A case study of the relationship between journalism and politics in Sri Lanka

Isabella Westerberg, H11Jkand
Bachelor thesis in Journalism
Department of Journalism, Media and Communication (JMK)
Stockholm University
Winter 2011/2012
Supervisor: Merja Ellefson
ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis is conducted as a Minor Field Study (MFS) in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between journalism and politics from three questions at issue: 1) What is the role of media according to the journalists? 2) How do journalists work with political reporting in the Sri Lankan print media? 3) How does print media and politics correspond to each other in Sri Lanka?

The theoretical framework consists of theories on media systems, democracy models, the notion of the public sphere, media during elections and types of regulations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 informants, both editors and journalists, at eight different editorial offices. The newspapers at which the informants were employed were either state-owned or privately owned. The qualitative material was transcribed and analysed using thematisation and meaning concentration to reveal patterns, attitudes and opinions.

The analysis is divided into two major sections; 'Media's Role in the Society' and 'Media and Politics'. The first section investigates the first question at issue. Informing and educating people are valued as important responsibilities amongst the informants. Media is considered to be powerful in terms of affecting both people and politicians, although, some reservations are made. The second section examines the second and third questions at issue. The ideal execution of political reportage includes notions of neutrality, fairness, balance and unbiased reporting. In reality this is not necessarily accomplished. The state newspapers seem to report on behalf of the government in a positive and uncritical way. Private newspapers consider themselves to be more independent, but political ties and restrictions can disable their independence. Tendencies towards clientelism, political parallelism and instrumentalization are noted in the media environment. Sensitive, political news is often self-censored by journalists due to fear of consequences.

In 'Conclusions and Discussion' the questions at issue are connected to each other in an attempt to discuss the complex relationship between journalism and politics in Sri Lanka.

Key words: Sri Lanka, journalism, media, politics, political structure, instrumentalization, parallelism, clientelism, censorship, state media, private media, media's role, political reporting, news reporting, political interference.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION p. 4
2. PURPOSE p. 4
3. QUESTIONS AT ISSUE p. 4
4. MATERIAL p. 5
5. BACKGROUND INFORMATION p. 6
   5.1 Post-war Country with Restricted Media Climate p. 6
   5.2 Media Ownership in Sri Lanka p. 7
   5.3 Freedom of Speech and Media Guidelines p. 7
6. PREVIOUS RESEARCH p. 8
7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK p. 8
   7.1 Non-Western Media Studies p. 9
   7.2 Comparing Media Systems p. 9
   7.3 Media's and Journalists' Role in the Society p. 11
      7.3.1 The Public Sphere p. 12
      7.3.2 Journalistic Ideals and Political Interference in Media p. 12
   7.4 Media and Democracy p. 13
      7.4.1 Democracy Models p. 13
      7.4.2 Media During Times of Election p. 14
      7.4.3 Defining Democracy p. 15
8. METHODOLOGY p. 15
   8.1 Qualitative Research p. 15
      8.1.1 Semi-Structured Interviews p. 16
      8.1.2 Observations p. 16
   8.2 The Interview Guide p. 16
   8.3 Selection and Contact with Newspapers p. 17
   8.4 Conducting Interviews p. 18
      8.4.1 The Interview Locations p. 18
      8.4.2 Language Difficulties p. 19
      8.4.3 Covering Themes p. 19
   8.5 Analysing the Interviews p. 20
      8.5.1 Transcriptions p. 20
      8.5.2 Thematising the Content p. 20
      8.5.3 Meaning Concentration p. 21
   8.6 Validity and Reliability p. 21
9. ANALYSIS p. 22
10. MEDIA'S ROLE IN THE SOCIETY p. 22
    10.1 Informing and Educating The People p. 22
    10.2 Media's Effect p. 23
       10.2.1 Two Reasons For Affecting the People p. 24
       10.2.2 Affecting Politicians p. 24
    10.3 Media as a Public Sphere p. 25
11. MEDIA AND POLITICS p. 25
    11.1 The Ideal Political Reporting p. 25
    11.2 Content of Political Reporting p. 26
       11.2.1 The Difficulty of Finding Accurate Information p. 27
    11.3 Guidelines and Restrictions p. 27
       11.3.1 Censorship p. 28
    11.4 Approach during Elections p. 28
       11.4.1 The Honestly Biased p. 28
       11.4.2 The Supposedly Unbiased p. 29
       11.4.3 Influencing the People p. 29
    11.5 The Connection between Media, Journalists and Politics p. 30
       11.5.1 The Duality of State and Private Media p. 30
       11.5.2 Why Upset a Friend p. 31
       11.5.3 Journalism and Democracy p. 32
12. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION p. 32
    12.1 Ideals and Reality p. 32
    12.2 A Substantial Connection between Journalism and Politics p. 33
12.3 Moving Forward

13. REFERENCES

IN APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1 – Presentation of Newspapers
APPENDIX 2 – Interview Guide
APPENDIX 3 – Letter to Editors
APPENDIX 4 – Transcriptions
1. INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka claims to be a democratic nation, but contrary to this thought, the freedom of expression is constantly and consequently being called in to question (www.en.rsf.org:1-2; www.fojo.se:1; www.freedomhouse.org:1; www.sida.se:2-3). Events such as bombings at editorial offices, threats directed to individual journalists, kidnappings and murder have been reported. This has created an anxious and unsafe professional field in a restricted media environment. The intimidating occurrences are assumed to be executed by parties or groups opposing the political content of the media (www.fojo.se:1; www.en.rsf.org:1; www.freedomhouse.org:1). Problematising the supposedly hostile media climate, it is essential to clarify the relationship between journalism and politics. How do these factors correspond with each other?

