but at present, people supported the call to regulate and control the media. "The sentiment is that people prefer peace rather than democracy. For almost two decades of reforms, we have had pluralism and public media. The attitude now is democracy can wait; we want peace, security."¹⁷ An investigative journalist in Myanmar said for him, media reform represented six central areas of

¹⁵ Interview with Nezar Patria, a member of the Press Council and editor of the digital department of Jakarta Post, in Jakarta on 4 May 2016.

¹⁶ Pirongrong Ramasoota (2013)

¹⁷ Interview with Kulachada Chaipipat, SEAPA, Bangkok, 6 October 2015.

improvements: capacity building of journalists, sustainability of the media outlets, an enabling legal environment, safety of journalists, use of technology for communication and media literacy.¹⁸ Others say they prioritised empowerment of the media and journalists as part of the changes while journalists in Mandalay, the second largest city in the country, said reform to them meant having a safe working environment, better salary and welfare for journalists, a level playing field for private and state media, the closure of the Ministry of Information, the freedom to access and interviews public officials and reporting without censorship.¹⁹

4.2 Media role

The stakeholders interviewed agreed that having a free media was crucial for democracy building and to encourage public participation in the political process. Reforms would allow the media to work freely and safely and ensure citizens access to information. However, all countries grapple with the issue of who is a journalist, whether in the form of dissident/exile/activist media in the transition and post-transition phases or whether online reporters and citizen journalists are “authentic” journalists. The political divisions in Thailand also brought to the fore discussions about partisan media²⁰ and that not all media or journalists are always in favour or work towards democratisation. Literature on transition note that media tends to play a role in the breakdown on authoritarian regimes, but that this function reduces or occurs less so during the “consolidation” phase (Voltmer, 2013; McCargo, 2003). News organisations themselves are not democratic or promote democracy (Schudson, 2011) as can be seen in the slant and agenda taken by some of the journalists in the coverage of the conflict and riots in Rakhine state (Myanmar)²¹ and in their treatment of Muslim minorities in Indonesia.²² With the advent of ICT and citizens’ media, a relevant question to be asked is if political communication that go through only the journalistic filters are good enough for democracy (Blumler & Coleman, 2015). In all three contexts, digital technologies and their impact on media and citizen’s access to information were viewed as both opportunities and threats. Hate speech over Facebook in Myanmar and the influence of Twitter in politics and public participation in Indonesia and Thailand were cited as examples of potential negatives in the use of technology. The reforms in Indonesia that began in 1999 did not fully anticipate the impact that information technology would have on news, entertainment and political communication, but today, it is the most influential platform for personal and political use.²³ It is useful to inquire further how the use of social

¹⁸ Interview with Nyan Lynn of *Mawkun* magazine on 12 December 2015 in Yangon.

¹⁹ Interview with seven journalists and editors from different news outlets in Mandalay on 11 February 2016.

²⁰ Chaipipat, *ibid*.

²¹ Regional media freedom organisation, the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA) issued a letter to the then Myanmar President Thein Sein on 8 November 2012, calling for more media freedom to combat racism in some of the mainstream media and the statements of senior government officials.

<https://www.seapa.org/burma-free-press-needed-to-properly-address-rakhine-conflict-open-letter/>

²² Jakarta Post. *Indonesian journalists support Islamic fundamentalism: Survey*. 25 August 2011.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/08/25/indonesian-journalists-support-islamic-fundamentalism-survey.html>

²³ Interview with Irawan Saptono of Institut Studi Arus Informasi (ISAI), 8 May 2016.

media in disseminating information and shaping opinions can be integrated into the wider reform agenda.

