

Waves of democracy

Contemporary exile journalism: A case study of The Democratic Voice of Burma



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Cultural complexity
in the new Norway

Abstract

While the media in Burma is characterized by strict control, censorship and a general lack of freedom, the Burmese exile media is developing rapidly. The news reports from these media organizations reach millions of people inside Burma as well as Burmese living in exile.

This thesis presents the operations of a modern exile media organisation, *the Democratic Voice of Burma* (DVB). Through qualitative interviews it explores the development and current state of this media organization, and the measures and initiatives DVB employs in order to establish and maintain professional integrity. The theoretical foundation of the concept «professional» is explored and discussed in relation to studying the challenges that arise as external and internal forces pressure DVB to adhere to this concept, which is frequently invoked in, and for, a context quite unlike the one in which DVB is operating.

Keywords: Burma, Exile media, Censorship, Authoritarianism, Democracy, Freedom of Expression, Human Rights, Activism, Journalism, Ethics, Media systems.

Sammendrag

Mediene i Burma er kjennetegnet av kontroll, sensur og en generell mangel på pressefrihet. Samtidig utvikler burmesiske eksilmedier seg raskt. Nyhetsreportasjene fra disse mediene når millioner av mennesker inne i Burma og i eksil.

Denne masteroppgaven presenterer hvordan en moderne eksilmediebedrift, The Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), opererer. Gjennom kvalitative intervjuer utforskes de tiltak og initiativer som DVB igangsetter for å etablere og opprettholde en profesjonell integritet. Det teoretiske grunnlaget for begrepet «profesjonalitet» utforskes og diskuteres. Deretter settes det i sammenheng med studiet av de utfordringer som forårsakes av at eksterne og interne krefter presser DVB til å følge idealer utviklet i, og for, en annen kontekst enn den de opererer i.

Stikkord: Burma, eksilmedier, sensur, autoritær, demokrati, ytringsfrihet, menneskerettigheter, aktivisme, journalistikk, etikk, mediesystemer.

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Acronyms:

8888: The uprising in Rangoon on August 8th 1988 (08.08.88)

AFPFL: Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

CPJ: Committee to Protect Journalists

DBC: Danish Burma Committee

DVB: Democratic Voice of Burma

MFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MT: Myanmar Times

NBC: Norwegian Burma Committee

NCGUB: National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma

NED: National Endowment for Democracy

PSRB: Press Scrutiny and Registration Board

RFA: Radio Free Asia

RSF: Reporters sans frontier (Reporters without borders)

SIDA: Swedish International Development Agency

SLORC: State Law and Order Restoration Council

SOCFEX: Somali Coalition for Freedom of Expression

SPDC: State Peace and Development Council

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

VOA: Voice of America

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1.0 Introduction

2008 was a grim year for press freedom around the world. In total, 60 journalists were killed, 929 were attacked or threatened, and 673 journalists were arrested (www.rsf.org¹). Since 1992, 722 journalists have been killed worldwide, more than 500 of them were murdered. It is a disturbing trend, and even as the number of victims appears to have stabilized after the last war in Iraq, the figures still provide harsh evidence of the press being a deliberate target in war and conflict zones (ibid).

Burma² has one of the most repressive media environments in Asia, according to Bob Dietz and Shawn W. Crispin of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) (Dietz & Crispin 2009). In 2008, Burma was ranked number 170 out of 173 countries³ on the annual Press Freedom Index produced by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and the country thus retains its position among the bottom six countries, a position held ever since RSF published their first Press Freedom Index in 2002.

During the last eight years, CPJ has documented 340 cases of journalists forced into exile⁴ due to media censorship and journalists being threatened, harassed, arrested or physically harmed (Phillips 2008). Some individuals continue their struggle on their own, while others form media organizations in hiding or in exile, in order to be able to continue to report freely. One such exile organization is the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) based in Norway.

The Norway-Burma relationship

The decision to award the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize to the Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi generated a lot of attention towards the country ruled by generals for decades. The story of how Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her party *The National League*

¹ http://www.rsf.org/article.php?id_article=25484 (01.09.09)

² Burma, the name provided by the British during the colonial years, was officially changed to the old name *Myanma Naingngandaw* or *The Union of Myanmar*, by the ruling junta in 1989. Many states, as well as the Burmese opposition movement, still use the name Burma. As will I in this thesis.

³ The RSF Press Freedom Index measures press freedom by collecting data including information about self-censorship, financial pressures, the flow of information on the Internet and press freedom violation. Countries with insufficient data are excluded from the Index (RSF: How the index was compiled (22.10.08)).

⁴ Exile: «The state of being sent to live in another country that is not your own, especially for political reasons or as a punishment» (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary [1948] 2000).

for Democracy challenged the military regime and won the 1990 election is well known. As is the rest of the story, of how «The Lady of Burma» was placed under house arrest, and prevented from travelling to Oslo to accept the Nobel Peace Prize. As hosts of the peace prize ceremony, it became an important political issue for Norway to support Aung San Suu Kyi and the Burmese movement for democracy. Delegations from the US-based Burmese exile government visited Norway on several occasions. The Norwegian government expressed a desire to help the Burmese opposition⁵ that had been forced into exile. Jan Egeland, State Secretary of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time, describes the meeting with the Burmese delegation:

I received the Burmese exile government delegation on several occasions. I, and the MFA, wanted to support them as much as we could. During long-lasting sandwich meetings in my office, the guests gradually explained, in their unassuming way, that the main problem they were facing, was reaching the Burmese public with their message and with information about what was going on in Burma. Their prime minister in exile, Sein Win, asked Norway to help them establish a radio station to reach Burma with information that the military regime would censor.

Rune Herzvig, the leader of World View Rights, got involved. He came up with the idea that the NRK radio transmitter on Kvitøy in Rogaland, which originally was made to reach Norwegian ships in faraway seas, could be powerful enough to transmit radio via short wave signals from Norway to Burma.

We wanted to help the exile government. I took the initiative to approach the UN and other international forums to gather political backing and money to the project. This was a pretty big issue – us supporting and hosting an opposition movement – which was even working to achieve a change of government in their country!

The Kvitøy transmitter is owned by NRK. In the beginning they were sceptical to say yes to the radio project. This was far beyond their mandate. I therefore discussed the matter with the Minister of Culture, Åse Kleveland, who cleared the situation with NRK (Egeland interviewed 27.05.08, my translation).

With the right contacts and strong commitment from the devoted people involved, the rather sensitive project of establishing a Burmese opposition radio on Norwegian soil was made possible.

1.1 The research problem

The main research question for this thesis is:

What measures are taken by the exile media organization «The Democratic Voice of Burma» in order to obtain and retain professional integrity, and why?

⁵ The opposition movement is a dynamic alliance of groups with two main 'fronts'; ethnic groups joining forces to achieve some level of self-determination, and the Burman (ethnic) majority concerned with the struggle for democracy (Brooten 2006: 356-357).

Through qualitative interviews and document analysis I will approach this problem by exploring a series of more specific questions, divided into three categories:

Professional / responsible journalism:

- *In their mission statement⁶, the DVB is committed to 'responsible journalism'. How do DVB journalists reflect upon this commitment?*
- *What does the staff at DVB regard as the most important parts of being «responsible», and how does this relate to «professionalism»?*

Levels of education / journalism skills:

- *What is the level of relevant education among the DVB staff, and do they feel adequately qualified?*
- *How does the DVB work to improve the journalism skills among its staff?*

The exile situation and how it influences the journalists:

- *What parts of exile journalism do the journalists find hard?*
- *What do DVB journalists regard as their 'first priority'?*
- *What parts of living in exile do DVB journalists find most difficult?*
- *What motivates these journalists?*

The reputation of the DVB and previous evaluation:

- *How do other Burmese exile media regard the DVB?*
- *How do the donors evaluate the project of funding the DVB?*

By investigating the empirical data gathered from qualitative interviews with the staff, management, the DVB board of directors, other Burmese media organizations and a selection of the financial donors, I will explore the measures taken by DVB in order to become- and be perceived as professional. However, this goal of professionalism needs to be further discussed. What kind of professionalism is DVB striving for? Why is this important to the organization? Who expects professionalism, and why?

⁶ «Mission Statement: The Democratic Voice of Burma is a non-profit Burmese media organization committed to responsible journalism. Our mission is: to provide accurate and unbiased news to the people of Burma, to promote understanding and cooperation amongst the various ethnic and religious groups of Burma, to encourage and sustain independent public opinion and enable social and political debate, to impart the ideals of democracy and human rights to the people of Burma». Available: <http://www.dvb.no/english/about.php> (12.03.09)

In the theoretical approach of this thesis I will present a summary of some of the most important contributions to normative media theory during the last decades. This can help explain the findings of my descriptive empirical data. At the same time my data might bring forth some interesting indications of the influential power of exile media on Burma's national media system, as I will discuss in chapter 6 of this thesis.

The broader picture

This thesis is a product of a fascination for the larger philosophical debate on democracy, exile and journalistic professionalism, yet I attempt to explore these huge, theoretical questions through a smaller empirical approach. Just as the ongoing theoretical debate on the journalism profession in different media systems is partly a result of empirical observations, the everyday thoughts and actions of the DVB staff, as they strive for professionalism and to deliver independent news to the people of Burma, is both a result of, and fuel to, this larger, philosophical debate.

To many Burmese, life is not about elusive philosophical contemplation, because life evolves around surviving another day in poverty, where education and the basic right to free expression is absent. Still, the uncensored reports provided by the DVB might catalyze a reflection among the Burmese public upon their own situation. As issues like forced labour, corruption, abuse and attacks on minority groups is noted and commented upon in the DVB reports, the ideas of freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of the individual, freedom of religion, democracy and human rights are introduced. In addition to tending to the basic need for information, the reports from DVB and a few other news providers fuels a vital circle of spreading consciousness and knowledge to the people of Burma.

The need for this study

Strangely, it seems the academic literature on *exile journalism* is dominated by historical cases, such as *French Exile Journalism and European Politics, 1792-1814* by Simon Burrows (2000). Yet I see exile journalism (and exile journalists) as a contemporary global phenomenon. To name a few examples: In 2009, the Bhutanese writer T.P. Mishra of the Third World Media Network published a handbook entitled *Becoming a Journalist in Exile*, written for the aspiring journalists living in Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal,

and other journalists in areas where media freedom is threatened. 90 or more Zimbabwean journalists are currently exiled, and some have formed exile media groups abroad, such as the SW Radio that broadcasted from London until jammed in 2005 (Witchel 19.10.05, Shamba 12.08.08). Due to the political unrest in Somalia, 20 Somali journalists received training in exile in Kenya in 2008, to develop their journalism skills and allow them to continue their work as journalists despite the harsh conditions (SOCFEX Press Freedom in Somalia, 2007 annual report). These examples show that in many cases journalists are encouraged to continue their profession even after they leave their home countries, often with the help of organizations dedicated to media support, e.g. International Media Support (IMS), Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Media Helping Media (MHM), Internews, Media Support and the International Press Institute.

Meeting biased sources

I was not involved in the Burma activism that took place in the late 80's and early 90's. I was still a child, and I have only vague memories of Aung San Suu Kyi winning the peace prize. In my opinion, this is positive, as I believe I have been able to approach this subject with an open mind. Still, in the process of this study, some of the articles and reports I have read have to a large extent been heavily biased, as the main stakeholders in this conflict are diametrically opposed to each other, and as many activists have dedicated a lot of time and effort to the long-lasting struggle for a democratic change in Burma. I have tried to remain conscious about this when reading, but still it is necessary to make certain reservations with regards to my handling of some partial, unbalanced articles.

Developing the theoretical approach

The theoretical approach has been developed after the data was collected, and is therefore a result of trying to comprehend and process the information gathered. As mentioned earlier, little has been written about modern exile journalism. In some cases new terms and definitions are used, like «alternative media» or «diaspora media». In the theoretical approach, I will try to establish the position of exile media in normative media systems theory, as an introduction to the discussion of the measures taken by DVB to be- and be regarded a professional media organization. I will try to explain the measures that I observe are being initiated by «dissecting» the term «professionalism» through the

theoretical approach. When exile media organizations have to, or feel the need to, adhere to the same professional demands as mainstream media in order to be heard and taken seriously, some conflicts arise, as others scholars have noted (Brooten 2006). This is one of the things I will try to explore further throughout this thesis.

1.2 The architecture of the thesis

Chapter two of this thesis is the background information chapter, providing a brief history of Burma and an overview of the Burmese media landscape. In this term I include both media organizations based inside and exiled media groups. This chapter also includes a concise history of the development of the DVB and the structure of the organization.

Chapter three accounts for the methodology in this thesis: A case study with data collection through qualitative interviews and document analysis.

Chapter four contains the theoretical approach, concentrating on the ideals of ‘professional journalism’ and the conflict between these norms and the actual practise of journalism. I also present the ongoing debate regarding the conflicts that arise with doing media studies outside the Western world based on a Western framework, along with some aspects of media development theory which includes many of the same problems.

Chapter five gives a summary of the findings from analysis of the qualitative interviews and the document analysis, structured by the ten research questions presented in chapter 1.1.

Chapter six of this thesis is the discussion of the findings of chapter five.

Chapter seven presents a summary of the findings, along with some concluding remarks, followed by a **postscript** providing a critical look at the validity, reliability and transferability of the inquiry.

2.0 Burma and DVB: A brief history

In order to fully understand what DVB is, how it was initiated, and in what context it developed, I will give a brief historical presentation of Burma in general, and take a closer look at the Burmese media landscape in particular. I will also map out the Burmese exile media landscape of which DVB is a part, as this part of the Burmese media field has evolved and expanded during the last decades, as a result of the political situation. The following information is based upon a number of various written sources, online and print, as well as on information from the interviewed sources for this thesis.

The creation of «Burma»: From colony to coup d'état

The Union of Burma is situated in the South Eastern part of Asia, at an important geopolitical location, bordering some of the biggest powers in Asia; India, China and Thailand. The country is about twice the size of Norway. According to the CIA, Burma's population is currently more than 48 million people (by April 2009), though this is an estimated number only, as no census data has been provided since 1931 (Smith 1991 according to Brooten 2006: 355). Burma is a federation of seven *divisions* and seven *states*, and the population consists of seven larger groups, and about 135 subgroups of ethnic minorities. The most populous ethnic group in Burma is *Burman*⁷ (Baman) at about 68%, followed by *Shan*, *Karen (Kayin)*, and *Rakhine* as the largest ethnic minorities (cia.gov⁸). Though the ethnic minorities also have their own language, most understand Burmese, which is the official language (approximately 32 million speakers). While the *divisions* are dominated by the Burman, the *states* are in essence home to the ethnic minorities

Due to the multitude of ethnic states, groups and subgroups in Burma, and all of them having different aspirations to independence and self-governance, the area has suffered from internal disputes throughout history. Consequently, Burma is home to the world's longest running civil war (Brooten 2006: 355). The country was run as a province of British India until 1948, when general Aung San⁹ with his Anti-Fascist

⁷ The term *Burmese* refers to the nationality and the official Burmese language, while *Burman* is the ethnic majority group.

⁸ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html> (09.09.09)

⁹ Aung San was the father of Peace Prize Laureate and NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

People's Freedom League (AFPFL) managed to unite the minority groups with the ethnic majority and demand independence from the British (Chowdhury 2008: 5, Brooten 2006: 355). But despite achieving broad consensus among the different ethnic groups, the situation was volatile, and before they managed to establish a Burmese union, a political opponent murdered general Aung San, along with half a dozen of his cabinet members (burma.no¹⁰). Still, Burma gained independence, and the newborn democracy survived for more than a decade.

This brief stint of democracy was, however, a tumultuous time, even with periods of civil war among the ethnic groups and the Burman government (Brooten 2006: 255). In 1962, for reasons of the disturbances in Burma since Aung Sans murder, general Ne Win claimed that the Burmese union was in decay, forced a coup d'état with his army, and formed his own party, the Burma Socialist Program Party. His politics are often referred to as the «Burmese way to socialism»¹¹.

Poverty despite vast resources

«The Burmese Way to Socialism» was misjudged. Political mismanagement and instability during the 26 years of military rule led to Burma's deterioration, from being one of the wealthiest countries in Asia to become one of the poorest countries in the world. Despite having vast natural resources, the country remained poor and underdeveloped. According to an article in The Burmese-run exile online newspaper *The Irrawaddy*, sources in Rangoon claim the Burmese government has increased its control over the state finances, and are earning an increasing amount of hard cash due to the discovery of the gas deposits, and increased mining and logging (Aung 04.06.07).

The main markets trading with Burma are China, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, India and Bahamas (US Department of State¹²). Though many organizations advocate boycotting any trading with the junta-led country, and the U.S., EU, Australia and Canada have imposed economic sanctions, this has not had much effect on the military government, who instead have looked elsewhere for trade partners. At the same time, illegal trade flourishes. Burma is the second largest poppy-producer in the world,

¹⁰ <http://www.burma.no/Temasider/Historie/index.html> (01.05.09)

¹¹ <http://burmalibrary.org/search.php?t=k&sstr=burmese+way+to+socialism&c=0&q=all&o=d&f0=1&a0=1&v=1> (01.05.09)

¹² <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/ci/bm/> (01.05.09)

after Afghanistan, and is a vital part of the infamous area often referred to as *the golden triangle*, producing vast amounts of opium and heroin from the poppy plants.

The 8888 uprising

From the military takeover in the 60's to the late 1980's, Burmese people were subject to forced labour, widespread human rights violations and displacement due to the ongoing armed conflicts between insurgent groups and the government. On August 8th, 1988 (hence the term «8888»¹³), people started protesting in the streets of Rangoon¹⁴. Students, monks and workers led the peaceful demonstrations, demanding democratic reforms. In the end the military government launched a crackdown, wounding and killing thousands of people (Brooten 2006, Perry 2007, cia.gov¹⁵, Chowdhury 2008). In this period General Ne Win was forced to resign, and there was a brief period of civilian government before another coup once again turned Burma into a military rule, now under the «State Law and Restoration Order Council» (SLORC) and general Saw Maung¹⁶.

The 1990 election

The new leaders assured the people that the military dictatorship was a necessary step to regain peace and order, and that multiple party elections would be held as soon as possible (ibid, Chowdhury 2008). The election was held 1990, and the party National League for Democracy (NLD), led by the late general Aung San's daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, won a landslide victory, even with the party leader already placed under house arrest. But the military government of Burma did not acknowledge the outcome, arguing that the many conflicts between the various ethnic groups proved the country was not yet ready for democracy. As the ruling junta refused to let the NLD form a government, parts of the NLD formed a government in exile, named the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB). With headquarters in the U.S. they could continue their political work with a goal of mobilizing international support (ibid).

¹³ The date was not coincidental, as the number 8 is considered auspicious in Burmese numerology.

¹⁴ **Rangoon/ Yangon:** Rangoon was renamed Yangon in 1989 (see note1), and was the capital until 2005 when **Nay Pyi Taw/ Naypyidaw** was made the new administrative capital (2005/2006).

¹⁵ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html> (08.08.09)

¹⁶ http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs6/Yearbook2005/Burma%20Human%20Righ/Historical_Background.htm (01.11.09)

In Burma under the SLORC (in 1997 renamed «State Peace and Development Council» (SPDC) rule, those opposing or provoking the government have been subject to frequent arrests. But there has also been disturbances within the military government; in 2004, the prime minister was arrested and sentenced to 44 years in prison, on grounds of corruption and bribery, though the official statement said he was «permitted to resign for health reasons» (news.bbc.co.uk/).

Some 2 million Burmese have fled to Thailand during the years of military rule. About 150.000 refugees are currently living in camps on the Thai-Burma Border (Brooten 2006: 357). The refugees fled from the same conditions that triggered the 88-uprising; violation of basic human rights such as the right to education, healthcare and freedom of speech.

«The saffron revolution»

Many blame the deterioration of Burma's economy and infrastructure on poor leadership by the military junta, as large proportions of the GDP is spent on the armed forces. In addition to this Burma has also failed to produce as much petroleum as it used to, with production in the beginning of the 2000's being at about one third of the level in 1984 (Perry 2007:164). Though the Burmese offshore gas production accounts for up to one third of the country's export income, this did not prevent the fuel prices from skyrocketing in late 2006 and 2007. On August 15th 2007, the military junta removed fuel subsidies without previous notice, causing the price of fuel to increase abruptly, some say by 100%, others claim it was closer to 500% in a matter of days¹⁷. This created an inflationary pressure on other household articles such as rice and cooking oil, as fuel prices often influence prices on other basic commodities. Activists, students and the political opposition organized peaceful demonstrations to protest, and after a while the Monks, highly respected in Burmese culture, joined in (ibid, Chowdhury 2008, Amnesty.no¹⁸). Some media referred to the demonstration as the «saffron revolution» because of the monks maroon robes with «saffron» sashes (Eisentträger 2007, novinite.com¹⁹). As the number of people joining the demonstrations increased, the

¹⁷ <http://www.altsean.org/Reports/Fuelpricehikes.php> (01.11.09)

¹⁸ <http://amnesty.no/web.nsf/pages/Burma> (01.11.09)

¹⁹ http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=85644 (05.06.09)

government made violent arrests of hundreds of monks and civilian demonstrators. During the turmoil a Japanese photographer, Kenji Nagai of the Japanese news agency APF, was shot. The murder was caught on tape and broadcasted worldwide. Unlike the previous tumults in Burma, the Saffron revolution was in general well documented by media representatives. Some reporters from international media, as well as exile media organizations like DVB, were present. In addition to this media coverage ordinary Burmese citizens uploaded pictures and eyewitness reports on the Internet. Footage of a dead monk floating down a dirty river, still swathed in his saffron red robe, was distributed globally by a number of international news media.

One direct consequence of the electronic dissemination of information and images was the government restricting the use of Internet cafés and cell phones, and temporary blocking international news providers like CNN and Reuters (Chowdhury 2008: 13). On September 28th, Internet traffic was shut down in Burma for nearly two weeks, made possible as the only two Internet service providers in the country are under government control. International cell phone connections were also disabled for a short period (ibid: 4).