4.3 Legal framework

There were mixed responses and levels of confidence about the ability of the legal framework to provide the protections or guarantees for freedom of expression and media freedom. Responses seem to support findings from other transitional societies that regulations and policies on public service in particular, are often abused by or benefit old power holders, or new ones that want to entrench their position (Milton, 2001; Peruško, 2013; Wiratraman, 2010). While there are standards regarding the enabling legal environment for media to operate freely and for individuals to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, there is no evidence linking the enactment of media laws to improved situations. Indonesia adopted a Press Law in 1999, which aimed at ensuring the removal of any forms of censorship and control of the media, but other laws that have come in place since then have introduced new threats to the work of journalists. Among them at the State Intelligence Law, Electronic Information and Transactions Law, and the Pornography Law, and criminal defamation continues to be in the books. The News Media Law and Printers and Publishers Enterprises Law, passed in 2014 in Myanmar, replaced the draconian 1962 Printers and Publishers Registration Law, but journalists say there is inadequate protections in terms of physical safety and access to public information.²⁴ Models of self-regulation have offered mixed results; both Indonesia and Myanmar opted to legislate the creation and functioning of independent bodies like the press council (Indonesia) or the news media council (Myanmar) and the broadcasting commission. Thailand adopted the voluntary model for the print media, while a National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission only came about in 2011 and has since been superseded by the military junta in its coup in May 2014. Stakeholders interviewed said while the Indonesian Press Council was regarded positively, it continued to face challenges from the enforcement agencies that do not fall back on the Press Law when dealing with complaints related to the media.²⁵ The National Press Council of Thailand (NPCT), which was formed in 1997 when it was active in the media reform process, has had a challenging experience as news outlets that have disagreed with its decisions choosing to leave the body.²⁶ The media council in Myanmar is in its infancy but it has had to mediate complaints largely coming from government officials. Journalism trainer and activist Myint Kyaw said the laws introduced were generally better than the old ones but they retained provisions of criminal defamation and they did not replace the Penal Code, which was still used against the media and journalist.²⁷ Women journalists and activists interview in Myanmar noted that the laws enacted were not enforced on the ground and had not taken into account the kinds of threats they faced in their work, especially in areas where conflicts are ongoing. There are also conflicting views of the models for the broadcasting sector, with the state and international media development pushing for the transformation of state broadcasters

²⁴ Interview with Burma News International director Nan Paw Gay on 16 February 2016

²⁵ Interview with Asep Komarudin, LBH Pers in Jakarta on 4 May 2016.

²⁶ In July 2016, Thai language newspaper *Naewna* withdrew from the NPCT, citing its biased positions when it came to enforcing ethical standards. See Thai PBS online article: "Naewna pulls out of press council" <http://englishnews.thaipbs.or.th/173270-2/> (21 July 2016)

²⁷ Interview with Myint Kyaw, Myanmar Journalists Network (MJN) on 14 February 2016.

into public service broadcasting while the media community is calling for the abolition of the state-run stations.

4.4 Media ownership

Ownership of the media continues to be a major concern in Indonesia (Lim, 2012), and the 2014 Presidential elections particularly highlighted the extent of the political-business relationship and its impact on electoral decision-making (Tapsell, 2015). In Myanmar, the media community fears that that military cronies will end up owning media or media related businesses (Abud, 2013). After the opening up in 2013, several media owners in Myanmar published dailies but these soon folded due to lack of finances, some forcing the owners to partner with known business owners close to the military; among them are publications like *7 Day Journal*, *The Messenger Journal* and *Hot News Journals*; television station MRTV4 and satellite service provider SkyNet (Brooten, 2016). The editor of a publication in the state of Kachin said she feared that once the new law on broadcasting was passed, it would not only hurt those in the print, and that the broadcasting licenses would be given to the cronies of the military regime.²⁸ The obvious lack of economic opportunities in Myanmar for small publishers or media owners will impact on their ability to sustain themselves and as Hallin & Mancini (2004) and Voltmer (2013) have written, may set the course of reforms backwards. Journalists in Indonesia say the main challenge for their work is from the industry itself and with the oligopoly in ownership of broadcasting stations, some newsrooms have been biased in their coverage.²⁹ Senior journalist and member of the press council, Nezar Patria said the issues now in Indonesia are the role of conglomerates and tycoons who capture the space for press freedom and the market. The initial interviews echo findings that issues of regionalism and ethnic differences influence the way access to and ownership of the media are viewed in both Myanmar and Indonesia (Ida, 2011; Hill, 2011; Tapsell, 2015). An editor of an ethnic language publication from Karen state in Burma said the media reforms was centralized and did not adequately reflect the views or position of those in the states.³⁰

4.5 Civil society role in media reform

In the 1997 and 2007 processes in Thailand, there was unity among media publishers and the involvement of the academe, grassroots organisations and non-media groups made the media movement strong.³¹ Also significant is the existence of media watch or monitoring groups during and since the reforms, a trend similar in Indonesia, which could reflect the improved levels of media literacy and expectations of the public for the media to serve their interests in a democracy. Pirongrong (2013) notes that media monitoring groups watching the media were initiated given the influence and power of the media, and that if the media were weak or unethical, it would affect public discourse and policy making. To date, she says there are more than 10 media watch groups, mostly online, and individuals who use social media like Facebook, as a “collective network trying to make changes.”³²

²⁸ Interview with Seng Mai, chief editor of *Myitkina News Journal* on 16 February.

²⁹ Interview with Arfi Bambani, Aliansi Jurnalis Independen secretary-general on 4 May 2016 and Eni Mulia of the Perhimpunan Pengembangan Media Nusantara on 3 May.