The Cyclone «Nargis»

On May 3rd 2008, the cyclone «Nargis» hit Burma. The tropical storm caused massive damage, and thousands of lives were lost during the storm and in its aftermath. It was evident that more people would die within days if food, clean water, medical assistance and shelter were not provided. International aid agencies and NGOs quickly started making arrangements, but the Burmese government refused international emergency teams visa, and published unlikely low numbers of victims to understate the scope of the natural disaster (e.g. Barstad 08.05.08 and Alleyne and Henry 09.05.08). Thus what began as a natural disaster suddenly became a political issue. Amnesty International (AI) estimates that one year after the storm, 21 people remain imprisoned, serving sentences of 10-35 years for helping out in distributing aid or burying dead bodies.

The current situation

Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest since before the 1990 election, was about to end her last period of house arrest in early 2009, when an American citizen, John

William Yettaw, swam across a lake, reportedly to ‘visit the lady of Burma’. Both Yettaw and Aung San Suu Kyi were sent to Insein Prison for violating the terms of her house arrest. After a long trial Suu Kyi was sentenced to 18 more months of house arrest, which means she will not be released in time for the 2010 election in Burma. The sentence was condemned by many world leaders, among them UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon, US secretary of state Hillary Clinton and British prime minister Gordon Brown (bbc.com (c and d), Naing 14.05.09, Petersson 12.08.09, McCurry 12.08.09).

A «Seven-step Road to Democracy»

By January 1st 2009 the number of political prisoners in Burma is 2162, according to Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) (AAPP), many of these because of their pro-democracy activism. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 14 journalists are currently imprisoned; some have been so since the 1990’s²⁰. In recent years, the military government of Burma has met some of the criticism from the political opposition and the international community by launching the «Seven-step Road to Democracy» (Miller (03.10.07), United Nations General Assembly, report (17.09.08)). The steps focus on reconvening the national convention, drafting a new constitution, and starting to build a modern, democratic nation. However, the exile government, National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), are excluded from participating in this process, and little has improved. The «Seven-step Road» is often criticized for being nothing more than political fluff.

2.1 The Burmese media landscape

The government in Burma has maintained ownership of all broadcast media based inside the country since the ruling military government came to power. This, however, is not unique in Asia, as Jim Richstad states in an article from *Journalism Studies* in 2000:

Few Asian political leaders accepted the western concept of an independent press as the «watchdog» over government. Rather, they assign a stronger role to government to lead society, including the press (Jim Richstad 2000: 274).

Propaganda, censorship and the ministry of information

There is very little press freedom in Burma. The media have been subject to strict censorship since independence from British India, and the state media are in essence

²⁰ <http://cpj.org/imprisoned/2008.php> (09.10.09)

mouthpieces for government propaganda, suppressing any negative news about the country, like the problem of human trafficking or the spreading of HIV/AIDS (BBC.com (e) (22.10.03), Irawaddy.org 15.08.07)). The Press Scrutiny and Registration Board (PSRB), is subject to the Ministry of Information. PSBR controls and exercises censorship of the Burmese media, as stated in the Printers and Publishers Registration Law of 1962. The law encompasses a full scrutiny of all print media. Anything that can be considered harmful to the government is censored; mentioning the opposition or Aung San Suu Kyi is forbidden unless through a direct quotation of government media, and words like *democracy* and *human rights* are prohibited. This causes journalists and editors to self-censor their work.

As in many other countries, all media outlets in Burma must have a license in order to be legal. In Burma these licenses have to be leased, and are a significant source of revenue for the government. During recent years, more licenses have been established, and the process of submitting texts for approval has been made more efficient. A representative from the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division, Major Tint Swe, announced on February 20th 2009 that a new computerized system would be introduced for reviewing and approving press material. Some editors say this will reduce the expenses that come with reprinting due to censorship. Others, however, are alarmed at the news that «censors» are going digital, as they claim these will make it easier for the censors to not only cut out parts of the texts, but to edit sentences and formulations without leaving visible traces to the readers. (Mizzima (07.03.09), Myat 26.02.09).

The Printed publications

The government also owns all the *daily* newspapers in Burma. The news published through the state owned press mostly concerns generals opening factories or donating money and the exact same stories may be published in different newspapers, proving that the articles are not written by the newspaper's own journalists (Interview with Internews representative and Than 2002). The state media often target the exile media, by discrediting news from the outside opposition media as fabricated lies (e.g. New Light of Myanmar 02.09.07, 02.09.08, 07.09.08 and 01.09.2008²¹).

²¹ Available: <http://missions.itu.int/~myanmar/NLM2007/index%20eng.htm> (27.10.09)

Though the government owns the daily papers, there are many privately owned weekly or monthly newspapers and magazines currently operating in Burma. In 2000, the weekly newspaper *Myanmar Times* (MT) was founded, as the «first independent private (English language) newspaper in decades» (Than 2002: 159). The founding managing director was the Australian Ross Dunkley, who initially claimed he would create a newspaper that would deal with the ‘one-sidedness’ of reporting out of Burma. But despite some stories on sensitive topics, the MT has not challenged the views of the government (Ibid: 161).

The number of private periodicals is quite large in Burma, at least compared to the number of other printed publications and media outlets. In 1996 the government of Burma shifted to a more liberal course in approving new applications for journal publication licenses. At the beginning of 2000, there were some 50 journals in Burma (Than 2002), and now there may be many more. Most journals are dedicated to the «pop» genre, defined by Tin Maung Maung Than (2002) as «covering a hodgepodge of items on religion, astrology, fashion, celebrities, music, films, scandals and so on» (Ibid: 156-157). However, some 28 % of the periodicals have a circulation of less than 2000, due to a system of small shops renting out the periodicals for a small fee, allowing for more readers to access the popular press at low costs (Ibid: 149).

Radio and television

In countries where Television remains a luxury, radio is arguably the most efficient and powerful medium to reach a mass audience. As conflicts arise, newspapers and television may be the first casualties, according to Loretta Hieber (1998). The situation in Burma confirms this, as all broadcasting media operating legally inside Burma are controlled by the state. Furthermore, Hieber states that in countries where illiteracy is widespread and the media deliberately targeted and censored by the government, broadcasting radio from other (neighbouring) countries may be the best way to reach larger groups of people (ibid). This is exactly what has happened in Burma, as several radio stations provide news broadcasts to the Burmese people, sent from locations outside the country. Cheaper TVs and technological progress have also made satellite television broadcasts from other countries into Burma feasible, with news media targeting the Burmese public in

particular as well as foreign channels broadcasting entertainment and sports in other languages.

According to an article in *Myanmar Times* (26.02-04.03.2001), a representative from the Ministry of Communications, Posts and Telegraphs (MPT) estimated a total of some 20.000 satellite receivers in use in 2001. The numbers are disputed, and in their television proposal from 2004, DVB claims some 1.5-2.5 million satellite receivers are in use in Burma. The U.S.-based radio Voice of America on the other hand, claims research indicates about 12% of urban households have satellite dishes – which is more than twice the DVB estimate (Heng 2002:153 and voanews.com (12.02.09)).

Satellite TV is not affordable to many Burmese, but there are occurrences of public satellite TVs being available in remote villages, allowing everyone access. The free channels offered via satellite are mainly Chinese and Indian entertainment channels. DVB used to be the only TV-channel broadcasting *in* Burmese, while *owned* by the Burmese, and *independent* from the Burmese government. In 2008 the news provider Voice Of America (VOA) started satellite television broadcasts in Burmese language as well. VOA is also an independent source of news to the Burmese people, as it is not subject to the Burmese media censorship, however it is owned by the U.S., and thus some of my interviewees regard it as «less independent than DVB» («M2», Khin Maung Win). Neither DVB nor VOA broadcast legally according to Burmese law. That is why they operate from outside the country, as their fear their offices would be targeted inside, with equipment confiscated and staff members arrested (Aye Chan Naing: 110, 328, 758 and 812).

Internet

According to data from the CIA World Factbook Online (2007)²², Burma has got some 40.000 Internet users. Other sources, like the Open Net Initiative (ONI) placed Burma's Internet penetration at 0.6 % at most in 2005, approximately seven times the CIA estimate (ONI Country Study: Internet Filtering in Burma, 2005). Most people access the Internet by visiting Internet cafés charging by the hour, but these cafés are only available in the largest cities in Burma. Reporters Without Borders have referred to Burma's Internet system as something that «increasingly resembles an intranet as more and more

²² <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html> (01.11.09)

foreign electronic services have been cut» (RSF according to BBC.com (a)). People are therefore not allowed to register e.g. hotmail or Gmail accounts, but rather use state-monitored email services. By early 2000 there were some 3600 registered users of the Myanmar Post and Telecom email service (Heng 2002: 155).

Since 2000, online content has been subjected to the same terms of censorship as other media. Permissions must be granted before any websites can be made, and political material may not be submitted. However, some manage to circumvent the government control and connect to proxy servers outside Burma, e.g. with the use of mobile phones (Open Net Initiative regional report on Burma 2007: 1-3). The restricted access to Internet in Burma has resulted in bad publicity towards foreigners seeking to invest in Burma. On the one hand the government presents Burma as a modern country and a suitable business partner, on the other hand, the Internet remains a threat to government control.

Legal limitations to media freedom

There are a number of laws restricting the freedom of the media in Burma. Some are indirectly affecting the media, such as the 'Unlawful Associations Act', used to arrest people affiliated with groups deemed illegal, such as the NLD (Nai 30.03.09). There is also the Official Secrets Act, preventing the distribution of documents that are considered secret by the government. The «Burma Penal Code, section 109», prohibits spreading of «false information», such as providing documentation of events to the illegal news providers or singing songs of independence. These laws prevent journalists from exposing and publishing critical stories of their government.

In addition to this laws indirectly obstructing the media freedom comes a number of more media-specific laws. The Television and Video Law of 1996 demands all imported TV sets, video recorders or satellite dishes to be registered at the Ministry of Communications, Post and Telegraphs (MCPT). Any imported videos must also be submitted to the Press Scrutiny Board, including those shown in public by the diplomatic missions, the UN etc. (Heng 2002: 155). Through this legal system the government is able to control physically imported media content and receiving devices. In addition to this law, the Computer Development Law (1996 and 2002), states that any unauthorized import, possession or use of computers with networking capacities, modems or other

means of transmitting information electronically, is illegal. Violating any of these laws may be punished by prison sentences of 7-15 years, unspecified fines and confiscation of the associated equipment (Ibid).

Despite the lack of media freedom, there are many private media outlets in Burma, mainly periodical journals and magazines. An increase in the private media sector due to the aforementioned more lenient licensing regulations has resulted in more newcomers to the media industry, but many lack experience and knowledge. Burma has lacked a formal journalism education for years. According to DVB chief editor Khin Maung Win a journalism school may have opened recently, but I have not been able to verify this by other sources. There is a general need for basic media and journalism training in Burma. «Learning on the job» seems to be the usual practice (Than 2002: 150). According to a 2002 report from the International Crisis Group (ICG), the Burmese government spends about 0.60 USD on education per citizen annually, and it is said that Burma is the only country where the older generation have better English language skills than the younger²³.

2.2 The Burmese exile and opposition media

This thesis is mainly concerned with Burmese exile media. It is therefore necessary to present an overview of the Burmese media landscape *outside* of Burma. This does not include all the foreign media that the Burmese are able to access by satellite dishes or Internet connections, nor all the foreign news media targeting the Burmese people, but maps out the main actors in the fields in which DVB operates. As the percentage of Burmese people inside Burma having access to the Internet is marginal, I will not focus on the mainly web-based services, such as Mizzima and Irrawaddy, but rather on the broadcast media having the potential of reaching the broader masses inside.

The main radio transmitters sending news in Burmese into Burma are Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Asia (RFA), BBC Burma Service and Democratic Voice of Burma. DVB deputy director Khin Maung Win estimates that half of all Burmese households have radios – and says perhaps half of them listen to the DVB on a regular

²³ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1530&l=1> (01.11.09)

basis (Interview 24.02.09, lines 907-11). There are no official estimates available to verify this.

Until 2008, DVB was the only television broadcaster targeting the Burmese people from outside the country, and the only channel offering unfiltered Burmese language broadcasts (as well as some minority languages). VOA launched their TV broadcasts in Burmese, «Burmese weekly TV magazine», in February 2009, but they produce significantly less TV material than DVB. The Burma services of VOA, BBC, and RFA are important in the Burmese media field, but they differ from DVB as they are not channels owned and run by Burmese people, but divisions of larger international media outlets.

2.3 The DVB: 17 year old veteran

Democratic Voice of Burma was a result of Norwegian political support to the Burmese exile government, after Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. Better known as «the Burma radio», DVB was launched on July 19th 1992, with financial support from the Norwegian government. The opposition, some activist groups and the exile government of Burma, formed a supervising committee based in Thailand, and controlled the editorial section of DVB. In the beginning, a significant part of the broadcasts consisted of news aggregated from various media in Thailand, which was faxed to and put together in Norway. But gradually, DVB started gathering and broadcasting news own news reports as well (Interview DVB Chief editor Aye Chan Naing, 23.09.2008, Jan Egeland 27.05.2008 and Harald Bøckman 07.09.2009).

Today, the DVB is registered as a foundation, with the main office in Oslo. The management consists of a chief editor and a deputy chief editor, both appointed by the board of directors. Until 2002, the Burmese exile prime minister was the chairman of the board. After 2002 he was made board member, while Harald Bøckman, China specialist and coordinator for the Network for Asian Studies at the University of Oslo, was appointed chairman. The chief editor and deputy chief editor are also director- and deputy director of the DVB. While the deputy chief editor/deputy director's main areas of responsibility is the administrative aspects of the operations, the chief editor/director overlooks the editorial department and supervises the other editors of the news, feature, web, ethnic broadcasts and entertainment sections.

DVB's main administrative office has remained in Oslo, but the organization has also opened offices in Thailand and India. The Oslo office has 14 fulltime staff members. The main editorial office in Thailand normally has about 30 employees, while 4-5 employees run the small India office. DVB has also got a large stringer network involved in operations inside Burma. This makes DVB the largest media organizations in the Burmese exile media field (ibid).

From activism to professionalism

In the beginning, DVB served the Burmese exile government, the NCGUB. This was emphasized in the broadcasts, as they would announce «this is a message from the Democratic Voice of Burma of the NCGUB». But gradually, as DVB's operations expanded and became more professionalized, the need for independence became evident both to the donors, editors and the board of directors (Naing, 23.09.2008, Bøckman 07.09.2009). Around year 2000 DVB informed the board of its desire to sever the political ties to the opposition movement. The mission of DVB was consequently altered; now the channel was to become an *independent* media organization dedicated to spreading news to enlighten, educate and inform the Burmese public and exile movements.

Though the intention of this transition to independence was a major step towards becoming more professional, parts of the opposition and the exile government have still not come to terms with it. At the 15 years anniversary of DVB there was a huge debate concerning their independence, and DVB was even accused of leaving the democracy struggle. Some even claimed that DVB becoming independent made it necessary to start a new radio for the opposition movement.

Though the DVB is no longer subject to the party programme of the NCGUB, it is still part of the movement fighting for a change in Burma's political system. Consequently, while dedicated to covering the untold stories of human rights abuses in Burma, their agenda of the programming is to disseminate the ideals of democracy and human rights, to trigger change of government. According to the deputy chief editor, the overall goal is to gradually transform DVB into a professional public service broadcaster, and to return to Burma and continue the broadcasting from inside (Win (24.02.09), and Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) evaluation report 2007).

Raising the level of professionalism

In 2004, DVB initiated a «Master Training Programme» – to systematize the training and capacity building within the organization. The programme has been a cooperation between DVB and educational institutions like Swedish Radio and the Institute for Further Education of Journalists (FOJO), and the Thomson Foundation (UK), working to support free and open mass media by developing media and training journalists. The training aims at covering both basic and advanced journalism training, technical training with using computers, Internet and recording equipment (DVB: 2006 Annual report to SIDA).

Registering DVB as a foundation rather than an organization was a major step in the process of professionalization. A clear set of rules and statutes brings the operations and structure of DVB more in accordance with Norwegian law, according to chairman of the board of directors, Harald Bøckman (Bøckman 07.09.2009). At the same time the management of DVB are looking at ways of registering DVB legally in Thailand, as the current operations of the Thai-office are semi-illegal, with some illegal immigrants among the staff members and the operations being subject to the goodwill of the Thai secret police. By registering DVB as a foundation in Norway, the board of directors and the management of DVB hoped to either be able to register DVB as a Thai foundation or as a Norwegian foundation in Thailand (ibid).

In addition to this the board of directors has focused on getting more qualified individuals to fill the seats, with media experience and expertise. Previous evaluations have criticized the competence of the board of directors, in terms of media experience and of the influence of the NCGUB. According to Harald Bøckman the board is looking for more qualified people, preferably from the Southeast Asian region. The downside of having DVB registered as a Norwegian foundation, according to Bøckman, is the rule that at least 50% of the board members must be domiciled in Europe (SIDA evaluation report 2007, Bøckman 07.09.2009). This process of modernizing and improving the entire structure of DVB shows that the focus lies both on raising the level of professionalism of individual staff members, but also the operation as a whole.

Stringers inside Burma

DVB reporters operating inside Burma are referred to as ‘stringers’ by DVB management. They are considered employees of DVB, yet they operate mainly as individuals. Revealing too much about their operations or identities can put these workers and the inside operations of DVB at risk. The following account briefly maps out the inside operations based on information from interviews with deputy chief editor Khin Maung Win, «Joshua» (in charge of coordinating the inside operations of the stringers with the Thailand office and main character in the documentary *Burma VJ* (2008)), chief editor Aye Chan Naing and facts presented in the documentary film *Burma VJ* (2008).

After the coverage of the 2007 Saffron revolution, DVB experienced the importance of having people on the ground inside Burma as first hand sources of information. Increased financial donations made it possible to expand the stringer network inside to some 60-80 people, a number rapidly increasing. Though the stringers have little contact with the other DVB offices and mainly work on their own, they are paid regular salaries. As they are likely to become targeted if opening «official» offices in Burma, the reporters inside operate in a network organized to provide as much safety for each individual as well as preventing the network to disintegrate if one group or individual is arrested. The communication between the small groups and individuals operating inside goes through coordinators situated in the outside offices. The stringers have cover stories about their employment in case they are asked or suspected of illegal activities, and many of them have other jobs as well, to avoid suspicion. The inside locations used to store equipment or edit footage is kept a secret to any others than the outside organizers and the stringers using the location. In the documentary *Burma VJ* by Anders Østergaard (2008), the operations of the DVB stringers is portrayed through the experiences of reporter «Joshua» during the Saffron Revolution. The film shows how stringers can only film short clips to avoid getting caught, with their camera hidden in a bag at all times.

Using digital photo- and video cameras, voice recorders and cell phones these reporters both produce entire reports as well as providing sound- or video clips, pictures or eye-witness reports to the reporters based in Oslo, Thailand or India. The reports and information gathered is sent by email or telephone if possible, otherwise it is smuggled

across the border between Burma and Thailand. The stringers inside Burma are, like the exiled DVB staff members, from various backgrounds, with various qualifications. They too attend training organized by the DVB outside Burma, and as these reporters are working alone or in small groups, they have to be trained to master the technology of different media platforms, e.g. both be able to shoot good video footage and edit it, and to write reports or record radio interviews.

A multimedia cooperation

On May 28th 2005, DVB launched the first TV-broadcasts, and became the first media organisation to reach the Burmese public with unfiltered TV news in their native language. DVB presents the introduction of TV broadcasts as an important improvement, and many of the interviewed DVB staff members, management and representatives from other Burmese media organizations claim the live images are a very powerful influence on people (Aye Chan Naing, F1, M2, Mizzima, Internews). By broadcasting via satellite, DVB is less vulnerable to sabotage, according to the chief editor, as sabotaging the satellite DVB uses would both require advanced technology and it could potentially damage signals of other (international) channels as well, which would cause additional negative attention.

At the moment DVB produces three hours of new radio programmes daily, and one and a half hour of television, which is looped to make the DVB TV-programmes available 24/7. In addition to this, the DVB Youth Voice, a separate channel part of the Kids News Network sponsored by Free Voice from the Netherlands, is producing and airing 10-20 minutes of television for kids and youth every week. By using satellite services in Israel and increasing the amount of content and by looping, the costs of the TV project has increased, but the whole operation has become more cost-effective, according to a 2007 quarterly report from DVB to SIDA.

In addition to radio and TV broadcasts, DVB operates websites in Burmese and English. The website is also supposed to be available in Arakan, Kachin, Karen, Karenni and Shan languages, but at the moment these services are not available at the website (dvh.no). As the web pages are not updated continuously, as would be expected for any online newspapers, it functions primarily as an archive for selected news. Due to the limited Internet penetration in Burma, the DVB websites mainly service the Burmese

diaspora and the international community. According to an evaluation of the DVB commissioned by SIDA in 2007, the website has some 50.000 unique visitors every month in 2007. In addition to the news articles, the website has got sections of sports, feature and entertainment. The websites also hosts forums for discussion, and links to DVB on Livestation, a web platform streaming instant online television and radio broadcasts through a peer-to-peer network.

2007 was an important year in DVB's history. As the «Saffron Revolution» unfolded and DVB provided the world with exclusive footage and information from within Burma, the channel fortified its position as the main provider of independent news from Burma. DVB reports were quoted by the biggest international news media such as BBC and CNN²⁴. During the demonstrations DVB often had exclusive access to the events unfolding inside Burma because of the unique stringer network. But as the government connections and discovered one of their «locations» inside, expensive equipment was lost, and 10 people affiliated with DVB were arrested. DVB paid a large price for managing to put Burma on the agenda (interviews with Khin Maung Win and Aye Chan Naing).

Financial support

DVB depends on financial aid from a dozen donors. Many of these donors have increased their support rapidly the last four years. Deputy chief editor Khin Maung Win divides the donors into three main categories:

Development donors, the largest one being the Swedish International Development Agency, support the DVB from a development aspect. One of SIDA's main focus areas is poverty eradication. In reporting about cases of corruption and abuse, DVB contributes to fighting corruption and thus protecting the poor, and this is an important reason for SIDA's funding of the DVB.

Media donors, the largest one being the Freedom of Expression Foundation, Oslo, are mainly concerned with supporting media in situations where the right to free expression is challenged. Other media donors to DVB are Free Voice from The

²⁴ E.g.: <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/asiapcf/09/27/myanmar.protests/index.html> and <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8119424.stm> (01.05.09)

Netherlands (both supporting DVB and DVB Youth Voice), and the Open Society Institute's Burma project.

Political donors, the largest one being The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), are nations or political organizations supporting DVB because of their part in the struggle for democracy in Burma. The Norwegian MFA has been the largest of these donors since 2005, and has supported the DVB continuously since the beginning. Other political donors are the US based National Endowment for Democracy and the Danish Burma committee (DBC) – the third and fourth largest donors in total.

Between 2000-2007, DVBS budget increased by 360% (SIDA evaluation report 2007). The main increase came between 2006 and 2007, with a substantial increase in funding from the Norwegian MFA, SIDA and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in particular. The television success of recent years, allowing DVB to obtain and broadcast exclusive video footage from the 2007 Saffron Revolution, was important to this increase, as it convinced donors that the DVB operations were worth expanding.

The audience in Burma

The previously mentioned 2007 SIDA evaluation refers to an audience survey conducted by DVB in 2003, estimating some 13 million beneficiaries from the DVB broadcasts (SIDA evaluation report 2007). According to the same survey, 67 % of respondents are satisfied with the overall broadcasts of DVB, while 72% feel that professional standards need to improve. 59% of respondents are confident that 75-95% of DVB's reporting is accurate. In their 2007 annual progress report to SIDA however, the DVB estimates a total of 20 million beneficiaries from the radio and TV audience (DVB: 2007 annual report to SIDA). A survey conducted in 2006 covering 183 people, found that 63% listened to DVB radio broadcasts, 28 % watched DVB TV broadcasts, and 62% said they discussed the DVB with others (DVB: 2006 annual report to SIDA). It should be noted that the low number of recipients in this survey and the fact that the information is obtained by the DVB staff, weakens its reliability.

During the 2007 Saffron Revolution, international media used DVB footage, allowing DVB material to reach more people than ever before. Their important role in

directing attention towards Burma was noticed, and in 2007 they were awarded several prizes: The Reporters Without Borders prize of 2007, The Poul Lauritzen Foundation's annual human rights award (Denmark) and The Ossietzky Prize (Norway).

At a 2007 press conference, the military government of Burma referred to DVB as the «worst media». To have the regime publicly warning the people about DVB clearly indicates that they are perceived as a threat, and that their influence on the Burmese people is taken seriously. Similarly the government tried raising the satellite fees substantially after the 2007 demonstrations, again indicating that they felt threatened by the exile media, however most satellites remain unregistered. In a 2007 annual report the DVB declares the number of people willing to give interviews to the channel has doubled since the previous year (DVB 2007 annual report to SIDA). This suggests that people are becoming less afraid to talk to the media, and that they are convinced that taking the risk of speaking out is worth it.

Servicing ethnic minorities

DVB is the only station that services all the major ethnic groups in Burma with customized news broadcasts in the various ethnic languages, and at the moment the only TV station servicing ethnic minorities in Burma in their language at all. The broadcasts are limited to around 30 minutes a week directed to the six largest groups of ethnic minorities; Arakan, Chin, Kachin, Mon, Shan and Karenni (Aye Chan Naing: 655). Most Burmese are taught the official language in school, but in some remote areas ethnic minorities only speak and understand their own language. To them, DVB broadcasts may be the only source of independent news. There are, however, no audience surveys available on these ethnic broadcasts, as the audience is difficult to gain access to, and the impact of DVB's ethnic services is therefore not documented. Still, some eight ethnic organizations use DVB as a news source and further spread DVB reports (DVB 2006 annual report to SIDA).

The audience in exile

For this thesis, I have interviewed two Burmese people living in Oslo about their relationship and thoughts on DVB, to gain insight to how DVB is perceived by its audience outside Burma, as the inside audience are virtually impossible to access. It is

important to note that the following information is based on the views of two Burmese living in Oslo only.

Both informants use DVB as a regular source of news, and supplement with other media focusing on Burma, mainly VOA, RFA and BBC World Service. «M12» says he spends about three hours a day following the news. The other informant, «M11» says he trusts DVB, but sometimes they might broadcast 'mistakes'. When they do he contacts them and helps correct the errors. Both informants say they normally combine the reports from all the available Burmese news providers to get an overall picture of the situation. This process of verifying everyday news through all available news sources might be a direct result of growing up with propaganda, and it is interesting to note that both informants mention this. «M11» says DVB is both exile media and opposition media, and that they are in fact a part of the NCGUB, but that they are becoming increasingly independent, which is a good thing. He also feels DVB is unbiased («M11»: 107-115).

DVB is quick to report when something happens, «M12» says, but the presentations are not so good, and some of the programme hosts are not very professional compared to other channels (ibid: 120). «M12» says he thinks DVB is an independent and unbiased exile media, and though it is no longer a part of the NCGUB, he believes they still cooperate. Politically, «M12» is very satisfied with DVB, but says the level of professionalism is not high enough. He trusts DVB, but mentions that their sources are sometimes very biased, thus indicating the need to verify news from DVB with reports from the other channels. «M12» feels DVB is sometimes too diplomatic in their reports, not daring to say anything negative about e.g. the situation for Burmese in Norway.

3.0 Method: The research design

This first part of this thesis, including chapters 1-3, is the ‘predestined’ part of the thesis, as it presents my approach to the research question and provides necessary background information and context, as well as the methodology and research design. The last part of the thesis, chapters 4-6, was developed as a result of the data found using this methodological approach. The theoretical approach was selected after the interviews had taken place and the documents were analysed, which is why it is placed in the last part of the thesis together with the data from the material analyzed.

A research design is the «logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of study» (Robert K. Yin 2003: 19-20). A high quality research design ensures trustworthiness, credibility and data dependability (ibid: 33). The methods I have used to collect the empirical data for this thesis, are semi-structured qualitative interviews and document analysis. By interviewing involved informants with different connections to the case, thereby comparing the information gathered from the different interviews as validating this information through the document analysis, the validity of the research design is strengthened. Furthermore, by allowing the main informants to review the quotes extracted from the interviews, thus avoiding misinterpretations or misunderstandings, validity is increased (ibid: 34).

It would have been possible to approach a different research design. I considered *observation*, but due to the language barrier this approach could potentially cause more difficulties it would than provide valuable. Also, my stay at the DVB offices in Thailand was limited to one week only. Participant-observation involves empathising with the social unit being studied, preferably for a longer period of time, even a year or more (Østbye et al. 2002: 107). Still, while being present in the DVB editorial offices I made observations that influenced my understanding of how DVB operates.

3.1 The Case Study

John W. Creswell (2007) defines the case study as an in-depth study of a *bounded system*, with the focus being either the case or an issue illustrated by the case. The case study uses a diverse selection of data collection materials, and the system or the case is positioned

within a larger context (Cresswell 2007: 244). Barbara Gentikow explains that «A case study may be the inquiry of a person, a group of people, an institution, reception of a specific media text, the use of a specific medium, etc», adding that what is important with such studies is gathering all available information and immersing oneself in the case to understand its entirety (Gentikow 2005: 40). Svein S. Andersen (1997) describes the case study as a common term describing research approaches in many different fields. He also stresses that what a case study *is* or *should be* in social sciences, is heavily debated. Theoreticians disagree on whether the case study is «choice of what is to be studied» (Stake 2005 according to Creswell 2007: 73) or a «methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy» (Denzin & Lincoln (2005), Merriam (1998) and Yin (2003) according to *ibid*: 73). I choose adhere to the latter, by regarding this case study as a methodological approach, to gain in-depth knowledge about DVB as a case, or phenomenon.

The case study is a suitable method to gather general knowledge, according to Østbye et al. If the field has been well documented, and theories already exist, the case study can be used to test these theories. When the case or the issue investigated through the case is not well documented, case studies can be used to gain some basic insight to the field (Andersen 1997: 131). The latter approach fits this study better, as there were few written sources to find regarding exile media in general, or Burmese (exile) media in particular.

Andersen also explains that «even though one might be open for any theoretical basis in a particular study, attempts of theorising should continuously be assessed to general theories and knowledge that the social studies are built upon» (*ibid*, my translation). The studies in poorly documented fields are often referred to as *explorative* (Østbye et al. 2002: 245-46 and Andersen 1997: 131), as is the case for this case study of DVB. This study can also be defined as an *intrinsic* case study; the focus lies on the case itself, because it presents an unusual or unique situation (Cresswell 2007: 74).

A case study may consist of several designs; single case or multiple, holistic or embedded. This is a single-case study. Due to the lack of literature and research in the field of exile media in general, and the lack of data from the rare previous inquiries of DVB in particular, the aforementioned *rare or unique circumstances* is the main argument for justifying the value a single-case study of DVB (Yin 2003: 39-46).

Moreover, this single-case study is *holistic*, concentrating on the entire case as a whole, though stressing «professionalism», as expressed in the research question.

The context

Every case must be understood within its context. The notion ‘thick description’ (as discussed by e.g. Barbara Gentikow (2005), Østbye et al. (2002) and Creswell (2007)) in case study research, implies that the researcher tries to map out every potentially important aspect of the situation, emphasizing the importance of the context. By obtaining detailed knowledge about the driving forces of the phenomenon studied, the researcher can separate between the essential and less essential, and thereby identify important qualities, connections and driving forces of the case (Østbye et al. 2002: 243-44).

Yin (2003) explicates the use of case studies as the method of choice, pursuant to «deliberately wanting to cover contextual conditions, believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study» (Yin 2003: 13) He stresses that in the case study, the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident. This emphasizes the relevance of the contextual conditions in case studies, as opposed to for example laboratory experiments where the phenomenon is deliberately removed from its context (ibid). In the case of investigating the level of, and view on, professionalism in DVB as a contemporary phenomenon within the Burmese exile media context, the context is undeniably crucial.

Case study definition

Yin also stresses contemporariness as another important premise for case studies, as opposed to for example historical inquiries. He provides an overall definition:

1. *A case study is an empirical inquiry that*
 - investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
 - the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.
2. *The case study inquiry*
 - copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
 - relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
 - benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis

(Yin 1994: 13-14).

When I nevertheless also lend some focus to the historical development of DVB, I consider this to be valuable information to place the present DVB in its historical, political and cultural context.

Method triangulation

When comparing the case study to other research strategies such as the experiment, the survey, the archival analysis and historical research, Yin highlights three areas that separates these strategies: The *form* of the research question, whether it requires *control of behavioural events*, and if it focuses on *contemporary events*. The research questions in the case study strategy are described as questions of how and why. As are my research questions for this thesis (see chapter 1). As for *contemporariness*, the case study differs from the historical research by its ability to access relevant interviewees (Ibid: 5-8). The case study in general has a variety of evidence to draw upon – and researchers are expected to do so as a part of the need for *method triangulation*. The goal of method triangulation is to arrive at the conclusions of this inquiry from a multitude of different sources all providing insight into the same phenomenon (Yin 2003: 99). Marshall and Rossman provides this description:

«Triangulation is the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point. (...) Designing a study in which multiple cases, multiple informants, or more than one data-gathering method is used can greatly strengthen the study's usefulness for other settings» (Marshall & Rossman 2006:202).

Another important principle in organizing the collected data in case study research is to create a case study database (Yin 2003: 101), which serves to strengthen the reliability of the study (see chapter 4.3). However, in this study of DVB, much of the material I have analyzed and the interviews conducted contain sensitive information about DVB and its journalists that cannot be revealed in a public case study database. The interviews I did with DVB staff and the Burmese people living in Oslo, although anonymous, contain sensitive information and can therefore also not be made public. I will, however, share information on how I approached the interviewees and how they were selected in chapter 4.2.2.

Case study protocol

In order to strengthen the quality of the project I developed my own version of a case study protocol. By systematically arranging my work, this has helped me as a researcher to 'stay on track', and also to document the procedure of my inquiry in order to strengthen the reliability of the thesis (Yin 2003: 67). This is of great importance, especially when working in a field where little research has been done. In this case, my contribution is limited due to the time and resource limits of the master thesis. Having a case study protocol is important in order to organize all the information gathered, and to systematically plan the next step of the research. It is also important to have access to all the relevant information in order to be able to document the study, and, in this case, to be able to destroy some of this documentation when the thesis has been evaluated, as it contains sensitive and personal information.

3.2 Qualitative research

With a qualitative study, emphasis must be put on processes and meaning, rather than quantities and frequencies. Tove Thagaard (1998) emphasizes that qualitative research is based on studies of isolated incidents or phenomena, as expressions of the reality as a whole, whereas quantitative studies are considered autonomous and independent of the larger «whole».

I have used two different qualitative methods to gather relevant information: semi-structured qualitative interviews and analysis of reports and other documents. Empirical research became the obvious choice in this case study of DVB, as there were only limited amounts of written sources available it was pertinent to acquire information directly from sources involved in the project.

The power of empirical research

Barbara Gentikow emphasizes the *power* of the empirical research. She argues that empirical discoveries (in their best) may cause a theory to be revised, though one discovery is obviously not enough (Gentikow 2005: 34). The kind of theory that can be derived from empirical research is often referred to as *grounded theory*; by analyzing the data material from the empirical research one can induce new theories from empirical discoveries (Gentikow 2005). I will discuss this further in chapter 4.3.

In the initial phase of this inquiry, it became evident that I could not rely on reaching the DVB audience inside Burma, due to the current political situation. It became evident that if DVB was to be the case, the research had to be based on qualitative interviews. Tove Thagaard (1998) states «An important objective of qualitative studies is to understand the social phenomena in the light of extensive data on persons and situations» (Thagaard 1998: 11, my translation). The fact that I was given access to DVB staff members and documents was essential.

System and flexibility

It seems that terms like «exile media» or even «exile journalism» or «exile radio» are not much explored by media scholars, making the objective of this thesis to explore in a field where little research has been done. Thagaard (1998) stresses the importance of working with «system and empathy» when using qualitative methods of research, perhaps as a reaction to the common misinterpretation of qualitative studies being «soft» research, not following standardized procedures. Some contributions to theorizing qualitative research stress that the research process involves making a series of decisions along the way (Mason (1996) and Coffey & Atkinson (1996) according to Thagaard (1998)). Qualitative methods are characterized by a *flexible* research design allowing the researcher to work parallel on different parts of the project. The procedure and methods need to be changeable, on the grounds of the information provided by the data gathered (Thagaard 1998: 46). Continuous evaluation of relevant insight provided by the data is one example of how the project needs to be assessed by the researcher along the way. This affects every aspect of the study and allows each of the steps – developing research questions, gathering data and analyzing it – to influence each other (Ibid: 25). The research questions might need some altering as new information comes forth, and the main focus of the project might be shifted along the way. This, however, shows the importance of a solid foundation for the project as a whole, and the necessity of working systematically with the methods of choice and the information gathered through interviews and document analysis.

Yin (2003) stresses the need for systematic procedures in doing case studies, and repudiates the accusations of the case study's lack of a well-organized systematic approach to science (Yin 2003). Still, it is important to remember that a systematic

approach alone does not necessarily provide interesting results. The researcher needs to be reflective and critical throughout the process (Ibid: 17-19). One example, as advised by e.g. Thagaard (1998) and Yin (2003) is to gather the data parallel with the analysis. The researcher will then be able to adjust the strategy of gathering information or the selection of interviewees if it proves necessary.

3.2.1 Qualitative interviews

Interviews are suitable for providing information about people's personal experiences and understanding of the situation they are in, as explained by Kvale:

The qualitative research interview seeks to understand the world from the perspective of the interviewees, to extract the importance of the experiences of people, and to unveil their experience of the world, beyond scientific explanations (Kvale 2001: 17).

Lindlof (1995) recommends qualitative interviews as a suitable way of obtaining data that is otherwise less accessible (Lindlof 1995: 166). However, there are some problems that might arise when conducting interviews to gather information about the case, as it happens through an open interaction between the researcher and the source. The closeness of the situation may present challenges, some of which I will be discussing in this chapter. The situation is much like what exile journalists (and any other journalist for that matter) experience in their work; the demands of social responsibility, dealing with biased sources, protecting their informants, double-checking every piece of information and allowing every side of the story to be heard.

The researcher and the source

The relationship between researcher and the source is discussed in many works concerning qualitative methods (e.g. Yin (2003), Thagaard (1998), Cresswell (2005)). The researcher's ability to appear sensitive to the source is one important factor in this relationship (Thagaard 1998: 12), and it is especially important when gathering sensitive information. According to Thagaard (1998), the qualitative method is based on a «subject-subject relationship», rather than the «subject-object relationship» of the quantitative studies. This explains how the surroundings and the social set affect the procedures, and how the researcher (unintentionally, yet inevitably) influences the sources and their answers. Østbye et al. (2002) uses the term «ecological validity» when discussing this influence (Østbye et al. 2002: 120).

With regards to the sources in this thesis, it was necessary to consider a number of possible disturbing factors: Was my presence intimidating? Was the location of the interview or the use of a voice recorder making the interviewees uneasy or restrained? Would language factor in as an inhibitor in conducting the interviews? By comparing statements and data from other sources, the aforementioned triangulation, I have sought to secure the validity of this inquiry, as I will discuss further in chapter 4.3.

Furthermore, the relationship between the researcher and the informant introduces a number of ethical challenges. First of all, in the case of DVB: Some of the interviewees worked in vulnerable positions, and some had secret identities. I started all my interviews by verbally obtaining an informed consent from all the interviewees – after informing them about the project, as advised by the Norwegian committee for ethical research, in their guidelines for social-, humanities-, and theological studies²⁵. The interviewees were also informed that they were free to resign from the interview at any time, and of their right to avoid answering questions was. I informed the interviewees that they would be kept anonymous in my report, for two reasons: their own safety as illegal migrant workers (the DVB staff in Thailand), and to ensure that any critical comments they had about DVB or any other media or organizations would not be held against them. I believed the anonymity allowed the informers to be more open about the challenges of working and living in exile. The chief editor and the deputy chief editor however, are not anonymous, as they speak on behalf of the entire organization, and they both agreed to be identified.

Secondly, I had to consider the ethical aspects of my inquiry. Both regarding the already mentioned anonymity of the interviewees, but also due to the overall responsibility I had with being allowed access to confidential information. I therefore agreed to discuss the final thesis with DVB chief editor Aye Chan Naing before publishing. This means that despite using confidential reports as part of the data material for this thesis, the final result should not compromise the security of DVB's operations.

²⁵ [http://etikkom.no/no/Forskningsetikk/Etiske-retningslinjer/Samfunnsvitenskap-jus-og-humaniora/B-Hensyn-til-personer-5---19/\(01.11.09\)](http://etikkom.no/no/Forskningsetikk/Etiske-retningslinjer/Samfunnsvitenskap-jus-og-humaniora/B-Hensyn-til-personer-5---19/(01.11.09))

A guided conversation

The interviews were conducted as *guided conversations* or *conversations with a purpose*, following an interview guide developed prior to the session (see Østbye et al. 2002: 103 and Lindlof 2002: 171). One interview guide was developed for the DVB staff members (except for the interview with the DVB chief editor, which was overall more comprehensive) one for the Burmese living in Oslo and one for the donors.

Using a voice recorder provides a more actual rendition of the interviews than any other method, according to Yin (2003) and Østbye et al. (2005). In the *guided conversations* making up the data material for this thesis, a lot of information is found not only in what the interviewees say, but also in *how* they say it. To ensure these nuances were not lost, all the qualitative interviews I conducted were recorded with consent from the interviewees (except for the pilot interview), and were transcribed in detail.

3.2.2 Completing the interviews

In this inquiry I have interviewed a total of 20 people, a number that fits well with what is advised by Barbara Gentikow in a study of this kind (Gentikow 2005: 77). This constitutes a manageable amount of data material to process. The selection of interviewees was done using a combination of *self-selection*, the *snowball effect*, and what Gentikow describes as the *principle of availability*. In terms of *self-selection*, an open invitation was sent to a large group of people. The *snowball effect* means getting one contact to put the researcher in touch with another contact or informant, thus creating a rather random selection, though within a specific universe. The *principle of availability* is based upon a situation where the desired contacts or informants are not available, and the researcher has to replace these individuals with the people being available at the moment (Gentikow 2003: 79-80).

I contacted the journalists working at DVB rather than technical or administrative staff, as this thesis deals with questions regarding the journalism profession and professional journalism. The interviews were done in a classical face-to-face setting, which is the best way to go deeply into the case and get data of high validity, according to Gentikow (Ibid: 84). The informants selected for this inquiry represent «a panel with conscious and strong relations to the subject of the study» (Ibid: 78, my translation), as they are directly involved with DVB (except for the interviews with the two Burmese

people living in Norway). Their bias is obviously of importance, still I do not believe I could have gained this information through any other source, and I consider the value of their testimonies to outweigh disadvantages related to bias.

The pilot interviews

Two of the interviews in the study were pilot interviews (one with a DVB staff member (part time) in Oslo, and one with a Burmese man living in Oslo). Through these two pilot interviews two different groups of informants were tested, as well as the interview guides, causing some minor revisions. Both the pilot interviews were included in the analysis, as they provided valuable information. Including such pilot interviews in the final thesis can be questionable from a methodological point of view (Ibid: 82). Still, since the qualitative interview format is so flexible, I do not consider these two interviews to differ much from the others.