³⁰ Nan Paw Gay, *ibid.*

³¹ Chaipipat, *ibid.*

³² Interview with Pirongrong Ramasoota on 7 October 2015.

Nevertheless, they face resource challenge, like many civil society groups, and this could hamper their capability to continue monitoring the media. In a case study of three radio stations in Indonesia that broadcast content or discussion about media coverage and ethics after the media had gained its freedom, Jurriens (2011) discusses the potential of the journalists and the public to monitor and scrutinize the media to the extent that it can create a public sphere for policy dialogue. The press freedom movement in Indonesia had the support of wider civil society and community participation was particularly obvious in relation to the broadcasting sector to set up community radio and to legislate the right to information (Birowo, 2011). While the Indonesian experience has seen more collaboration and networking during the *reformasi* days, stakeholders note that the popularity of social media has shifted the idea of public space and spheres online so organised groups are becoming less relevant. In Myanmar, some interviewees said the level of distrust between the civil society and media remained as a problem and it posed challenges for the media community to have a wider base of support. Yet, others say the 2007 Cyclone Nargis, which led to the growth of the civil society movement, was one of the turning points that prompted more interaction between the government and the media as well as citizen journalism in the country.³³ In 2015, alliances of civil society groups and the media were beginning to emerge, for example on the legislation of right to information while civil society projects also include monitoring media content particularly on the issue of hate speech.³⁴

4.6 Women and media reforms

Question were asked about the presence of women in the discussions over media reforms, and the selection of stakeholders also took into account the need for diversity in background and perspectives. Women academics and activists were among those who were involved in public campaigns regarding the need for community media in Thailand such as Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, Uajit Virojtrairatt, Supinya Klangnarong and Sanitsuda Ekachai,³⁵ and senior journalists were involved in the independent journalists' movement in Indonesia against the Suharto regime in the mid 1990s.³⁶ Yet, journalists in the two countries lament that there has not been much improvement in areas such as coverage of women and marginalised communities or the continued inequalities between men and women in the media workforce. Those interviewed in Indonesia and Myanmar said the laws were not gender sensitive as they excluded protection for women and sexual minorities. As a recent example of political change, gender and the role of women in Myanmar's transition can be said to be tied to donor requirements but few organisations (international and local) actually take it seriously. According to one NGO representative, gender is a 'hot word' but little is reflected in the actual work, for example, in the journalism training curriculum, or gender perspectives in safety training for journalists and in terms of participation of women

³³ Interview with Zaw Oo, director of Myanmar Knowledge Society on 9 February 2016.

³⁴ Baker, N. "How social media became Myanmar's hate speech megaphone" in *Myanmar Times*. (5 August 2016). Accessible here: <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/21787-how-social-media-became-myanmar-s-hate-speech-megaphone.html>

³⁵ In discussing civil society movement in media reforms in Thailand, Greg Lewis (2006) highlights individual reformers from the media, politicians and academics, though not specifically focused on their gender and how it factored in the reform process.

³⁶ Women journalists were among the 58 signatories of the "Deklarasi Sirnagalih" on press freedom and the initiators of the Aliansi Jurnalis Independen in August 1994 (AJI, 2014)

in discussions or conference panels.³⁷ This research will raise questions about phenomenon like this to explore the extent to which gendered reforms were considered in these countries. In discussing the inclusion of groups during the media reform processes, some interviewees also raised the lack of participation and access for those in regions away from the centres, and marginalised communities.

5. Conclusions

This report has presented the background to the research, the literature review and methodology. The three countries are useful for comparison in the region as they have undergone or are undergoing political transitions, which also include reforms in their respective media sectors. It is still too early to draw conclusions from the initial phase of the research, but some key themes have emerged that will enable me to address the research questions in terms of the goals of reforms, the groups that have been involved and initial suggestions of what are critical factors needed for the reforms to be long term. The following two years will be used to test the research questions through further field studies.

Closing

This report has introduced the theoretical framework and methodology for the research I am currently pursuing with the assistance of the SHAPE-SEA small grants. I have presented the preliminary findings from the pilot study and observations made during the period supported by the grant. This report will be subject to the approval committee of the University of Nottingham Malaysia for its further research direction.

³⁷ Interview with Yin Yadanar of Article 19 Myanmar on 10 February.

Annex 1: Interviewees during pilot phase based on gender and work background

Work Background	Gender	Men	Women
Journalists, editors		15	11
Representatives of media NGOs, human rights activists		7	4
Journalism trainers		4	0
Academics		0	1
International media development officers		1	2
		27 (60%)	18 (40%)

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