The Oslo staff

Seven invitations to join the interviews were sent to seven DVB journalists in Oslo, and three journalists agreed to attend. In addition to these three comes one journalist interviewed in the pilot interviews, as well as the Chief editor and the deputy editor. Whenever I could, I allowed the informants to decide where the interview should be held, as recommended by among others Barbara Gentikow (2005). Most of the DVB staff interviewed in Oslo preferred to meet at their office.

The Thailand Staff

In Thailand, I had also intended to focus only on the news reporters and the editors, but due to the language barrier I decided to speak to some of the other journalists as well (involved with feature, DVB Kids news and web), as they were the ones with good English language skills. The selection of interviewees in the Thailand office²⁶ bore the characteristics of a snowball effect, as some interviewees would suggest others I should talk to, based upon their position in the DVB and their language skills. I also interviewed a DVB stringer, which proved to be advantageous as he had just come out of Burma and could share a 'fresh' glimpse into the current conditions inside. This interview offered

²⁶ I will not name the cities in which the interviews were conducted, as requested by the DVB management.

great insight in the DVB operations in Burma, as the interviewee was in charge of coordinating the network inside.

The interviews in the Thailand office were conducted in the DVB building, and so the interviewees were only a few metres and an open door away from their bosses and co-workers. Still, I found most of the informants both willing and genuinely interested in discussing the problems of the organization, as well as the successes. A total of seven people were interviewed in DVB's Thailand offices.

The other interviewed Burmese media organizations

DVB chief editor Aye Chan Naing helped me establish contact with representatives from two other Burmese exile media organizations. Both of the interviews conducted are included in my research. The fact that the chief editor of DVB controlled whom I was able to access has to be taken into consideration in discussing the selection of informants. However, as the representatives from both of the other media organizations were quite vocal in their criticism, I took this as evidence of not being manipulated by the selection of interviewees. Though both of these organizations produce news in different medium than DVB, they are a valuable source of information and worthy of some comparison, as they operate in the same context and with many of the same goals as DVB.

One of the media organizations I contacted was Internews, an international non-profit development media organization working to empower local media, with a branch office in Thailand. Internews has been involved in many projects in Eastern Europe as well as Africa and Asia, providing journalism, production and management training, strengthening media infrastructure and working for the adoption and implementation of media laws in 21 countries²⁷. Internews is consequently not a competitor to DVB, but highly qualified to share professional reflections on the channel's strengths and weaknesses. Even though DVB staff would pass by every now and then during my interview with the Internews representative on the porch of the DVB house, the Internews representative seemed to feel free in criticizing and point out the weaknesses of DVB. The interview with the Internews representative was done at the DVB house.

²⁷ <http://www.internews.org/about/default.shtm> and <http://www.internews.org/regions/asia/default.shtm> (01.11.09)

The other media organization I met with was Mizzima (see also chapter 2.2), a multimedia news agency based in New Dehli, India, with a branch office in Thailand. Mizzima has websites in English and Burmese, publishes a monthly journal, and is producing online television news. By targeting people with Internet access, Mizzima can also not be considered a competitor of DVB, because, as mentioned in chapter 2, the Internet access is scarce in Burma. Mizzima is thus mainly targeting the international community and Burmese living outside Burma. The interview with the staff at Mizzima was held at the Mizzima branch office, and a representative from the office brought me there in his own vehicle to avoid drawing attention to their semi-legal operations. I was encouraged to talk to all of the staff members present, though my questions were mostly directed at one main representative.

The Donors

When selecting which donors to interview I focused on the ones that provide the largest sums to DVB; the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the US based National Endowment for Democracy (NED). These donors represent two of the three «groups» of donors; the politically motivated and the development donors.

The Norwegian-Burmese interviewees

Initially I intended to interview two Burmese people living in Norway with no connections to the channel other than using it as a news source. This was not meant to be an audience survey of any kind, but an indication of how DVB (the news and DVB in general) is perceived by some representatives from the audience in exile. Both of these interviewees had more connections to the DVB than I had hoped for; one had delivered information to the channel as a part of his involvement with a Burmese opposition group several years back and they both had many good friends among DVB staff in Oslo. Despite growing numbers of Burmese refugees granted asylum in Norway as UNHCR quota refugees, there are not many Burmese people living in Oslo. It was no surprise that the informants had some ties to DVB and the staff, but I did not expect them to be as involved as they turned out to be. This may have effected or toned down their critical comments about the DVB.

3.2.3 Immersion in the data material

Barbara Gentikow describes transcribing and analysing the interviews as the last two phases of the interviewing process (Gentikow 2005: 116). To be able to systematically extract quotes and information from the informants, yet allowing them to remain anonymous throughout the process, I provided a personal number for each of the interviewees, along with the letter M or F indicating gender. In longer direct or paraphrased quotes I also provided the number of the line in the document from which the quote was extracted. This helped me keep track of the quotes, and in some cases it is relevant to know the succession of the quotes.

Reducing and organizing the data material

In order to sort and organize the data material, one needs to structure and code it (ibid: 119). This is a situation of trying to simplify the message and to systematically be able to compare data. I chose to do this by reading through all the interviews with my ten research questions in mind, extracting only the relevant information to answer these questions. The result was a 'condensed' version of the data gathered from the interviews, sorted to allow me to make the conclusions as presented in chapter 5.

The document analysis

The selected documents included in the document analysis were the 2006 annual report of DVB (neutral²⁸), the four quarterly reports of 2007 written specifically for SIDA, the 2007 evaluation of DVB commissioned by SIDA, the 2007-2008 DVB annual progress report to SIDA, and DVB's overall budget for 2009 (neutral). Though these were the documents I considered to be most important and relevant, I also read the quarterly reports from 2003-2006. Seven of the eight documents were written by DVB, and one, the 2007 evaluation, was prepared by COWI AS a consultancy, which has previously also evaluated DVB for the Danish development agency Danida. The findings of previous evaluations in 2002, 2005 and 2006, were also included in the 2007 evaluation, thus allowing me to establish, through the 2006 and 2007 reports, if the recommendations from these evaluations had been met. I consider these documents combined to give an adequate insight to the overall development of DVB during the last four years, with

²⁸ By 'neutral' I mean this is piece a general documentation, not written to or for any specific recipient

special attention given to the ability of DVB to meet the requirements of the donors and continuously improve the operations.

A common feature for document analysis is that the texts are available prior to the inquiry. The researcher therefore has no influence on the text (Thagaard 1998: 12). Doing a document analysis in a case study is mostly about corroborating the information collected from other sources (Yin 2003: 87). The selection of documents I was able to gather is not public information, and some information might be sensitive. I have therefore been careful and conscious when referring to data from this material. In the document analysis it has been taken into consideration that these documents were written with the intention of continuing to receive support from the donors, or evaluating the financial support already given. As stressed by among others Syvertsen (2004), it is important to consider the source and purpose of the documents, the time spent and method of gathering this information, as well as investigating how the information corroborates with the information gathered from other sources (Syvertsen 2004). Some of the information in the DVB documents I considered to be less biased, as it can be classified as archival information, and contains *organizational records* such as budgets etc. (Yin 2003: 89).

3.3 Validity, reliability and generalization

The concepts of *reliability*, *validity* and *generalization* are all intertwined; in order to generalize from one study to another, or for example to generate new theories from empirical research, the study must be both valid and reliable. Some theoreticians, e.g. Andersen (1997) emphasize the possibility of *generalizing* in case studies. Yin refers to generalization in case studies as *analytical generalization*, where the findings of one particular case study are generalized to some broader theory (Yin 2003: 37). Others suggest using different terms when doing qualitative approaches, like Marshall & Rossman (2006), who refer to Lincoln & Guba (1985) when using the terms *credibility* and *transferability*. I will not make any attempts of generalizing the findings of this study as I consider the preconditions for modern exile media to be too diverse, and one would need knowledge about more cases in order to generalize. I will instead, in the last chapter of this thesis, look at the possibilities of having the data of this empirical research adding to the theoretical aspect being used to interpret the findings.

Validity and reliability

Robert Yin's criteria for research design consist of *Construct validity*, *Internal validity*, *External validity and reliability*. *Construct validity* is about 'establishing the correct operational measures for the concepts being studied', to secure that the data collected and the sources from which this evidence comes is relevant to answering the research questions. (Yin 2003: 34). It is also important to establish a chain of evidence, to easily allow the reader to follow the derivation of facts in a case study (ibid: 105)

The second of Yin's criteria, *internal validity*, is relevant for explanatory or causal studies only, whereas the third criterion, *external validity*, is about determining the field to which the findings in the study can be generalized (Ibid: 34-35).

Yin's last criterion is *reliability*, which aims at showing that the findings of the inquiry would be the same if another researcher repeated the procedures (Yin 2003: 37). The goal is to minimize bias and the researchers subjective impact on the result. To strengthen the reliability, it is important to document all the steps of the inquiry, as I have tried to do in this chapter, discussing the methods of choice and by developing a case study protocol. As Yin puts it: «The general way of approaching the reliability problem is to (...) conduct research as if someone was always watching over your shoulder» (Ibid: 38). In chapter 8 I will in retrospect consider the validity and reliability of the research design.

4.0 Theoretical approach

As presented in the first chapter, the main research question for this theses is: «*How does the modern exile media organization «The Democratic Voice of Burma» operate in order to obtain and retain professional integrity, and why?»* In order to be able to discuss this question, it is necessary to take a closer look at two of the terms being used: First of all by exploring the term *professional integrity*, and furthermore, *exile media organization* is a concept central to this thesis, necessitating a clear understanding of what the term implies.

This chapter begins with a presentation of what scholars and journalists present as the prerequisites for professional journalism. Following a code of ethics is arguably a necessary part of professionalism, and I will briefly explore of the most important aspects of such ethics, before turning to the media systems from which these ethics originate. I will then investigate the different philosophies that have fostered these media systems, before discussing the role of exile media in this context. It lies at the very premise of exile media that they are exiled from their country of origin, the reason generally being because these media groups share a different philosophy than the ruling power of their home country. This means the exile media are operating in other countries under different prerequisites and different sets of values than the country they report on and to. Which media system are they to be considered a part of, or alternatively, do these media groups operate somewhere *in-between* media systems?

4.1 What is «Professional journalism»

Per Olav Reinton, former director of the Norwegian School of journalism has combined what he considers to be the most important skills required for ‘good journalism’, or *professional journalism* one may argue, in a formula:

Journalism = Knowledge x	Source skills Analytical skills Communication skills
--------------------------	--

(Østlyngen & Øvrebø 2005: 16, my translation)

‘Professional journalism’ thus requires not only knowledge of a topic – knowing how to deal with sources, having analytical skills, and the art of communicating the message to the audience is equally important.

Source skills

This is the part of journalism concerning the collection of information and data, and can be further divided into two main skills; the «finding skills» and the «utilizing skills», according to Østlyngen and Øvrebø’s *Journalistikk. Metode og Fag* (2005). Finding skills is a question of knowing where to look, who to approach, and to maintain an open mind when searching for good sources. Utilizing skills are necessary to be able to «drain» the right information from the sources – including e.g. interview- and observation techniques (ibid: 16). Journalists are expected to search beyond the facts that lie in the open, in order to discover «the truth about facts» (Ibid: 52, my translation).

Analytical skills

Analytical skills concern both securing the authenticity of the information and the «draining» process, as well as the ethical aspects of good journalism. That means following some (general) codes of journalism ethics. In Norway, there is a Code of Ethics for the Norwegian Press²⁹ – a set of ethical norms established by the Norwegian Press Association that all major media organizations in Norway have agreed to follow. The website [medialaw.com](http://www.medialaw.com)³⁰ has collected the codes of ethics from various journalist’s unions in Asia, but has no information on Burma. Therefore, instead of having a national code of ethics for the media, some Burmese exile media define their own. Mizzima has made their code of ethics available to the public on their website (Mizzima.com/code-of-ethics), and DVB has got some of their codes of ethics spelled out in the staff manual, but according to the management this needs to be revised and updated.

Communication skills

The last of the three main skills, the communication skill, is about finding the best way of passing the story on to the audience, for example in deciding the best angle or

²⁹ Available: http://www.nj.no/Code+of+Ethics+of+the+Norwegian+Press.b7C_wZHU0V.ips (01.05.09)

³⁰ Available: <http://www.medialaw.com.sg/ethics/jcode.htm> (21.10.09)

dramaturgy. In terms of the angle, this often coheres with finding a story's «news values», e.g. what is interesting, sensational or conflicting in the information gathered, thus creating the 'best story' (Østlyngen and Øvrebø 2005: 16).

This presentation of the skills a good journalist must possess does not provide the full picture of what journalism is, there are many additional qualities needed. McNair (1998) stresses that journalism is a profession, and in order to be accepted as a professional group, journalists must work by a code of conduct, i.e. an ethical code. The working methods remain as I have briefly described above, but needs to be elaborated upon in terms of underlying ethical norms.

4.2 Journalism and the codes of ethics

Journalists need to be committed to the ethical norms of journalism in order to produce professional journalism. In *The Sociology of Journalism*, Brian McNair (1998) states that drawing a line between which products are «journalism» and which are not, is important because of the audience's expectations of a distinct form and content. When communication holds the characteristics that distinguish journalism, it is given a distinctive status over other forms of communication, as it is expected to adhere to certain values. McNair's definition of journalism is;

Any authored text, in written, audio or visual form, which claims to be (i.e. is presented to its audience as) a *truthful* statement about, or record of, some *hitherto unknown* (new) feature of the *actual, social* world (McNair 1998: 4).

The sources of information about these «new features about the social world» become the «definers of journalistic reality», and 'believable journalism' needs to be verified by «accredited sources» lending their expertise (ibid: 6). This means there are certain values, certain ethics that journalists need to follow, because the audience expects the *truth*.

McNair explains this:

We are purchasing what we believe to be a reliable account of the real beyond our immediate experience, mediated through the professional skills of the journalist and the resources of the journalistic organization (Ibid: 30).

«A reliable account of the real»

As shown in the quote above, McNair uses the word *mediated*, which may be understood as an alteration of reality through the process of journalism. The process of mediation includes selecting what to report, i.e. what is *newsworthy*. This means the journalists are

selecting *what parts of reality to report*. They also choose how to report it. The norms defining what is newsworthy is constantly negotiated by the news workers, and «news is perpetually defining and redefining, constituting and reconstituting social phenomena» (Tuchman 1978: 184).

When journalists gather information and present it to their audience as journalism, the audience is given «a sampled version of reality» out of which they can make sense of society and the world (ibid: 31). McNair's «sampled version of reality» can be linked to Gaye Tuchman's «window metaphor»: «News is a window on the world. (...) But, like any other frame that delineates the world, the news frame may be considered problematic» (Tuchman, 1978: 1). According to Tuchman, the view on the world through «the news window» depends on the features of the window, e.g. on the glass, the panels, the direction and the spectators position to the window. This shapes which reality is presented through the news. Tuchman claims news «transforms mere happenings into publicly discussable events» (Tuchman 1978: 3). The events that are given the most coverage by the media – e.g. prioritized in the inevitable process of *selecting* what to report and how to report it – makes journalism political, as it holds the power to reproduce, or even influence, the political agenda.

A code of ethics: Objectivity and independence

Journalists shape how the audiences perceive reality. To some extent this is accepted as a necessary part of journalism. But if «the window is too small», or only shows what happens «in the streets» and not «in the backyards», a journalist's account of reality becomes one-sided or even incomplete. For journalism to maintain credibility, the audience thus needs to be assured that the journalist's account of the events is true, and not coloured by e.g. the journalist's personal feelings. According to Brian McNair, journalism ethics is what facilitates the portrayal of journalism as a «truthful discourse of the real world» (McNair 1998: 65). Journalism ethics makes journalist's mediated reality accepted as *the truth*.

Objectivity is the oldest and most important ethical demand of liberal journalism (ibid). It refers to the technique of telling a story in a matter-of-fact way, without the reporter showing his or her opinions (Østbye and Østlyngen 2005: 91). The ideal is the journalist being an impartial spectator to the events unfolding, able to observe and

subsequently report the unbiased truth (McNair 1998: 67). 'Objectivity' requires the separation of facts from opinions, balancing the versions of a debate and validating the statements presented by «referring to authoritative others», with goals of *depersonalization* and *neutrality* in order to communicate a trustworthy independent interpretation of facts to the audience (ibid: 68-70). Some argue that it is impossible to establish a universal recipe for objective journalism, as the styles, ideals and news values change in different societies at different times (ibid: 12). To meet this disagreement, one may talk of *impartiality* rather than objectivity. McNair refers to a sociological study when he explains impartiality as stepping away from the tradition of «presenting the world as it is», as the world is perceived differently. Instead of presenting «the objective truth» one should rather present «allegations» from one source and a counterpoint from those subject to the allegations –thus leaving the truth to reside somewhere in the middle (ibid: 70). In this way, the audience is left to draw their own conclusions, and defining the truth is not left to the journalists.

Whether using the term «impartial» or «objective», the goal is to eliminate the journalist's bias. Bias can be perceived as partiality in the reporting, e.g. in terms of choosing what parts of the available information to report, and predetermining the outcome and conclusion of a story. Still, the angling and selection of news may unintentionally favour one side over the other.

According to Michael Schudson's *The Sociology of News*, the term bias has mostly been replaced by «framing» in social sciences (Schudson 2003: 35). This can be defined as «principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters» (Gitlin 1979: 6). Framing also includes the inadvertent parts of shaping the news. To acknowledge that framing of reality happens in news reports is to acknowledge that it is inevitable (Schudson 2003:35). The factors influencing the news selection and production finds its roots in several aspects other than personal bias, and criticising this alone is beside the point:

Critics of political bias ordinarily presume that the journalist should be a professional who tells the truth and that it is possible to do this without prejudice. But for those who emphasize framing, professionalism is as likely to be the disease as the cure (Schudson, 2003: 47).

In trying to meet the standards of professional journalism, news are angled and shaped into predefined shapes, genres and categories. Professionalism, as opposed to bias, is therefore a paradox. The ideal of reporting in a matter-of-fact-way has been established to counter bias and reduce any personal feelings and ensure a balance selection of sources, facts and perspectives, and to allow all parties to get a chance to present their position in a conflict. (McNair 2005: 34, 91). Despite the core values of professional journalism being objectivity and independence, the fact that the journalist will always influence the report cannot be escaped. Journalism shapes the audience's perception of reality through its framing of events and the world. The goal is merely to approach the ideal in a way that does not jeopardize the public's trust in the media, which is partly the reason why it has become an important element in marketing, in the increasingly competitive media industry (McNair 2005: 34).

One can assume that the ideals that formed these ethical norms have developed from consensus about a certain kind of media system, among a group of people in a certain society. Different countries have different media systems. Does this mean they have different ways of viewing professionalism?

4.3 Media systems – the origin of journalism ethics

The norms and values presented above are common to many media systems. But are the characteristics of professional journalism as presented above suitable to professional journalism in any media system? In this thesis I investigate the measures taken by a contemporary exile media organization in order to become, and be perceived as a professional participant among other news media. After having charted the measures taken by DVB, I move on to the question of why the organization operates as it does. The approach to this question became an attempt to map out what has produced the ideals of professionalism DVB strives at upholding. In order to get a better understanding of this, I find it is necessary to take a closer look a central issue in the study of the media: the relationship between media and power.

Media research has long been dominated by one work that opposed four different ways of organizing media; the authoritarian model, the libertarian model, the soviet

model and the social responsibility model, as presented in *Four Theories of the Press*³¹ by Siebert et al. (1956). Siebert et al.'s four theories are considered normative; this is not a description of how media systems are – but rather an attempt of systematizing the different media system ideals. This normative approach has been criticized for being based in and thus favouring a western normative view of the world's different media systems, and thus producing a theoretical global generalization based upon a very limited experience from few countries, according to e.g. Curran and Park [2000] (2006), Josephi (2005), Hallen and Mancini [2004] (2006) and Heng (2002). In more recent pieces of research, several of the mentioned scholars have argued that Siebert et al.'s theories lack valuable complexity. According to McQuail (1994), the media in a country does not constitute a single, holistic media 'system' with a single underlying purpose. McQuail argue many elements (often overlapping and inconsistent) intertwined makes up the media of a country (McQuail according to Hallen and Mancini 2006: 12). But despite being severely criticized for decades, *Four Theories* has remained a relevant point of departure for new research in more than half a century after it was written. *Four Theories of the Press* has continued to inspire new research, as scholars advocated the need for a more nuanced exploration of the connections between media and power.

One such contribution came from Denis McQuail, who in 1983 added two more theories to Siebert et al.'s; the development model and the democratic participant model (McQuail 1983). But as the political world developed, and the Soviet Union came to an end, Siebert et al.'s divisions no longer made sense. Alternative divisions have been suggested, but though many recent additions to normative media theory to some extent are based on *Four Theories*, others advocate the need for acknowledging differences between media systems rather than attempting to pigeonhole complex systems into predestined categories, whatever the divisions may be. Descriptive works, like Curran and Park's *De-Westernizing Media Studies* (2006) and Heng's *Media Fortunes, Changing Times* (2002), attempt to avoid favouring some systems over others and instead initiate a fresh approach to investigate the connections between media and power, and

³¹ Despite referring to the press, the theories presented in *Four Theories of the Press* are generally interpreted as referring to all mass communication media.

thus also the different ideals present in the different ways of organizing the media, through detailed empirical studies of national differences.

A global approach

Curran and Park (2006) have campaigned a process of *de-westernizing* media studies, by exploring the relationships between the media and the power in countries «outside the Anglo-American orbit» (Curran and Park (ed.) 2006: 11). The editors argue «media studies will benefit from developing a wider comparative perspective», and are thus directing some criticism towards both *Four Theories* and other previous contributions which can be interpreted as favouring one system above others. Curran and Park are aware of the cultural relativism that has influenced previous research, and take a conscious stand in their study.

By stressing the differences between national media systems, the authors disagree with earlier scholars such as Anthony Giddens, who claimed «the era of the nation state is over» (Giddens 1999: 31). Instead, Curran and Park emphasize the importance of nation states as a marker of difference between media systems, that tends to be underplayed by globalization theory (Curran and Park 2006: 12).

In the combined presentations of different media systems gathered in *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, Curran and Park contribute to highlighting national differences in media systems. But at the same time similarities across national borders are revealed. In this way, experiences of the media in some countries can perhaps be useful in the understanding e.g. the development of the media in other countries with a comparable structure and government, which would perhaps not have been the case if the starting point of such research had been to reduce the experiences of both these countries to versions of authoritarian media systems.

An Asian approach to media systems

In the same way that Curran and Park aim at shedding some light on the relationship between media and power in countries from all around the world, Russell H. K. Heng (ed.) (2002) provides a similar approach dedicated to the different media systems of Southeast Asian states in *Media Fortunes, Changing Times: ASEAN States in Transition*. Heng focuses on the media systems of the ASEAN states (Association of Southeast Asian

Nations), that is Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Maybe of these states have undergone some sort of a transition of government during the last twenty years, and the media has played a major part in this (and vice versa). For some this has meant a development from authoritarianism to democracy, and for others, like Burma (Heng uses Myanmar), the transition has been from a planned socialist economy towards a capitalist market models (Heng 2002: xiii). According to Heng, there exists a moderate amount of literature addressing the media in Southeast Asia, and within the titles concerning ASEAN states, only a very small fraction discusses the media in the new ASEAN states – Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam (ibid: 3). My experience is that this is still the case in 2009. The few studies that have been made on these countries have mainly been empirically based studies concerning media as a «watchdog» of society and issues regarding censorship. But according to Heng such studies may easily end up condemning media for not being free, instead of trying to address the question of why the media is organized differently in different societies. Heng argues that some previous contributions have lacked a ‘theoretical sophistication’, and that some previous studies have attempted to place Asian media systems into traditional theories of media as presented in *Four Theories of The Press*, which he argues is unproductive, and gives ambiguous results (ibid: 4).

Media Fortunes, Changing Times approaches media studies in a similar way as *De-Westernizing Media Studies* in terms of inviting selected writers to contribute with reports on 9 of the ASEAN countries, but while Curran and Park are concerned with the influence of globalization, and includes contributions from all over the world, Heng is mainly concerned with Southeast Asia. And as Curran and Park do this to show the differences that may be overlooked in globalization-approaches to media studies, Heng asks whether there *is* a distinct Asian style of journalism that could or should be recognized. He refers to scholars who claim it would be rewarding to develop common Asian theories of communication as alternatives to the Western approach, which may be ‘unhealthy’ for the Asian media systems. According to Heng some scholars support the validity of the claim for recognizing some ‘Asian values’, but stress the complications that may arise when dealing with a globally interconnected world. Others say the discourse regarding Asian journalism or Asian values in journalism will fade, as such

Asian leaders have used such arguments in confidence and pride as they were experiencing an economic growth now waning (ibid: 4-9).

One important thing separating Heng's approach from Curran and Park's is Park considering the nation states important in shaping national media systems, despite the increasingly transnational media products produced, while Heng interprets the transnational trends in the southeast Asian region as an indicator of the state losing some of its dominance in shaping the media agenda, as new information technologies challenge state's control of the media, even where the state power is still extensive (Heng 2002: 14).

A problematic simplification

The tendency of looking at Western, liberal media systems as free, as opposed to the communist or authoritarian media systems of other parts of the world, is an inadequate description of the complex reality, according to Brian McNair (1998), as the media in 'liberal pluralist societies' are also restricted in many ways, e.g. by various systems of ownership and regulation (McNair 1998: 31).

In *Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics* (2006), Hallen and Mancini demonstrate how the well-established 'professional model' based upon Western media systems is inapplicable to most countries around the world, including several European countries. It is considered a fact that «Press practices always differ from press theory» (Altschull 1995: 441). Still, Hallen and Macini argue:

«Four Theories of the Press has stalked the landscape of media studies like a horror-movie zombie for decades beyond its natural lifetime. We think it is time to give it a decent burial and move to the development of more sophisticated models based on real comparative analysis» (Hallen and Mancini 2006: 10)

They have developed three models to better be able to describe the relationship between media and politics in Europe. In this way they advocate the need for examining the relationship between political systems and media systems more closely, in a descriptive way, in order to develop more nuanced, versatile models (Hallin and Mancini: [2004] 2006).

Including the different and juxtaposed examples of national media systems in the studies, as well as the various contexts in which these systems are formed, might improve

the overall understanding of the various relationships between media and power, and of the different ideals of the media. This brings us one step closer to understanding why DVB is expected to adhere to certain ideals as part of being regarded «professional», and it may also shed some light on the conflicts that occur, as this professionalism is rooted in a media philosophy very different from the media philosophy of the target country of DVB. In this chapter I have given an account of some different ways of viewing and approaching media systems. The next step is to dig one layer deeper and look at what constitutes a country's media system.

4.4 The philosophies of media systems

The structure of a media system contains a distinct philosophy for how the media in a country should be organized. Robert McKenzie (2006) describes this philosophy as a root network «feeding the media system with characteristics from the surrounding culture» (McKenzie 2006: 71). Instead of analysing media systems using normative theories (such as e.g. *The Four Theories of the Press* by Siebert et al. 1956), which can easily become biased as the term implies certain *universal normative* standards to which all media systems should be measured, one should look at *the philosophies* of media systems, according to McKenzie. Various parts of different philosophies can be found in one media system, and media systems based on the same philosophy are not necessarily equal (ibid: 84). McKenzie classifies media system philosophies as authoritarian, libertarian, communist, social responsibility, development or democratic-participant. Identifying these various philosophies in media systems helps us to understand why media systems are different, and how the media serves different purposes in different countries. At the same time this can remind the researcher of the fact that there may be aspects of several philosophies present in one particular society or media system.

Six philosophies for media systems

The aspiration of this thesis is to understand how DVB operates in order to be and be perceived as a professional media organization, and why. Being regarded professional is important in order to be acknowledged internationally, and it seems to be important to the donors financing the DVB operations as well.

According to McKenzie, one may argue that what constitutes ‘professionalism’ varies with the different media systems. The principles of media operations are fundamentally different between the different media philosophies. In the *authoritarian* system, the media should serve the state, and the state should control the media. In the *communist* philosophy, the state should own the media, and the media should elevate cultural tastes and teach the communist doctrine. In the *libertarian* media system, the media should be self-regulated, with minimal interference from the state, and should be owned by private companies. In the *social responsibility* philosophy, media should contain balanced opinions and commentaries, and the goals of the editors should be clear. In the *development* philosophy, the media should have the role of a government watchdog. Last but not least, in the *democratic-participant* philosophy, citizens should get to influence – or even contribute to the media production, and there should be a freedom of criticism (ibid: 71-87). With such different motives only in terms of the principles of operation, it is evident that «professionalism» takes on different meanings in differing systems.

The various philosophies indicate the pointlessness of judging one system’s level of professionalism based on the ideals of another system. On the contrary, «professionalism» is based on codes of ethics that arise from different media systems based on different media philosophies, and is thus a relative concept. Acknowledging this relativity, professionalism in exile media becomes a problematic and elusive concept. It is a challenge for any media to meet the expectations that come with professionalism. But exile media may be excluded both from the media system of which they originate, and also from the media system to which they are exiled.

4.5 Alternative media

Exile can either be forced or self-inflicted. The staff members of DVB cover both categories, as some have fled Burma out for fear for their own safety, while others have left voluntarily, in order to be able to pursue their (political) work. According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (2000), *exile* means:

1. The state of being sent to live in another country that is not your own, especially for political reasons or as a punishment
2. A person who chooses, or is forced to live away from his or her own country (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 2002: 436-7).

Within the very premise of *exile media* lays the fact that these media groups are unable to operate in their home country, for political reasons. They therefore have to move the operations to another country in order to continue the work – countries with potentially fundamentally different media philosophies. The following approaches show some descriptive contributions to media theory regarding alternative media, those kinds that are not mentioned or do not fit into any of the defined categories. I will end this chapter by presenting some of the main problems that occur, as these alternative media are not treated separately within media theory. This causes the alternative media to be studied and classified within the same standards as mainstream media, both by supporting organizations and when attempting to be acknowledged and reach beyond their initial target group and contribute to an international news agenda.

Diaspora media

When searching for literature regarding exile journalism there is little to be found. A related term, however, which also involves exiled populations, is diaspora media. Research on diaspora has been conducted from a number of academic perspectives. *The Media of Diaspora*, edited by Karim H. Karim (2003) examines media use in diasporic communities and discusses the uses of media by transnational communities in six selected countries. This descriptive contribution to media theory provides some interesting views on exile media. Hamid Naficy's chapter, «Narrowcasting in diaspora. Middle Eastern television in Los Angeles» (2003) argues multi- and transnational media corporations have produced a model of television that can be referred to as «centralised global broadcasting» (Naficy 2003: 51). At the same time, due to issues like displacement and political and social reconstructions, a «decentralised narrow broadcasting» has also developed. Naficy divides this heterogeneous category into three subcategories: ethnic television, transnational television and exile television, however these categories are flexible and may merge. Using the US as an example Naficy defines the categories; *ethnic television* is produced in the host country by long-established minorities who regard the host country as their homeland. The programmes rather describe intracultural struggles than intercultural (ibid). *Transnational television* consists mainly of imported programmes or programmes produced by multi- or transnational concerns. Thus the

homeland is defined as outside the host land. One example is Korean productions being aired freely using American airwaves to reach a Korean population within the US.

Diaspora television is produced in the host country by exiles, often by amateur producers rather than larger media organizations. Both collective and personal challenges related to e.g. identity is foregrounded, and the programmes delivered in English. According to Naficy, *transnational* and *diaspora* television is *narrowcasting*, as it is transmitted in foreign languages and thus does not reach as many people (ibid: 53).

One simple definition describes diaspora as «religious or national minorities in foreign environments» (ordnett.no, my translation). Dictionary.com provides this explanation, among others: «a) A dispersion of a people from their original homeland. b) The community formed by such a people». According to Michele Reis (2004) there are some basic descriptions that can be used to assess whether an ethnic group is in fact diasporic:

1. Dispersal from an original «centre» to two or more foreign regions;
2. Retention of a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland including its location, history, and achievements;
3. The belief that they are not – and perhaps never can be – fully accepted in their host societies and so remain partly separate;
4. The idealization of the putative ancestral home and the thought of returning when conditions are more favourable;
5. The belief that all members should be committed to the maintenance or restoration of the original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, and the belief in a common fate (Reis 2004: 43).

According to this definition, the exiled Burmese population could well fit the description of a diasporic community. However, the exile «narrowcasts» defined by Naficy differ from the operations of DVB and the other Burmese exile media, as the main proportion of their operations and broadcasts is not directed at a Burmese diaspora in exile, but rather directly at Burma, i.e. from the diaspora to the homeland. Also, the main proportions of what DVB produces is in Burmese language, only a small fraction of the website content is in English.

Media in conflict zones

Media operating in exile do so because of ongoing conflicts with the prevailing media philosophy in the home countries. In the following I will include theory regarding media in conflict zones, as this is relevant for the case of Burma. I will also include theory

regarding the development of media in post-conflict societies. DVB is being funded partly by organizations working for media development, and is consequently part of the bigger debate on how to empower and improve media in (post) conflict zones.

According to Loretta Hieber (1998), media intervention in conflicts can be divided into two categories; that of reporting in a traditional way to a general audience, promoting peace instead of stirring up or contributing to heated conflicts, or, in a more proactive way, designing a custom made message with a determined agenda to specific groups. The first category can be referred to as ‘peace broadcasting’, and according to Price and Thompson (2002) it has been attempted in three different ways: «By establishing international outlets for the purpose, by setting up new, indigenous media for the purpose, and by working with established local media» (Price and Thompson 2002: 17). The latter of these three ways has been effective in the Balkans and implies fewer risks for the interveners, but it is only possible in countries where the existing media system is functioning well enough to be worth developing (ibid). However these methods all represent various degrees of ‘propaganda for peace’ – and as Price and Thompson stress, there is a tension between using the news media for specific purposes while concurrently advocating that media should not be controlled (ibid: 18).

The second of Hieber’s two categories of media intervention in conflicts, *intended outcome programming* (or *desired outcome programming*) has, as the notion implies, a clear agenda for the outcome of the broadcasts. According to Howard (2003), intended outcome programming is «radio and television programmes teaching conflict resolution through entertaining radio or television dramas, and the presentation of news focusing on the democratization process» (Howard 2003: 17). Hieber (1998) states that there is no necessary contradiction between the fundamental journalism ideal of objectivity and desired outcome programming promoting peace, if this means being an intermediary between oppositions, working to dispel rumours and to focus on points of agreement (Hieber 1998). In fact, Hieber says, intended outcome journalism may actually have a greater impact on the audience than traditional sensationalist journalism (Hieber 1998).

In conflict areas, media freedom may be restricted, often justified as a safety precaution or as a result of a political approach, and in some cases the media are used to tone down conflicts and promote certain values, rather than e.g. being a critical

counterweight to the political powers. It is apparent that exile media organizations operating in conflict zones face huge challenges. Is it then reasonable to expect these media organizations to import norms and ideals developed for operating under ideal conditions, and not adjusted to the conflict situation?

Imported ideals

The best practices for media development, and what role media should play in developing (post-conflict) countries is debated. Allen and Stremlau (2005) discuss the trend of organizing and developing the media in transitional countries based upon the experiences and views of the Western countries in their paper «Media Policy, Peace and State-reconstruction» (Allen and Stremlau 2005). The authors claim there is a tendency of embellishing as the «ideal» media model the «free marketplace of ideas», when in fact there are many limiting factors to media freedom even in the parts of the world where the media is considered to be free. Allen and Stremlau also point out that Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, often used to promote press freedom, is about individual (and collective) rights and freedoms, and not about the rights of media institutions. Thus, ignoring local realities to promote an «international ideal», is at times counterproductive (Ibid: 13). Thompson and Price, editors of *Forging Peace* (2002) also discuss the conflicts that may arise when dealing with media intervention in conflict- or post conflict zones, stating that «Applying imported norms (...) brings problems which are intriguing at best, bitterly divisive at worst» (Price and Thompson 2002: 15).

One of the reasons why importing ideals can be difficult and unfortunate is that this means transferring ideals from one society to another, which is potentially built on different philosophies. This can result in a wider discrepancy between the ideals and the actual performance of the media than necessary. As mentioned there will always be a gap between journalism theory and journalism practice, but how wide can this gap become before the theory is reduced to meaningless demands rather than attainable goals and ideals?

Caught between the normative and the descriptive

Gaye Tuchman says «professionalism» in journalism is «knowing how to get a story that meets organizational needs and standards» (Tuchman 1978: 66). As I have mentioned

previously in this chapter, the very recipe for «good journalism», e.g. «the organizational needs and standards», plays a major part in shaping the version of reality presented in the news. In areas lacking the preconditions necessary for a free, well functioning media, others set the standard and the result may be an even deeper gap between ideals and the everyday practice.

In her article «Journalism in the Global Age – Between Normative and Empirical» (2005), Beate Josephi examines contributions concerning global and transnational media written by authors set within the dominant (Western) discourse. She finds that until recently, other media/journalism models than the Anglo-American standard based on Western ideals have rarely been acknowledged by researchers. This contributes to maintaining an unnecessary gap between the normative and the empirical, as non-western media is evaluated using models developed for and in different societies than the ones in which they are operating (Josephi 2005). This may create unfortunate consequences, as journalism has often been, and still is, promoted as a beacon for democracy. As a result journalists of many countries without a democratic foundation are not seen as «journalists» at all, but rather as «information providers» (ibid: 575).

The chapter above provides one version of a limited theoretical approach to exile journalism through conflict journalism, media development and diaspora media theory. This helps establish the field of which DVB is a part. The aspiration of this thesis is to investigate what measures are taken by DVB in order to become and be regarded as a professional media organization, and why these measures are initiated. The previous theoretical approach has been an attempt to demonstrate the origins of some aspects of this professionalism. Furthermore I have shown that the same professionalism is developed in a normative approach to journalism. Exile media, on the other hand, is rarely mentioned in normative media theory, though theories may arise from descriptive contributions. This illustrates how normative approaches to media theory may lack valuable details and distinctions, not only in order to understand these different kinds of media, but also because these alternative media are more powerful than they are often credited with.

With the help of new media technology exile media organizations like DVB are reaching more people despite being opposed by government forces. In the case of Burma, the impact of the independent news media operating from outside is increasing with the growing numbers of recipients to the radio- and TV-broadcasts. As previously mentioned, DVB was quoted by the largest international news media during the 2007 saffron revolution. In order to attain this acknowledgement and to hold on to this important position, DVB must continue to demonstrate ideals of professionalism like e.g. impartiality, which is important to both the libertarian and the democratic-participant media philosophy. In the following chapter I will present a summary of the views on professionalism, ethics, priorities and complications experienced by the DVB staff. I will then enter a discussion regarding the difficulties that arise with complying to certain ideals, based on my empirical findings.

5.0 The findings of the qualitative analysis

In order to systematically compare and combine the relevant information from the qualitative interviewees and documents the material has been analyzed with the ten specific questions presented in chapter one in mind. In this way only the information relevant to answering the main research question; *«How does the modern exile media organization «The Democratic Voice of Burma» operate in order to obtain and retain professional integrity, and why?»* is included. The following chapter presents a summary of the findings of this analysis. This information answers the first part of the research question; how do DVB operate? In the next chapter this information will be the basis as the findings are discussed in light of the theoretical approach, in order to approach the last part of the main research question; why?

5.1 The commitment to responsible journalism

The first of the ten subordinate research questions presented in chapter 1 reads: *«In their mission statement, the DVB is committed to ‘responsible journalism’. How does the DVB journalists reflect upon this commitment?»* When asked about DVB’s expressed commitment to responsible journalism, as communicated in the mission statement, the response from the interviewees stressed four areas of focus; Authenticity, the development of the independent DVB, bias and balance.

Responsibility to be authentic

The DVB reporters are very concerned with verifying the «authenticity» of every story – which I interpreted as more a question of «reliability». According to some of the journalist, this sometimes causes DVB to be a bit late in reporting «breaking news», as they will wait until every piece of information is verified before they publish it (F3, M1). As they are situated far away from the society on which they are reporting, and have no official sources to approach for confirmation, DVB journalists have to verify their stories by double-checking with other sources by phone, or with other media reporting from Burma.

«M1» says he does not worry about DVB airing inaccurate stories, and says «we are following the correct path to verifying the facts». But even though DVB staff are meticulous and cautious as they confirm their stories, the audience still needs to be

convinced: «we need to create a standard: This is DVB, this can be trusted», says «M10» and explains that DVB is not there yet. «It's like that now for political activists», he says, indicating that the part of the population involved in the pro-democracy movement trusts DVB, while this may not be the case for the general Burmese public («M10»: 102). The journalists are aware of this problem, but it is the editors holding the main responsibility. The journalists can only make sure they are doing the best in their reports, and «never pretend, never lie, always tell the truth, and never say you are someone else» («F3»: 107).

The 2002 change towards independence

The journalists that were with DVB at the time of the official separation from the exile government of Burma in 2002 say they felt this change allowed them to become independent in their reporting. «M8» says the most important aspects of being professional is independence.

According to «M9» the 2002 independence made it easier getting access to people inside, as many used to be afraid to be associated with the DVB and by proxy, the exile government. As the DVB no longer introduced their broadcasts stating that the following is broadcasted is in cooperation with the NCGUB, the process of establishing the channel as independent began. «M1» believes the 2002 independence made DVB more professional («M1»: 194).

«We had many problems in the past», «M9» says, and explains that previous feedback was critical: «They said ‘this is bias! Democracy and human rights; You're biased!’», «M9» recalls, and asks rhetorically: «but is it bias? These are very basic ideals. Maybe it is not bias, but a foundation?» («M9»: 254-258).

When asked about the process of independence, several of the interviewees mention the bickering on the 15th anniversary celebration, to explain how the decision was disputed:

The exile groups and activists misunderstood us (...) They thought we are going back to Burma to cooperate with the military government, [but] after 2003-2004 they realize and appreciate (...) I think we are the first media group, you know, to take down the iron curtain after leaving the government! («M9»: 292).

Despite mentioning the disputes among the various Burmese exile media, all of the interviewed journalists regard the 2002 separation as a positive change, because of the achieved independence.

«A democratic bias»

A number of the interviewees mention that DVB is not entirely unbiased, and that this should be improved as a part of committing to responsible journalism. What «bias» actually implies, is disputed, and seems to be perceived differently by the different generations of DVB journalists. «The older generation (...) thought that we expect them to do propaganda, or to be biased», says chief editor Aye Chan Naing. «We constantly have to tell them that is not our expectation» (Aye Chan Naing: 691).

Debating the best way to deal with bias is an ongoing process, and according to Aye Chan Naing this is continuously discussed among DVB editors and staff. «In our case, we all have to be biased for democracy movement», says Khin Maung Win. «All we have been covering is violations, abuses by the regime. When you look at a report, you might say ‘oh, that’s biased’. But we can’t have a neutral situation in the case of Burma» (Khin Maung Win: 624-631). According to some of the younger journalists this is an example of how the older generations are coloured by their political history, and instead DVB should be completely biased, like any other news media: «We are not representing the exile side, even with the exile background, we are now journalists. Journalism is the bridge between the [Burmese] government and the exile government» (M1).

Balancing criticism

Another aspect of the commitment to responsible journalism is expressed through the journalists view on balancing the reports. «F2» says when choosing which news to report, the main focus is on news regarding government violation’s of people’s rights. Still, she explains, they always have to check the government side too («F2»: 58). This relates to the DVB policy of trying to obtain statements from government officials every time they run a critical story. Most of the journalists say the officials always decline to comment, but the process of giving the opposition this opportunity is still considered an important part of the story: «If military government don’t give response I don’t stop there, I give readers a glimpse of what happened, how many times I called without answer» («M10»). Some of the journalists say that if the officials refuse to give a statement they might instead refer to earlier official statements in the reports («M2»: 182).

«F2» says she made a story about negative issues within the NLD not long ago, and was approached by people criticising her. Regardless, she thinks it is important to cover these stories as well («F2»: 111). Not all the journalists share this view. When asked whether they could ever make a critical story of e.g. the NCGUB, most of the interviewees said no:

Critical feature about exile government is too difficult. Instead we can invite to a debate and give a topic. But it is still difficult to get different views. Burma is a special case. We have no covering of exile groups doing anything wrong. Audiences send emails about the wrongdoings of exile groups; we should cover this, we should apply professional journalism to exile! («M4»: 243-248).

Several staff members admit they have previously also avoided broadcasting negative stories about the opposition movement or democracy, even if they feel it should be reported («M9»). Though most of the staff members are preoccupied with being fair and balanced, one says: «We try the best, [but] people inside Burma still think we are opposition radio» («M8»).

5.2 Responsibility and professionalism

The second of the ten research questions reads «*what does the staff at DVB regard as the most important parts of being responsible, and how does this relate to professionalism?*»

Some of the most commonly mentioned responses relevant to this issue are «the responsibility to educate the people of Burma» and «the responsibility to following journalism ethics in general». But some unexpected views on «professionalism» is also worth mentioning.

Responsibility to educate

According to «M1», the most important part of responsible journalism is the selection of what should be presented. He argues the important thing is to remember that the key issue is to report «not what you want to say, it is what you need to say» («M1»), indicating that the Burmese population needs to be educated on certain issues, and that this influences the news selection.

The majority of informants do not see a contradiction between the ideal of being unbiased, yet working to *impart* ideals of democracy and human rights. «M1» explains

that DVB should educate people and give them information so that they can make their own choices. «F3» agrees, and says:

«Partly we are trying to change the power, but that is not our main goal, our main goal is to enlighten the citizens (...) All of media have bias; Al Jazeera, BBC, Fox. So then DVB can also have it, but we need a balance. Our radio is not a government organization; it is [a] media [organization]. We don't need to support power changes, but we should promote democratic knowledge to these people because they don't know about it and they don't know their rights («F3»: 134-151).

Commitment to journalism ethics

One of the interviewees stress that «being ethical» is avoiding stealing news and avoiding plagiarism. Another journalist expresses some concern about having to work in secrecy, for example by using hidden cameras to record certain episodes: «There's not in real word professionalism, always stealing the pictures...» («M2»: 255). In this way, being exiled and resorting to undercover reporting compromises the journalism ideals he is taught.

«M9» says DVB is developing a staff manual to strengthen the quality of the journalism. As the main focus is still to uncover human rights abuse and promote democracy this is very vague, and they need a set of more detailed rules to become more effective (M9). «M1» says it is important to promote diplomacy: «In my own opinion, I just want to build good understanding in a diplomatic way between the two parties» («M1»).

Other aspects of professionalism

When discussing professionalism with DVB staff, some interpret this as a question of the technical quality of their broadcasts, probably as a result of some language difficulties. Whenever this happened I did not correct them, as I found it interesting that many brought up the lack of technical professionalism as a problem. One of the interviewees said that if a story lacked quality in the picture or sound, they would not air it, as they «do not negotiate quality» («M1»).

A balanced combination of people, e.g. gender and age, was also mentioned as important in terms of professionalism. DVB has been working on creating a good balance of gender and age in their offices (COWI: 2007 evaluation of SIDA support to DVB). Only three of the 13 staff members I interviewed were female, but since the interviews were entirely voluntary, this could be coincidental. In terms of the age of DVB reporters,

«M4» mentions the need for young people to join the crew, in order to improve professionalism:

We need to get some new blood! But the new need training. The old are crystallized, stereotyped in their attitudes. They want to criticize the government, and try to cover only bad news. The new generation has new ideas about what to cover («M4»: 318).

5.3 Education and qualifications

The next question, «*what is the level of relevant education among the DVB staff, and do they feel qualified?*» was a bit tricky to approach because of the diverse response. Though most of the DVB staff members lack a formal journalism education, most are high school graduates, and many have experience from working with media before joining DVB. Those few of the interviewees with university degrees or other kinds of higher education have attended universities outside Burma, as the education offered inside has deteriorated during the last decades.

Level of relevant education and experience

Few of the DVB staff members I interviewed had any formal journalism education prior to joining DVB. Not surprisingly, as several of the interviewees informed me that Burma has lacked a school of journalism for decades. «M6» says most of the young people working for DVB (inside and outside Burma) have graduated from high school, but few have higher education from *inside* Burma. Some have attended universities or received journalism training in other countries prior to getting involved with DVB. One of the interviewees says he had some higher education from a Burmese university, but questions the relevance and value of it, and says «my education was propaganda» («M10»: 8)

Some staff members say they have been able to attend some journalism training initiated by various organizations inside Burma prior to joining DVB, though mainly for shorter periods and of a very general and basic nature. In addition to having attended training courses before or after joining DVB, several of the staff I interviewed reported they had prior experience from the media industry.

One of the interviewees was educated from a western university, and experienced the problem of not being able to adapt what he was taught to his everyday work («M4»: 250). This is also mentioned by several of the other staff members who have received journalism training after joining DVB: «Every institution teaches how to get a story ‘on the ground’», «M8» says, «but no one teaches how to work in our situation» («M8»: 78).

«M9» agrees: «I can apply only 5-10% of my own experience to my daily profession». It seems this frustration is mainly linked to the part of the training concerning professionalism in terms of journalism ethics. The more practical parts of the training initiated by DVB, such as Internet and computer use and operating equipment such as e.g. video cameras, is generally seen as a necessary part of being a journalist.

Do they feel qualified?

Several of the interviewees say they «will become professional in the future», but at the moment they are «still learning». «We need to get more training for advanced journalism», «M4» says. «Most of us only have basic training». One of the older interviewees was a student of the 88-generation, and had done information work for a group involved in the opposition movement. She therefore feels qualified because of her experience with working with the same people she now interviews: «I was one of them. (...) I know how to ask the questions» («F3»). However some of the interviewees, mainly women, express having difficulties learning some of the necessary skills, like e.g. English language. This may be starting difficulties as some of them had not worked for DVB for a very long time, but it also indicates some of the journalists do not feel completely qualified yet. In general it seems most of the interviewees have learned «on the job», except for the ones with prior experience from the media industry.

5.4 Improving the journalism skills

A logical follow-up to asking about the level of education and qualifications within DVB is how this is improved: «*how does DVB work to improve the journalism skills among the staff?*» As there is an uneven level of education and experience among the DVB journalists, further training of the staff members has been necessary from the beginning. After being confronted by the audience, evaluators and donors regarding the need for improving the level of professionalism, DVB initiated a «Master Training Programme» in 2004, a systematic approach to get all staff members through the needed training programmes to raise the level of theoretical and practical journalism skills. This chapter sums up the DVB staff, editors and board of directors view on new recruits – what is expected of them and what kind of training they need, as well as general information about the experiences from previous training.

Recruiting new staff members

Chief editor Aye Chan Naing explains that until around 1995-96, DVB recruited new staff members with an interest in journalism mainly from political opposition groups. After 2002 they began recruiting from a broader base, (Aye Chan Naing). Recruiting people is hard, according to Naing, and most new recruits have to be trained in basic journalism skills. Deputy chief editor Khin Maung Win says the different branch offices of DVB look for different qualifications when hiring new staff members; «For the offices like Oslo and Thailand, professionalism is more important, because we also have competition» (Khin Maung Win: 28). This indicates that having a «professional» organization as a whole is considered more important than securing the level of professional journalism training among every journalist. The overall most important criteria when hiring, according to Khin Maung Win, is «commitment for freedom, commitment to work for free media» (Khin Maung Win: 21). Journalists with a lack of commitment have no future with the DVB, he explains, adding: «some people, they are very good journalists, but their commitment is questionable, and then they don't dare to take the risks: [they will be] Cut off! Finished!» (Khin Maung Win: 639). This means that despite striving to become professional and move away from being a political tool, the management of DVB still expresses a need for politically motivated people rather than the best journalists.

A general need for further education

Aye Chan Naing explains that training inside Burma proved to be too risky, and now training is being done at various locations outside (Aye Chan Naing: 253-264). Khin Maung Win estimates they spend between NOK 500.000-1.000.000 on training 30-40 people annually.

In general, the staff inside Burma need more technical training, as they have to film, record, photograph, edit and upload all the material unassisted, Khin Maung Win explains. The staff based in Thailand and Oslo need technical training as well, though not to the same extent, and all staff contributing editorial content needs to be educated in journalism skills and ethics (Khin Maung Win: 79-84).

All of the staff members I have interviewed (except for one, who had only been with DVB for a month) say they have received training as employees. Still, with

constantly expanding and hiring new staff members, the need for training at all levels is continuous: «We now have 60 journalists in the country (...) By the end of 2009 we have 80 (...) So they need basic training, basic technical skill and internet training» (Khin Maung Win: 171).

Developing a suitable training programme

There are several challenges that arise from having trainers with a general journalism competence training the journalists of a media organization working under especially demanding preconditions. Providing a general, basic journalism training to all DVB reporters is a huge task, because special training is needed to cope with the challenges of operating in exile. Despite having trainers with good knowledge of the Burmese situation and experience from working in the region, several of the interviewed journalists say the training is not always in tune with the actual conditions.

«M1» is concerned that most of the training is being done by foreigners. Doing things «The Burmese way» means having to bend the rules of ethics at times, he explains «M2». Because some information is hard to get hold of, he says the journalists must sometimes use unconventional methods, like hiding the fact that they are journalists. Khin Maung Win knows is concerned with the conflicts that may develop when applying general journalism rules and ethics to the Burmese situation. One solution so far has been to develop a special training programme for DVB. Rather than sending their staff to the training institutions they have organized for various trainers to come to the DVB offices to provide training modified to their needs (Khin Maung Win: 171)

5.5 The challenges of exile journalism

Operating in exile brings about some strenuous challenges for the DVB staff members. When asked questions relating to «*what parts of exile journalism the journalists find hard*», many of the interviewees mention operating across vast distances as challenging, and several interviewees express frustration over not being able to travel to or inside Burma. The reporters are totally dependent on their phones and email to get information, even if they are situated within the country, because they are not always able to travel to the places they report from. In addition, they have to be aware of biased sources. Many

also mention their more personal conflicting feelings that arise as they are trying to remain unbiased in their reporting and at the same time handling their own political bias.

Risky reporting

Finding information, and validating this across huge distances, is mentioned as a basic, but hard part of the everyday challenges. In order to retrieve and verify information from inside Burma, DVB relies on the large stringer network inside. The stringers are operating in the most vulnerable positions. «We have to take a very, very high risk for those working for us», says chief editor Aye Chan Naing about those working inside (Aye Chan Naing: 757-759). Safety is therefore the main priority. These stringers earn more than the average salary in Burma, according to Khin Maung Win. They will also be assisted in case they become arrested, as DVB will help support their families, he says (Khin Maung Win: 589). Currently 6 people with connections to DVB are in prison after the Saffron uprising, according to Aye Chan Naing, a reminder that the «fringe benefits» do not balance the risks.

Denied access to their own country

Many of the interviewees express frustration over not being able to travel inside Burma because of the risk of being arrested if they are suspected of working for DVB. When the reporters inside learn about something going on, they have to phone first hand sources, on costly and unreliable phone lines. These sources may be ordinary people, e.g. farmers or teachers, or they may be individuals with some education or specific expertise, but they all have in common a connection with the DVB, either because of their political views or because they listen to or watch the DVB broadcasts and know who to contact if something happens. Getting through by phone to people is not always easy, as few people have phones at home, «M2» and «M8» explains, and organizing phone calls may therefore take a lot of time.

Many of the staff members in Oslo and Thailand have no freedom of travel, as they lack the proper documents. I will get back to this in chapter 5.7, as it is presented by several of the interviewees as more of a personal than professional problem.

Communication across vast distances

With travel restrictions and the task of coordinating operations across huge distances, the DVB staff is obviously dependent on and utilize all available means of modern communication technologies. Challenges also arise with the time difference, according to one journalist («F2»). The offices communicate by using web-based chat services or web phone (free), or through more expensive ordinary phone lines. Khin Maung Win says Norway is one of the world's most expensive countries to make phone calls from – and that Burma is the most expensive country to call in to (Khin Maung Win: 461). This is not completely correct, as calling to Burma is only about half the price of calling to Afghanistan, but still, at some 14-16 NOK a minute³² the total costs are very high. The connections are bad and the phones are cheap, says «F3», indicating the phones available at the DVB are of poor quality. To overcome this she says «DVB is my work, my sacrifice. I use my own phone, to get better connections» («F3»).

For the staff members inside Burma, slow Internet connections means spending hours uploading photos, which again increases the risk of getting caught. But luckily, according to «M8», the fact that arrested journalists are tortured to reveal the password of their email address shows that the government has no spyware installed on public computers. This means that despite taking a long time, uploading videos to the Internet via public computers is only a risk if the police are actually present at the scene.

Biased sources, biased audience

«Wrong information happens when we are far from Burma», «M8» says, and refers to the risk of being fed unreliable information. All the interviewed staff members were aware of the need to double-check all information with other sources: «One thing is villagers telling biased stories (...) [but] many NGOs do not want to talk to DVB», says «M9». This makes it hard for DVB to confirm what locals report, and complicates matters more. Fear of being associated with DVB sometimes prevents NGOs from cooperating, out of fear of jeopardizing their own operations.

The DVB journalists mention a general rule of always having two sources to a story, to avoid being misled («M2»: 213). But even with this precaution wrong

³² See e.g. <http://ventelo.no/privat/telefoni/bredbandstelefoni/bluephoneutenlandspriser.543.html>, or <http://privat.telenor.no/Telefoni/default.aspx?a=gopriserutland> (01.10.09)

information may slip through, as sources might confirm reports of abuse not because they really have knowledge of what happened, but because they all share the same hatred towards the government, and therefore grasps every opportunity to criticize, according to «M9». «For about 75% of the stories we are confident», he says, «but we can't confirm the rest» («M9»). In some rare cases they will actually meet official sources willing to comment on a story, but most of the time the officials will hang up the phone; «they are afraid that the government attacks to them, when they answer» («F2»: 75). The fact that Burma lacks real experts in many fields, at least experts who are willing to appear in the media, contributes to the problem of not having independent sources or sources qualified to comment on certain issues, to convince the critical part of the audience («M2»).

Balancing personal bias with a professional distance

Sometimes dealing with personal feelings and opinions when trying to remain unbiased can cause problems. Most of the DVB staff, both the ones involved in politics and those who say they are not, seem to agree that it is ok to be open about their political views, as long as they are not actively engaged in politics, or are active or leading members of their parties or organizations («M9»). «M10» says «I am politically a biased person, but impartial is my stand» («M10»: 91). Some, however, feel they actually have to conceal their beliefs, if it contradicts the opposition or the democracy movement («M4»: 262). Despite working for independence this means DVB still has some way to go.

According to «M10», his colleagues at DVB struggle mentally with spending every day reporting about the same atrocities. He therefore stresses the need for different angles and approaches to the stories, both for the sake of the audience, but also for the reporters own wellbeing. The increased focus on features, entertainment and culture may be a good change, for the audience as well as the journalists.

The high costs of exile operations

The broadcasting costs are high, but would have been the same even if the main office was moved to Thailand, Aye Chan Naing explains, as most of the relay stations used are situated in other countries, and the costs would therefore not be reduced with a different location (Aye Chan Naing).

Having the main office in Norway is safe, and ensures important financial and political support to the organization as a whole. Yet there are some disadvantages; the distance to Burma, and the expenses. The office in Norway is by far the most expensive to run. The 2009 budget estimates spending about NOK 4,3 million on salaries to the 18 staff members in Oslo, while NOK 2.8 million was enough to pay the on 54 staff members and stringers in Thailand (2009 DVB overall budget). In addition, more than NOK 700.000 is paid in taxes to the Norwegian government. As 66% of the donor money comes from non-Norwegian countries, or organizations from other countries, some donors are critical of the fact that DVB spends large sums of the financial aid received on paying high salaries, expensive services and taxes in Norway (SIDA evaluation 2007, Khin Maung Win: 300).

Foreign country, foreign language

Though the staff members living in Oslo have to adjust to a society even more different from the Burmese than the staff based in Thailand, they all share language difficulties as a major challenge. Even though Burma and Thailand are neighbouring countries, the languages are completely different. English language skills are required by most of the staff members, and one interviewee actually says that language is the most difficult part of being a journalist in exile («F1»: 80).

5.6 The ‘first priority’

When asked «what do the DVB journalists regard as their first priority», most of the staff members say it is «sharing the stories that are not being told». Some also think DVB should promote understanding and diplomacy. There is, however, some inconsistency as to what kind of stories the interviewees prioritise.

To tell the stories of the silenced

The main priority of DVB is to tell the stories that remain untold by the Burmese state media because of the heavy censorship, as a service to the people who hunger for information, according to «M8» («M8»: 42). «M2» shares his view on DVB before joining them: «We believed DVB was the real democratic voice of Burma, [as it] represents democratic movement, outside and exiles, and inside NLD», he says.

«M3» says almost everyone understands the broadcasts in Burmese, because Burmese is the official language in Burma. In addition to the daily news broadcasts in Burmese, DVB produces special programmes for the ethnic minority groups, which might support DVB's status as all encompassing in their audience approach.

The TV broadcasts are mentioned as DVB's greatest achievement («M2»), as it has the potential to reach millions inside, with convincing documentation of what goes on in their own country. Khin Maung Win defines DVB as «exile media with the role of a «national media», because there is no alternative in the country» (Khin Maung Win: 889). This adds to the idea of being a service to every social and ethnic group in Burma.

A bridge between the government and the people

According to «M1», «journalism is the bridge between the government and the exile government». He believes the media should initiate negotiations rather than reinforcing the steel front. All he wants is to «build good understanding in a diplomatic way between the two parties» («M1»: 129). Similarly, «M2» says the DVB should «share our people's opinions (...) and mirror the government so people can see what is going on».

«People in Burma are hungry for information», says «M8», as the state media will only report official visits to monasteries and new roads being constructed, but nothing about «ordinary people». But despite being frustrated with the state media only echoing government propaganda, it has been hard teach people not to be afraid to speak to the independent media («M8»: 45).

What stories should be told?

The DVB staff members have different opinions about what kind of stories they should focus on. «M2» says his priority is to document the lives of ordinary Burmese people, but mostly he has to settle on stories about Burmese people living in exile, since it is hard to gain access to people on the inside. Some of the staff members say the main priority should be covering news regarding human rights violations (e.g. «M9»: 52), others feel the editorial focus should be diverse: «Our mission is (...) to serve the people with news, information and entertainment» (e.g. «M4»). Chief editor Aye Chan Naing says:

We have kind of a full objective: One is to spread (...) unbiased news and information, the second is to spread the idea of democracy and human rights, (...) [and] create a debate, and that is

to get more understanding between different ethnic groups and the different religious groups (Aye Chan Naing: 454-458).

5.7 The hardships of exile

When asked «what parts of living in exile do the DVB journalists find most difficult?», the main problem seems to be insecurities caused by the lack of official documents such as passports, residence- or working permits. A lot of the Thailand staff members are illegal immigrants, and need to keep a low profile because of this. Staying on good terms with local and secret Thai police is necessary. Among the Oslo staff, some journalists have been granted asylum, some are married to Norwegians, and some have become Norwegian citizens. But there are also still people struggling with Norwegian authorities, as they have come to Norway on limited working permits.

The ongoing conflict between DVB and the Norwegian authorities regarding permanent residence developed as DVB being located in Oslo was only meant as a temporary solution, the goal was to return to Burma as the situation changed. The Burmese journalists were never supposed to be living for years in Norway. But the situation in Burma did not change according to plan, and DVB remained in Oslo. The journalists argue they should be allowed to seek asylum, as their working permits are outdated and they are unable to return to Burma after working for DVB. Until recently this was denied.

Stateless and tethered

Travel restrictions due to lack of proper documents is mentioned as a hard part of everyday life for the exiled journalists in Thailand. Some complain they are not even able to travel to the border towns between Thailand and Burma to cover stories, a distance of only a few kilometres («M2»). In addition to being mentally hard, as the exiled journalists feel restrained, «M2» says it also influences their work, as the process of getting permission to travel to the border areas is complicated, and they are not always allowed to go. This means they are denied access not only to the Burmese people inside Burma, but often also to the Burmese refugees living along the Thai-Burma border («M2»).

The staff based in Norway can enjoy a lot of benefits the rest of DVB staff do not: a high level of security, free health care and freedom of expression. Still, there is one major drawback, the immigration status. Some of the staff members have waited for more than a decade to be allowed to seek asylum in Norway. As this bureaucratic issue seems to have been solved, the individuals who have now been allowed to seek asylum have been waiting up to ten months for a reply. This is mentally hard, says Khin Maung Win. At the same time it has knocked the production off-balance, as trained employees have been forced to leave the country, forcing DVB to spend more time and money on hiring new staff. Harald Bøckman, chairman of the DVB board of directors, criticises the Norwegian governments handling of this process:

It is a scandal! (...) The problem does not concern too many people at the moment, about 5-6 persons. But over a long period of time, this has contributed to destabilizing the conditions in Oslo. The Norwegian bureaucrats have been extremely tail-heavy and bureaucratic. (...) We have had meetings with several departments and agencies, the ministry of justice and the police, the Norwegian Directorate of immigration, the ministry of foreign affairs: every department has been referring to the others. It has been a perpetual cycle of which I am deeply and utterly ashamed. (Bøckman 07.09.2009, my translation).

Bøckman, as well as some of the DVB interviewees mention a situation where DVB journalists were unable to travel to the UN human rights convention discussing Burma in Geneva because of the lack of citizenship (Bøckman, «M9»). According to Bøckman, the Oslo office has sometimes been forced to bend the rules, sending the journalists for further training abroad despite the restrictions. Another thing making the struggle for permanent residence permits even more of a paradox is that while DVB have been meeting a wall of bureaucracy, some 1000 Burmese quota refugees have been accepted by Norway, and granted asylum (Bøckman).

The problem of immigration and limited working permits was also reported in the 2007 COWI report of SIDA support to DVB. Another consequence of this situation has been that some DVB reporters left the channel for the competitors (like BBC or VOA), as they were able to offer a proper immigration status for their journalists in the UK or USA. This caused DVB to lose skilled staff members to the competition (Bøckman, «M9»).

The language difficulties

Not knowing how long they are allowed to stay in the country has also prevented DVB staff from investing time in learning Norwegian or becoming a part of the Norwegian society. The staff members are offered language classes for free, but this is often hard to combine with long working hours («F3»). Resettling in Thailand offers fewer obstacles than Norway, but the language barrier is still present («M3», «F1»).

Exile – a state of mind

Many of the Burmese living in Norway used to be part of activist groups in Burma. Some have continued this activism in their new home country, while others have lost the «spark». Bit by bit the activists seem to fill the gap where their political commitment dominated with a commitment to professional journalism, says «M9». Khin Maung Win believes Burmese people coming to Norway initially dreamed of getting a passport and going back to Thailand to continue the struggle for democracy, but as years go by, and the families settle and adapt to a Norwegian way of living, this changes (Khin Maung Win: 876-884).

The interviewees also say they miss people back in Burma, and that this makes life hard, even if they chose to leave themselves (ibid). The static situation of reporting the same depressing stories about the home country is also mentally hard, according to «M10»:

«[DVB is a good place to work] but when you stay with people in the same building for five days a week, it's close on people, you have to give each other space. (...) I am working for a country in trouble, but I can't take all their problems: government, poverty, injustice. (...) It screws you up» («M10»: 78).

At the moment, there are some 2000 Burmese people living in Norway, including the UNHCR quota refugees. As the number increases by more refugees and asylum seekers arriving from various routes, DVB deputy director Khin Maung Win feels he loses overview of the Burmese community in Norway. When discovering that the Norwegian police reported that some countries have been sending agents posing as asylum seekers to Norway, he suspected this could include agents from the Burmese military junta:

Many foreign countries, they are sending agents to Norway, the police said, without naming any country. We believe Burma must be one of those countries. (...) Norwegian government is receiving what they call quota refugees from the UNHCR. (...) those refugees coming from refugee camps are real refugees, but the agents, they always find shortcuts (Khin Maung Win: 408-451).

5.8 Motivation

During the interviews I asked «what motivates the journalists». Many of the motivational factors mentioned related to the feeling of making a difference to the Burmese people, in terms of covering the silenced stories of the ones suffering. When asked specifically what why the staff members continue to work for DVB the various answers may be grouped into five major motivational factors; fighting the government's abuse, informing the world about what is going on in Burma, the success of DVB during the last 17 years, political motivation and their effort as an investment in a better future for Burma.

The consequences of DVB reports

In order to explain how a story needs to be told differently to the Burmese and to the international audience, «M10» tells a story of a fire at a market in December of 2008: 2000 shops burned to the ground in the fire. To the Burmese audience, DVB serves the cold facts, but to the international community, they need to add some explaining:

People don't know that fire fighters are not like Norwegian fire fighters. (...) In Burma you have to ring them up, say I give you this money, they come quicker. Otherwise they come to the place and say 'oh, sorry, we forgot the water'. It happens all the time («M10»: 158-173).

By reporting stories like this, DVB are able to tell the international community about the hardship of the people of Burma, and at the same time, the stories of corruption at the lower levels sometimes result in the government taking action («M10»). Despite being criticized and opposed by the Burmese government, DVB reports have actually directly influenced Burmese politics by necessitating actions against documented incidents of corruption («M10», COWI: 2007 evaluation of SIDA support to DVB)

Motivated by success

After being in a key position during the Saffron uprising of 2007, both in terms of informing the Burmese public and the international community, DVB gained publicity and was able to expand. «That was our biggest success» Aye Chan Naing says. Many of other staff members also mention this as a motivating accomplishment.

The fact that DVB until recently was the only independent alternative Burmese-language TV-station seems to attract young Burmese to work for the channel, according to «M3», «M2» and Aye Chan Naing. Many of the younger staff members were fans of DVB long before they came to work there (e.g. «F1», «F2»). Several of the interviewees

mention the elevated status of DVB inside Burma as a major motivation. When asked where they think DVB will be in the future, many interviewees have a dream of DVB becoming a public service broadcaster inside Burma.

Political motivation

«F3» says she had no dream of becoming a journalist, but as she came to Norway she missed a Burmese democratic movement, except for the NBC. She wanted to support her people and country, this is why she joined DVB. «F1» explains that back in Burma, many of her family members got fired from their jobs in the media business because her aunt and uncle were NLD members. The fact that her politically active family respects DVB makes her proud to be working there («F1»: 157).

«M9» says he was very inspired when U Win Tin, a prisoner of conscience for 19 years, was released in late 2008 and expressed great excitement over the progress and expansion of DVB («M9»: 116-120).

An investment in the future

When asked about his reasons for working with DVB, «M3» says DVB «is the most uprising exile media against the government, and I want to be a part of that» («M3»: 54). Several of the DVB staff members stress the value of their work as an «investment in the future». Khin Maung Win says «sooner or later we have to move back to Burma, and investment in the country is always important, so more people in the country can be employed, so they are familiar with our operation» (Khin Maung Win: 368). «We want to see an open society in Burma (...) I don't know when Burma will achieve democracy, but I feel like I invest in it! (...)» («M9»: 196-197). Despite DVB becoming more professional, «M9» feels politics is a part of him, and an important reason for why he holds this job, and says the struggle for democracy is «in our blood, in our mind» («M9»).

5.9 Response from other exile/independent media

The two representatives from other Burmese exile/independent media organizations that I interviewed to find out «how other Burmese exile media regard the DVB» criticized DVB for not complying with the ideals they advocate. Still, they also respected the

impact of DVB, and despite being critical about the colleagues both provided some advice for future improvements.

Criticism

Excessive bias is a major part of the criticism from the other media groups interviewed. The representative from Internews says «DVB is obviously still biased, some people say» (Internews: 137). He criticises DVB for choosing one-side sources from the opposition movement inside. Even though DVB argues the coverage is balanced because an attempt to contact the government to get a response is always made, the Internews representative is not impressed, and claims this is irrelevant, if the main sources are always heavily biased (ibid: 283-88).

The Mizzima representative also comments on the alleged bias, and says «DVB, to be frank, is like an opposition media» (Mizzima). The radio broadcasts, he says, are not much compared to the BBC, RFA and especially the VOA, which he says has improved a lot in recent years (Mizzima: 125). «Some people in Burma will say they like DVB because it is very strong against the regime» he says.

This is echoed by the Internews representative. He claims there is a problem in what he interprets as a lack of editorial control, as DVB journalists will sometimes ask leading questions during interviews (Internews: 256-261). The 2007 COWI evaluation also mentions lack of editorial control, as DVB have been without an editor in charge of the ethnic programmes for a long time.

Regarding the separation from NCGUB in 2002, the Mizzima representative feels there has been little change. He agrees with the separation from the NCGUB, but adds: «one question you may raise is; if everything is going in this direction, what for? There are other free media already existing» (Mizzima: 157-172). By ‘other free media’, the Mizzima representative refers to e.g. Irrawaddy, the VOA, RFA and BBC, and reveals that he feels DVB held a more important position as a political radio. Some of the interviewees (e.g. some of the DVB staff members and donors) argue a «hierarchy of independence», with DVB being more independent than e.g. VOA, because DVB is owned and run by Burmese people, while VOA in the end tends to American interests. DVB is consequently not superfluous among the other opposition / independent / exile media. But to the Mizzima representative, the fact that DVB is ‘owned by the Burmese’

is not enough to justify their importance as independent. He has little confidence in DVB ever becoming a public service broadcaster, as he does not believe the Burmese people would accept it (Ibid: 286-91).

The DVB strengths

The Internews representative mentions the ethnic services of DVB as of great importance, but says the signals are weak, and that the RFA actually have a similar service, possibly with better signals (ibid: 151-160). He does not agree with the Mizzima representative in terms of DVB losing its relevance after becoming independent, and says DVB has some major qualities in terms of being « the biggest among the Burmese exile, [that are] run by the Burmese».

A major strength mentioned by the Mizzima representative is the satellite TV, which he considers to have a greater impact on the Burmese public than the radio broadcasts alone, with its live images as proof of what is happening (Mizzima: 101-112).

5.10 Donor evaluations

The two financial supporters asked «how do the donors evaluate the project of funding the DVB» were the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and US-based National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

The donors' method of evaluation

SIDA receives annual and quarterly reports from DVB as part of the funding criteria, and has previously hired external evaluators to evaluate DVB's operations. From the last report from 2007, their assessment is that «the DVB is on track in relation to the objectives mentioned in our agreement» (SIDA: 28).

The NED evaluates the DVB project only through quarterly and annual reports received from DVB, as well as through an annual self-evaluation done by DVB. The NED representative says DVB prove that they are fulfilling their obligations through the daily production of radio and TV programmes, and also highlights the effort DVB has put in continuous training of the staff to be more professional (NED: 50-57).

The donors recommendations

The NED representative says «The DVB is one of the most professional Burmese-run media organizations in the world» (Ibid: 65). He does not think rapid expansion has jeopardized DVB's standards because editorial decisions are still made by the most experienced staff members (ibid: 74-78).

The SIDA representative is a bit more critical, and says though the management of DVB acknowledges and aspires to the values of professional journalism, it is a «continuous process of capacity development to make sure that the entire operation and its reporting is streamlined within these values» (SIDA: 47). More training and experience is needed, the SIDA representative says, especially for the stringers inside Burma.

SIDA praises the high level of political commitment from Norway as the host country, but mentions high costs and the problem of Norway only funding on an annual basis, as the DVB needs longer-term commitments (ibid: 67). The NED representative mentions security as a major plus, but the high costs of living as a negative feature of Norway as host country for the main office of DVB.

Though the donors say they are not influencing the DVB in any way other than supporting the operations financially, the editors of DVB say SIDA used to be quite vocal in their criticism, e.g. regarding the NCGUB prime minister being chairman of /member of the BOC (Aye Chan Naing: 445). The donor's pushing for professionalism and independence has resulted in some drastic improvements of the whole structure of DVB. Aye Chan Naing gives an example: after DVB legally became a foundation, a result of recommendations from the donors, the exile prime minister is still on the board of directors, but by law in his individual capacity (Aye Chan Naing: 445-450). Thus the criticism from the donors has contributed to the professionalization of DVB.

6.0 Discussion

In the previous chapter I processed the qualitative interviews to extract only the information relevant to answering the main research question: «*What measures are taken by the exile media organization «The Democratic Voice of Burma» in order to obtain and retain professional integrity, and why?»*. I analysed the data material according to the ten more tangible sub-questions presented in chapter 1, the result being a «distilled» version of my empirical data relevant to these ten questions. Altogether this provides an in-depth account of how DVB operates in order to be and to be perceived as a professional media organization.

As previously mentioned, the theoretical approach of this thesis was developed as a result of the information received through the qualitative interviews. While conducting the interviews I discovered that many of the ideals presented were also what caused some of the conflicts, which was something I wished to investigate further.

In the following chapters I will take a closer look at the material presented in chapter 5.1-5.10. In some areas I will identify links to normative journalism ideals and challenges arising from working by these ideals in a complex and demanding context. As normative media theory meets the reality of the exile context, DVB staff members are sometimes forced to disregard ideals of the media philosophy in the country in which they operate and take matters in their own hands, doing it «the Burmese way».

In chapter 6.1 I will look at the data from chapter 5.1, 5.2, 5.6 and 5.8, concentrating on the DVB operations, the ideals DVB journalists work by, their priorities and their motivations. In chapter 6.2 I take a closer look at the challenges of operating in exile, using data from chapter 5.5 and 5.7. I will also present a previous study of Burmese ethnic- and exile media groups done by Lisa Brooten, which reveals similar problems among other media groups operating in the same area, and under the same conditions.

In chapter 6.3 the data from chapter 5.3 is examined in order to take a closer look at the staff members' level of education and their qualifications. According to the interviewees, Burma lacks a proper journalism education (though Khin Maung Win mentions a school having reopened a few years ago, I have not been able to verify this statement). In this chapter I will discuss why, after decades of censorship and control,

young people in Burma are still interested in working with media? How come some choose to leave Burma and live in exile to join DVB?

This leads me to the focus of chapter 6.4, as I discuss the measures taken by DVB to improve their operations and raise the level of education among the staff members, through various training programmes.

6.1 The DVB operations

From the empirical data material for this thesis, I discovered that when asked about «responsible journalism», DVB staff members would often refer to some main areas of responsibility: authenticity, independence, and to be unbiased and balanced. When asked whether they worked by any code of conduct, most interviewees referred to the DVB mission statement. They seemed to share an overall common perception of their responsibility: to be *trustworthy*.

As referred in chapter 4, Brian McNair (1998) defines news as «a truthful statement about, or record of something which is yet unknown». According to McNair, objectivity means separating facts from opinions, balancing the versions of a debate and validating every statement. These ideals are also present in the DVB mission statement, where being accurate, unbiased and independent are stated as fundamental responsibilities. These notions seem to be well set the minds of the journalists, but when digging a bit deeper, some conflicts can be revealed.

As shown in chapter 5.9 the Mizzima representative, and even some of the DVB journalists themselves, mention bias as a major problem. Critics claim that bias occurs due to lack of editorial control. Even the interviewed Burmese having no formal connection to DVB said false information had been broadcasted on several occasions. This shows that neither are the ideals fully implemented, nor the routines of verification infallible. «M9» said he is «only confident about the accuracy of the story in 75% of the cases, but unable to verify the rest» («M9»). And while the interviewed staff members are aware of their responsibility, their answers do not always corroborate this when moving beyond general terms. While most of the staff members said DVB should be independent, several said they had colleagues who did not appreciate the independence.

A distinct frame needed

Despite having established a mission statement based on fundamental ideals that can be traced back to normative media theory, as discussed in chapter 4, there are other factors influencing DVB's output. Most interviewees were aware of the burden of bias, and the mission statement explicitly warns against biased news. But none of the interviewed journalists make the connection between bias and framing, defined by Todd Gitlin as «principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters» (Gitlin 1979: 6). The exile situation presupposes a certain framing, but despite being generally aware of the need for independence and to fight bias, none of the journalists seemed to consider the one-sided focus of the DVB news reports as problematic or being an obstacle to DVB being regarded as professional. Only «M10» mentions a need to «angle» stories differently, but this is said in relation to easing the burden of reporting the same discouraging news year after year, and does not problematize the one-sided oppositional nature of DVB's reporting.

After DVB separated from the NCGUB and became independent, one may claim the news frame changed, from being a distinct «political opposition frame» to an «independent opposition news frame». Today, news about human rights violations and the struggle for democracy is mentioned as a priority, both by the interviewees and in the mission statement. This could represent a new kind of framing for DVB, a more controlled approach to criticizing the wrongdoings of the current regime rather than the regime as-is. It is interesting to note that while framing is considered inevitable in journalism theory, and the sober, matter-of-fact way of reporting has been developed to reduce personal colouring and bias, framing seems both welcomed and needed in the case of DVB. Burma does not share the well-established Western tradition of idealizing objectivity, and many seem to share the impression that bias does not jeopardize people's trust in news media, but lack of bias could. It seems a distinct framing is needed to gain the peoples trust, not the other way around. This causes a need to communicate the message that DVB is still a part of the democracy movement and thus of the opposition, despite the achieved independence from the NCGUB.

A professional appearance

In chapter 5.2 I investigated the personal opinions of the DVB journalists on what is considered *the most important parts* of their overall responsibility, to try to find out if, or how, the journalists would link «responsibility» with «professionalism». Some mentioned the need to be «ethically responsible» as an example of responsibility related to professionalism, which was an anticipated response. Many also mentioned «responsibility to educate the people», which would be unexpected from other independent news media, but can be traced back to the DVB mission statement point of «imparting ideals of democracy and human rights». I did not, however, expect the response to include a responsibility to produce «technically professional programmes». It seemed several interviewees linked «professionalism» to the more visible technical parts of the operations, the appearance of on-air content and people working at DVB, rather than the substance of the reports and ethical codes of conduct.

Different priorities

While conducting the interviews I experienced the DVB staff as somewhat disunited. Despite most of the interviewees answering my questions in relative accordance to the mission statement, and mostly seemed to agree with it, not simply repeating what they were supposed to say, several mentioned colleagues who were still too politically motivated, too biased. I asked the staff members about the main priority of DVB, and the responses varied. In chapter 5.8, some interviewees said the main priority for DVB was being «a voice for the voiceless», by telling the stories of those silenced. «M1», on the other hand, said DVB should be an intermediate between the people and the power.

This illustrates a division among the journalists, between those motivated by the power of the media to expose, and thus potentially change the regime, and those concerned with the status and concerns of the general Burmese population under the current regime, not necessarily with direct confrontation with the regime in mind. Perhaps the two stances are not so different after all, as the latter is also a matter of political motivation, free speech and the principle of a well functioning public sphere being fundamental democratic ideals. But it is important to notice the major difference between «being an intermediate between ethnic and religious groups» and «being an intermediate between the people and the power». The ethnic and religious groups are

mostly part of the same opposition movement, while «being a bridge between the government and people» could actually represent a more drastic «diplomatic» approach.

«Balance» is presented as another ideal, and I have previously presented the procedure of always striving to give the government a chance to comment on allegations as a measure to attempt to balance what otherwise would be a one-sided continuous attack. Yet while some explained the procedure of collecting official statements and telling the «government's side of the story» as important to achieve this kind of overall balance, others would triumphantly point out that the government never answers anyway, which may add to the criticism of bias instead.

It seems the necessity of being independent, unbiased and objective has been discussed within DVB, but not all of the journalists understand why – or even find this important. The mission statement states DVB should promote understanding and cooperation among the different ethnic and religious groups, which could arguably be related to the concept of «programming for peace», as presented in chapter 4.5. Still the mission statement says nothing about meeting the government in any way. Despite many interviewees stressing independence as an ideal, «M1» is the only one stretching the role of DVB to the ideal of being a «bridge» between the government and the people.

The different opinions' regarding what is – and should be – the main priority of DVB could perhaps also represent the difference between the older and the younger generation of politically motivated Burmese. DVB has already moved from being a part of the political opposition, directly targeting the current government through critical articles and even «counter propaganda», to a more balanced approach of claiming independence, criticising the abuse of fundamental rights. This, I will argue, brings the DVB news reports further away from activism and bias. It is positive in terms of being able to access and influence an international news agenda. The conflicting views could indicate a more advanced view on independence and objectivity. One reason for this might be the result of increased focus on journalism training within DVB.

6.2 The challenges of exile

In chapter 5.5 and 5.7 I present the challenges of exile and exile journalism, as expressed by the DVB journalists. The data consists of personal views, like the rest of the empirical

material, but it is interesting to see several coherent answers. There seems to be consensus on some problems related to the journalism profession in exile; distance, travel restrictions, language and dealing with bias. In addition to these come the more personal problems, as being exiled has been mentally hard on several staff members, and even worsened by having to spend every day swamped in misery and human rights violations. Some of the interviewees feel they no longer have a home country. Despite being unable to return to their home country after working for DVB, several journalists at the Oslo office have had to struggle for many years to be allowed to seek asylum. Both staff members in Oslo and in Thailand are frustrated by the travel restrictions, and learning new language is mentioned as difficult and tedious. Yet the most serious challenge of all is the safety risks involved for the journalists operating under cover in Burma and the border areas. The constant threat of being arrested prevents these journalists from following some of the journalism ideals as this could in fact increase chances of being arrested.

Distance

Distance is a complicating factor, which can be assumed to be relevant to all exile media organizations, as they are unable to operate in the country from and to which they report. Yet unlike other Burmese exile media like e.g. Mizzima and Irrawaddy, which both operate from countries neighbouring Burma, DVB is in the extraordinary situation of having the main office located some 8000 kilometres away from Burma and the other offices. As shown in chapter 5.5, several interviewees speak of problems related to distance. Being dependent on phone calls to get information accounts for big parts of the operations budget. But more critical is the fact that verifying stories by phone can be almost impossible.

Safety risks

The stringers operating inside Burma take the highest risks, according to chief editor Aye Chan Naing and deputy chief editor Khin Maung Win. Though being paid well, and having some benefits, as mentioned in chapter 2.3, these people are putting themselves in the line of fire, so to speak (Khin Maung Win: 589). The Japanese reporter who was shot during the 2007 Saffron revolution could just as easily have been a DVB reporter.

The journalists on the ground inside Burma are not only risking their own lives and future working illegally as journalists – they may also risk harming their colleagues. As mentioned, several people with relations to DVB were arrested during the 2007 uprising. Ten of these remain imprisoned serving sentences from 2 to 65 years for their involvement with the opposition movement and DVB (Aye Chan Naing: 773-792, Khin Maung Win: 592-595). As a safety precaution video footage is captured using hidden cameras («M2»: 255, Østergaard: *Burma VJ* (2007)). «M2» feels this conflicts journalism ethics, as people are not aware of being filmed. But as equipment might get confiscated and the journalists run a risk of getting caught, the stringers seem to have no alternative. Certain ideals have to give way to safety precautions.

Political bias

In chapter 5.7 I presented data regarding the interviewees personal problems related to exile. Being unable to travel («M2»), missing people back home («M3»), having to learn foreign languages («F1») and being in a situation of having to report the same depressing stories about their home country year after year («M10»), were the major issues mentioned. In addition to this comes the lack of a proper immigration status (Khin Maung Win), which triggers uncertainty and insecurity. Though these problems are personal, they are likely to influence the journalists lives and world view, thus potentially challenging their ability to remain unbiased. The heavy load of emotional baggage could complicate exile journalism. As shown in chapter 5.9, the Internews representative claims DVB reporters sometimes ask leading questions. Despite separating from the exile government, some DVB journalists are still biased, according to the Internews representative (Internews: 137, 265-261, 283-288).

Living in exile is hard on the staff members, and this effects DVB as a whole. I have mentioned the call for editorial control, which seems soundly based. I have also mentioned that DVB might meet even higher expectations than other media, in terms of dealing with bias, because of the history of the channel and the people involved. But can an exile media organization be expected to adhere to the same standards in objectivity as other mainstream media?

Objectivity in exile

In a study published in the *Journal of Communication Inquiry* Volume 30 2006, Lisa Brooten argues one problematic assumption, regarding the role of the media in situations of political violence, is journalists being «outsiders» to the conflict. Aid agencies are increasing their funding for media development and journalism in conflict areas, Brooten states, allowing more journalists to operate in conflict areas. Yet the fact that many journalists covering political violence are actually «insiders», touched by and involved in the conflicts, is not included in the debate on whether the journalist should be «objective» or a «facilitator of resolution» (Brooten 2006: 354). The DVB journalists, as well as the other Burmese ethnic and exile media included in Brooten's study, are directly involved in the conflict: the journalists are working in the middle of it, and it concerns their home country.

The tendency of Burmese opposition and ethnic media to claim independence started around year 2000 (Brooten 2006). Brooten claims this was equally motivated by donor demands, journalism training and «a genuine desire or ability to maintain independence from power-holders» expressed by the journalists themselves (Brooten 2006: 362). *The Irrawaddy* experienced the same discontent and scepticism as DVB as they proclaimed themselves 'independent' (ibid). Yet both *Irrawaddy* and DVB actually had the opportunity to facilitate the transition to independence, as both were partly or entirely based outside of Burma. Other opposition media based inside, or in the border areas, still depend on the goodwill of the local ethnic powers controlling various areas to have access to people, being able to travel, and to distribute the products. Despite being advised to become independent, these media groups remain linked to local political, ethnic or religious groups, as independence tends to be interpreted as undermining the traditional unity of the Burmese opposition, thus complicating the relationship with local powers. Nonetheless, views on *unity* seem to gradually change, and dissenting voices are increasingly accepted (ibid: 362-366).

Brooten notes that many journalists in the ethnic and opposition media link professionalism with politics. They believe increased transparency will reduce political violence. To give people the power to criticize leaders will reduce fear, one informer told her (ibid: 368). I made a similar observation in my study, as «M8» explained the ongoing

process of teaching people not to be afraid of speaking to the media («M8»: 45). According to DVB's 2007 annual report to SIDA, announcing a 100% increase in people willing to speak to the media from the previous year, the process of enlightenment is effective. The growth of DVB and other exile / opposition media may have been influential as well.

Another similarity between Brootens study and mine is the observation that both the Burmese people and the journalists find an extensive focus on human rights abuse depressing. Brooten says some media groups have begun changing their angle and focus, and report positive events as well, e.g. festivals and sports events (Brooten 2006: 369-370). This was noted by «M10» in this study as well, and with the increased hours of air time, DVB is in fact including more alternative programmes like entertainment and features in the hours of broadcasting, covering e.g. festivities like the Spirit festival («M10»).

The fact that media groups like DVB are directly involved in the conflict on which they are reporting, and that the normative ideals of independence are fundamentally different within a Western media system, causes some essential principles and ideals of free media to collide with the context to which it is introduced. Even though DVB is not as dependent on local powers as other ethnic or opposition media groups, as their offices are outside Burma and their TV and radio signals can be distributed freely, they too need to stay on terms with the groups united in the opposition movement, as these constitute an important part of the audience, sources and supporters.

As demonstrated, the ideals of independence may become problematic in cases like Burma. Those donors dedicated to media development, such as SIDA, seem to be a great influence in the process of professionalising DVB. Still, the need for these improvements in order to be taken seriously outside Burma has to be balanced with the need to stay on terms with local ethnic groups holding the power in certain areas within the country, or to stay on terms with the opposition or democracy movement.

6.3 The exiled journalists

In chapter 5.3 I presented the interviewees' level of education and relevant experience prior to working with DVB, and looked at whether the journalists actually feel qualified

doing their job. The interviewees explained that most of the staff working with DVB have graduated from high school, but few had studied journalism. Those who had studied relevant subjects at universities did so outside Burma, as the quality of the education system inside has declined substantially and many universities have been shut down for years. A journalism education has been more or less absent in Burma for decades.

Due to the lack of journalism education and the poor education system in Burma I was curious to find out where DVB could find competent recruits when expanding operations and replacing staff members leaving the organization. According to Aye Chan Naing, DVB previously hired journalists from politically active groups within the opposition movement, and trained them to work as journalists. However, with the change towards independence from the NCGUB, political involvement was no longer a prerequisite, and anyone with relevant professional qualifications could apply for jobs with DVB. Still Khin Maung Win says the most important thing to look for when hiring new people is their commitment, which shows that the abandoned tradition of recruiting from the opposition movement is still somewhat in effect. Despite being independent, it seems many of those seeking towards DVB are politically active, and often affiliated with the opposition / democracy movement.

Some of the interviewed people claimed young, inspired journalists are now applying for jobs with DVB, people who do not share the same history and political commitment as the «founding generation». In media landscape marked by censorship, control and propaganda, with no journalism education to offer the younger generation, is the lack of press freedom and lack of trusted media what motivates young people to join independent media like DVB?

«A hunger for information»

In the article «Rumor, Trust and Civil Society: Collective Memory and Cultures of Judgement» Gary Alan Fine (2007) claims rumours in authoritarian states are caused by incomplete or inaccurate information from the authoritarian sources, and argues «for a society to survive and flourish, significant trust must knit a population together» (Fine 2007: 7).

It seems, in the case of Burma, the information from the authoritarian sources is neither complete nor accurate. On several occasions throughout working on this thesis I

have noted how the censorship and control of Burmese state and private media prohibits the spreading of any critical information. Instead, as «M8» points out in chapter 5.6, the media subject to control will only publish stories of e.g. official visits to monasteries and the construction of new roads, or focus on sports and entertainment rather than news and politics. DVB, along with other exile or independent media organizations, are accused of broadcasting «fabricated lies» when reporting abuse and instances of misrule. Because of the lack of trust in official sources in authoritarian states, relevant information must be accessed in other ways. Rumours may to some extent fulfil the need for information: «when information is suppressed, knowledge claims become a form of resistance» (Fine 2007: 12). Establishing trust and credibility through for example professionalism thus becomes DVB's claim to knowledge and through that opposition.

Several interviewees in this thesis mentioned the difficulties in verifying information. In some cases DVB journalists say wrong information has been difficult to dismiss, as sources would verify stories without having any first hand information. The reason could be the sources sharing the same hatred towards the government, as «M9» suggests in chapter 5.5, but perhaps it is not even that intentional. Rumours of government abuse can be easy to accept as truth if there is lack of information and a history of similar incidents.

In chapter 5.6 «M8» explained the people of Burma are «hungry for information» because of the state censorship. It seems interest in information grows with the lack of it. This could be one reason why young people in Burma are interested in journalism and free media like DVB, as argued by Aye Chan Naing. Young recruits have explained their experience of frustration because they are censored, and as a result seeking towards media like DVB. This way they are able to broadcast their stories freely back to Burma (Aye Chan Naing 23.09.2008). Both «F1» and «F2» said they were fans of DVB long before becoming journalists themselves.

The range of exile media

Aye Chan Naing's explanation above points to another argument: As DVB and other exile, independent and free Burmese media have been able to expand and improve, and as new technology increases the scope of their reach, more people inside Burma are exposed to uncensored news and information. This could enhance the contrast between the filtered

and censored state news sent from within, and the (rather) free flow of information broadcast from outside Burma. As more media groups are escaping the censorship by settling outside, yet still reaching people inside with radio and TV transmissions, it should consequently become harder for the authoritarian government to dismiss all of this as «lies». I thus argue that DVB, among other media organizations, have become powerful challengers to the authoritarian government's restrained media system in Burma. DVB is empowered by the donors through their financial support, the Norwegian government through its political support and being host country, and new information and communication technologies, making it easier to reach people inside «closed countries». The improvements and expansions of the organization have been effective – and DVB has become acknowledged inside Burma («F1», «F2», «M9»). This could be another reason why young people growing up under totalitarian rule and heavy censorship are still interested in freedom of expression and free media: It is no longer possible to keep a country totally closed. With new media technology the youth of Burma are exposed to signals from the outside, and thus to the deficiencies of their own media system.

6.4 Improving the operations

During its 17 years of existence, DVB has developed from being a small amateur project, started by three exiled Burmese people working in Oslo for the Burmese exile government – to becoming a multimillion TV and radio station with some 120 employees in four countries, with 12 donors from nine different countries and websites in English and Burmese languages. The donors' increased funding is a consequence of the success of DVB, and has facilitated this major expansion.

The challenges of the expansion

It is interesting to note that while the donors view the massive expansions only as improvements, Khin Maung Win also mentions the problems, and says DVB is «expanding too fast»:

«[We have got] about one hundred more people. And the budget: two more millions dollars increase. So it means we are expanding too fast. (...) In Burma you cannot easily find high quality professional journalists. It means we are recruiting new you know, junior people, with, strong commitment, so it means we still need basic journalism training for new recruits (...) but at the same time, in parallel, we need advanced training for the senior ones» (Khin Maung Win 24.02.09: 264-276).

Though Khin Maung Win and the management seem pleased with the expansions, they are also aware of the challenges presented by the rapid ongoing changes that are happening.

Out of the two donors interviewed, SIDA seemed more concerned with evaluating the effect of their funding by being actively involved in and monitoring the progress and achievements of DVB by arranging independent evaluations. According to Aye Chan Naing, the donors have influenced the process of independence:

«some of the donors pushing us as well, (...) to be more independent from the opposition. (...) SIDA for example have been quite vocal in criticizing us for being... having our exile prime minister in the Board of directors» (Aye Chan Naing 23.09.2008: 444-447)

Khin Maung Win agrees, but adds the journalists themselves are also pushing:

«donors also put the pressure on us. And the journalists themselves. When we devoted, you know, our time, our energy in this professional work, we want to be seen as real professional journalists. (...) they will say no, we do not influence DVB, but in a way they influence. (...) they want to see the result of their money, so they are making some impression» (Khin Maung Win 24.02.09: 1025-1037).

In terms of the structure of DVB as an organization, Harald Bøckman also says the donors have been pushing for professionalization of the management and board of directors – resulting in the removal of the NCGUB prime minister as the chairman of the board, and the ongoing process of inviting persons who are more competent in media management as new board members (Bøckman 07.09.2009)

Improving the operations

The number of employees has grown rapidly during the last couple of years, yet neither of the interviewed donors fears this jeopardizes the standard of the news or the level of professionalism. In fact, the representative from SIDA says «we assess DVB to be in full control of its expansion. They could have grown much faster if the board and management had not applied a somewhat cautious approach» (SIDA: 55-57).

Deputy chief editor Khin Maung Win says «we spend quite a lot of money, approximately I might say half million to one million kroner a year for this training capacity building. (...) we train at least 30-40 people every year» (Khin Maung Win 24.02.09: 36-38). It is an ongoing process to get all the staff members to the same level of professionalism, he says, and the staff has to be trained in a variety of skills: «we have to

give them every essential aspect of, you know, ethical code of conducts, basic journalism, basic technical. (...) We are a multimedia institution, so the technical is also an important part» (ibid: 58-60).

The training is done both at the offices and at various training institutions. Khin Maung Win says they have been using the Thompson Foundation in UK for quite some time, as they offered a three month advanced journalism training course. After 2004 however, training has mostly been done with hired trainers, in order to get the arrangements designed especially for their needs. The trainers are mainly staff from Swedish Radio involved in media development, and an experienced journalist based in Bangkok. Harald Bøckman misses the same interest in media development from Norwegian institutions, and would ideally have had faculty from the Oslo University College contributing with their competence as well (Bøckman: 07.09.09).

What remains

Despite the focus on capacity building within DVB, some interviewees say they need more training to become professional. «M4» is aware of his lack of skills in some areas and says there is a general need for advanced journalism training. The fact that both audience and colleagues in the media industry noted a lack of editorial control, indicates that DVB still has a way to go before the organization as a whole can be considered a professional media organization.

Several interviewees mention the goal of transitioning to a public service broadcaster in a future democratic Burma. DVB has progressed by working to improve every aspect of its operations, and the organization has grown and become a lot more professional, which has allowed it to become influential outside Burma as well as inside. The critics, however, says that with the complicated media history of Burma it is impossible to get the people to support a public service broadcaster, even if democracy is achieved. It is an interesting problem. After half a century of media being subject to state control and censorship, is it possible for the people to ever fully trust state-sanctioned media?

The future of the DVB is still unwritten, yet one thing is for certain: The exiled amateur radio station founded in 1992, to help the Burmese democracy struggle, has

become, and will continue to be, a powerful voice for the millions of people who remain oppressed by the Burmese military government. DVB has proved its strength on several occasions, and has become a visible and powerful challenge to Burma's authoritarian rule.

7.0 Conclusion

In this thesis I have conducted a case study of one contemporary exile media organization – the Democratic Voice of Burma. The main research question was: «*What measures are taken by the exile media organization «The Democratic Voice of Burma» in order to obtain and retain professional integrity, and why?»*. This question has been approached through qualitative interviews and a document analysis structured by ten more specific research questions related to *professional journalism, the level of education / experience among DVB journalists, the exile situation and the other Burmese exile/independent media organizations view on the channel, as well as the donor's evaluation*. In chapter 6 the findings are discussed within a framework of media theory regarding the norms and ideals of the journalism profession.

By interviewing DVB staff members, audience, donors and colleagues from the exiled Burmese media landscape, I have documented the views of both representatives working within, involved with, and affected by the operations of DVB. I have tried to uncover the journalists' view on the various ideals of professionalism, to see whether their understanding of these ideals are shaped by their history and the context in which they operate, and to identify ideals of professionalism that are hard, or even impossible to implement when operating in exile.

In chapter 4.3 I presented the claim that normative media theory lacks valuable complexity needed to fully explain the relationship between media and power. Descriptive studies, on the other hand, may unveil the power of exile media, which may previously have been underrated. Insight regarding the important role of exile media in Burmese politics that could, beyond the findings of this case, provide a valuable contribution to a normative understanding of media and power. Perhaps including the complexity revealed and investigated in descriptive studies could contribute to developing the norms of professional journalism to become more in accordance with reality? By demonstrating the powers of the exile media, this case study of the Democratic Voice of Burma calls attention to exile media as an important factor influencing the people of power in Burma.

In chapter 5 I presented a summary of the findings of this inquiry, the measures implemented by DVB in order to create and maintain professionalism. This chapter thus

answers the first part of the main research question. The most important findings were the following rules and ideals: to always have multiple sources to every story, to follow the code of ethics and to be honest about their mission to the people they encounter, to be independent from political powers, to fight personal bias and bias in general, to balance their criticism and to avoid plagiarism. In addition to this, the management and staff report a continuous process of training staff members to increase the overall level of professionalism within the organization.

In chapter 6 these measures were investigated further, by asking *why* they were implemented. The theoretical approach lead to one explanation: DVB works by a set of a well-established and widely acknowledged journalism ideals, based on ideals that can be traced to the social responsibility and democratic-participant philosophies, in order to be recognized by, and among, international news media. Their independence from the exile government is considered a major step towards becoming a professional news media organization, and reducing bias seems to be the next step. Increased focus on following ideals of professional journalism has been a successful move for DVB. DVB has been able to spread important news worldwide and thus been established as serious and trustworthy. Financial donors have seen how this exile media organization is actually making a difference in Burma and in placing Burma on the agenda worldwide. Donations have increased 403% from 2000 to 2008 (Khin Maung Win). But the many ideals of professionalism have also brought about additional challenges for DVB, as the ideals and norms from other media philosophies are sometimes hard to comply with in the context in which DVB operates.

The goals of DVB are to provide independent news to Burmese people living inside Burma, and to advocate democratic change – both to people inside and in exile, and to the international community. Freedom of the press is a fundamental ideal of democracy – which both the founding powers of DVB and an entire Burmese democracy movement are fighting to institute in Burma. However, despite having struggled for democracy for half a century, Burma remains under totalitarian rule.

In 2007 DVB demonstrated strength and power by supplying information and documentation of the events later referred to as «the saffron revolution» to some of the

worlds leading international news providers, consequently putting Burma on the agenda world wide, while also establishing the organization as reliable and professional. If DVB was still linked to the exile government of Burma, as it originally was, their credibility could have been undermined. The news reports could easily have been dismissed as «activism» rather than journalism, and it is unlikely that an «activist media» group would be able to reach a global audience like DVB did in 2007, as heavy bias could undermine the message and trustworthiness of such media. If the goal is to reach out into an international «news sphere», it is important for DVB to be considered a professional news provider. In this study I found DVB staff members experiencing difficulties in applying the norms and ideals of professional journalism to their context and situation. If these problems become too dominant, both the reputation and subsequently the outreach of DVB might become threatened.

The fact that DVB managed to globally spread images and information from the «saffron revolution» demonstrates the ways in which exile media like DVB are able to threaten authoritarian states by challenging strict censorship and control. In broadcasting the images of thousands of people peacefully marching for political change, and the following arrests, DVB and other independent Burmese media groups provided evidence of human rights violations that could not be overlooked or dismissed by other nations. While illustrating the power and importance of exile media to the people of Burma, the 2007 uprising also demonstrated the potential for exile media like DVB to influence an international agenda in order to raise awareness of what is happening in closed countries like Burma.

By being able to reach people inside Burma with unfiltered news, and simultaneously reaching out to international news media with information about the situation in Burma, it is evident, both from my findings and the literature consulted, that DVB challenges the Burmese military government. Being in this position, and in order to be acknowledged internationally, DVB has to follow the normative ideals of journalistic professionalism. Yet as shown, some ideal procedures are unfavourable to the situation and context in which DVB operates. Journalism theory and journalism practice will always differ. This case study has demonstrated that in extreme situations like that of the Burmese exile media, certain ideals are hard, if not impossible to follow.

Postscript: A critical view on the inquiry

Looking back, there are certain things I could, and probably would have done differently if I were to rewrite the entire thesis, and redo the entire project. The approach has been strictly qualitative, giving the project some distinct characteristics and qualities. Instead of studying several objects and compare the results, I have immersed myself in this one case, trying to map out and understand the entire DVB, its operations and the people involved. Some critics may feel a lack of a comparative aspect, or argue I have not been able to address every aspect of DVB thoroughly enough. Still I consider such an approach to be valuable and informative.

In my opinion, getting honest, personal accounts of the actual process of working with journalism in exile is more valuable than discussing the ideal ways in which media organizations *should* operate, according to general theories. Despite the ever-existing possibility of different interpretations of the findings, and arguably some challenges in applying the theoretical aspect to the empirical findings, I believe this study can provide valuable information to DVB, the donors, other exile media, and hopefully to other readers as well.

In order to minimize the influence of bias, all the steps of the process should ideally be well documented. In this case, this has not been possible.

First of all, I promised the interviewees anonymity, and I have been trusted with confidential documents from DVB and other informants. The data gathered could therefore not be presented to anyone wishing to re-examine my research without obtaining new consent from the interviewees and the sources from which the documents were acquired.

Secondly, I may have interpreted some answers differently than other researchers would. By using a qualitative approach the data gathered has become subject to interpretation, both during the interviews and afterwards, while conducting the analysis, thus ironically enough, as a researcher I must realize that bias is not only an issue for DVB but also for me. Another researcher reviewing the empirical data from this thesis might, despite using the same theoretical approach, interpret various differently than I have.

As presented in chapter 3, *validity* refers to establishing the correct operational measures for the concept being studied, in order to make sure the evidence collected comes relevant to answering the main research questions (Yin 2003: 34 and 105). *Construct validity* refers to the overall research design. In terms of having little previous research and few written sources available, the methodological approach for this thesis was more or less given. Qualitative interviews seemed by far to be the best possible approach, both because of the lack of written sources, and because of the limited scope of available interviewees, both in terms of physical distance and the linguistic challenges. The *method triangulation* strengthens the methodological approach. Despite the inherent limitations in studying a topic concerning Burma, I managed to gather information from multiple sources, both written and oral, and the data regarding DVB came from both internal and external sources.

There were some alternative methodological approaches I rejected. Participant observation, and having more interviewees, perhaps by using a survey, would both require a translator. Expanding the universe of study by including more people and using observation could both provide valuable information and reduce the possible impact of bias and interpretation, but getting the right translator would be a demanding task. To find someone speaking Burmese and English without being partial is difficult. Involving an outsider to deal with sensitive information could be a challenge, and using a translator appointed by DVB, someone trusted, would not solve the potential problem of bias and interpretation. Instead I chose focusing on the people I was able to communicate freely with, and I believe I got more and better information this way than I would have by any other method. By using a qualitative approach I have been able to conduct semi-structured interviews, thus being able to follow up with more questions on matters I wished to explore further, and getting more information from the interviewees than I would have using a different approach.

External validity covers many of the same aspects as *generalizability*, in terms of addressing whether the findings are relevant beyond this study. In chapter 6, I documented how the findings of this inquiry coincide with the findings of Lisa Brootens study from 2006. This demonstrates how the problems experienced by DVB related to

following certain journalism ideals in exile, are in fact valid to several Burmese media groups. If following certain journalism ideals is a general problem among Burmese opposition-, exile- and ethnic media groups, perhaps these problems could be detected in other exile media as well. Despite the similarities to other Burmese media groups, the findings of this study cannot expect to carry enough external validity to be applicable to exile media in general. Still the documentation of the struggles and success of DVB may be relevant beyond this specific case, and would hopefully complement further studies of exile media.

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