The thesis is written and conducted as a field study in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, over nine weeks. This opportunity was granted to me as a Minor Field Study (MFS), sponsored by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and supported by the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication at Stockholm University.

2. PURPOSE

The thesis examines the relationship between journalism and politics from the Sri Lankan press journalists' perspective. The aim is to find answers to how journalism and politics are connected in Sri Lanka, and discover how this is operationalised in the print media. This will be linked to ideas of democracy, and the development towards a more democratic society. Investigating the journalists' opinions on improving the current media situation is also an aspect of the thesis. Furthermore, another ambition is that the study can be useful for organisations working for media freedom in Sri Lanka when utilizing resources and planning development support. The bachelor thesis is a case study, and does not aim to generalize, rather, its goal is to provide a valid and reliable excerpt from the situation of journalism in Sri Lanka.

3. QUESTIONS AT ISSUE

The questions that the thesis is based on are created in an attempt to both provide a descriptive study from a critical approach, as well as a normative analysis and discussion. The questions are structured in a logical order; they should be comprehended chronologically due to the continuing nature of them. All questions at issue are to be interpreted from the view of the journalists.
1) What is the role of media according to the journalists?

The first question serves the purpose to clarify how journalists view media as an institution. What the journalists themselves perceive media's position to be, is a base for understanding how media can and should act in society.

2) How do journalists work with political reporting in the Sri Lankan print media?

This question will try to clarify how the journalists perceive political reporting to be executed in the Sri Lankan press, both in general and during election periods.

3) How does print media and politics correspond to each other in Sri Lanka?

The third query is constructed to explain the previous question's causes. It is also used to illustrate and discuss the bigger picture of media and politics, and the complex relationship between them.

4. MATERIAL

The thesis' empirical material contains 17 interviews conducted with Sri Lankan journalists and editors, based in Colombo working within the print media. Colombo is the epicentre of the Sri Lankan press, and from the city all major dailies are distributed throughout the country (www.pressreference.com:1). Since the journalists are the persons producing the material, and the editors are the ones who decide what content to publish, both groups are interesting as informants. When necessary, the informants' differences in editorial position are highlighted in the analysis.

Employees at six major, daily newspapers have been interviewed: Daily Mirror, Mawbima, Virakesari, Dinamina, Thinakaran and Daily News. Two weekly newspapers are also included, The Sunday Leader in English and Irudina in Sinhala. In Sri Lanka the dailies are presented in three languages: Sinhala, Tamil and English, and the ownership can belong to the state or be privately owned. Therefore, the dailies chosen for the study, cover all constellations of these ownership forms and languages. A weekly equivalent to The Sunday Leader and Irudina does not exist in Tamil. A closer background description of the newspapers is provided in Appendix 1. At each editorial office I interviewed one editor and one journalist, though not at one newspaper where two journalists were interviewed, due to the editor's lack of time. One additional editor was interviewed at another
newspaper. In some cases I was given the opportunity to do field observations, although these were not planned, nor systematic. They are used as an indicating reference in the analysis.

The press as media format is interesting and chosen for two major reasons in the case of Sri Lanka. Twelve different newspapers are distributed daily. The literacy rate is high, though the circulation is quite low (http://www.pressreference.com:1). In terms of Sri Lankan value of money, a daily is relatively expensive, normal price is 15 Sri Lankan Rupees (apr. 1 SEK, November 2011). Newspapers have a larger scope than TV, Radio and Internet since it can reach rural areas where electronic media is technically impossible or too expensive for the average consumer. Furthermore, since there are daily newspapers printed in English, I myself can read them and gain understanding of the content.

5. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A brief background information is provided since Sri Lanka's political structure, social conditions and media climate may be unfamiliar to the reader. First, it concerns Sri Lanka's political situation and media environment. Second, a background in freedom of expression and Sri Lankan media organisations and guidelines is presented.

5.1 Post-war Country With Restricted Media Climate

Since 1983 the former British colony Sri Lanka has been plagued with a civil war. The conflict was due to two warring parties. The Sri Lankan government, representing the Sinhalese people, was acting as one party. The other party was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), advocating the Tamils' interests. The ethnic conflict has caused hundreds of thousands of lives to be lost. In 2009 the government defeated the LTTE, and peace was declared (Ciment, 2007; UCDP, 2011).

The official languages are Sinhala, Tamil and English. The reigning party is the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), led by president Mahinda Rajapaksa (www.sweden.gov.se:1-2), a paternal figure whose picture can be seen on big signs throughout the city of Colombo, in offices and homes, as well as on the newly-produced rupee bills. The biggest opposition party is the United National Party (UNP). Political power has been allocated back and forth between these two parties during the last decades, but it is worth noting that the SLFP was ruling when the civil war ended (www.sweden.gov.se:1-2, UCDP).
Even though peace is declared in Sri Lanka, the country faces other difficulties. Journalists work under harsh conditions, where threats and harassment against editorial offices and journalists are commonplace. There have been several reports of violence against individual journalists, and in some cases kidnapping and murder. The media climate is characterised with restrictions such as state pressure and censorship (SAMC, 2009:150ff; www.fojo.se:1; www.sida.se:2). Publication and distribution can be averted in Sri Lanka, if the authority discerns the material as a risk of embarking public disorder. Free press and freedom of information is restricted. Due to these conditions numerous Sri Lankan journalists have fled the country during the war, to proceed the reporting through exile media (www.en.rsf.org:1; www.freedomhouse.org:1).

5.2 Media Ownership in Sri Lanka

Looking into Sri Lankan media ownership, two forms exist: state and private. The state provides both press (published by Lake House Company of Newspapers), TV (Rupavahini and Independent Television Network) and radio (Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation). These mainstream media institutions are situated in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, and the most wide-spread media is state-owned TV and radio. There is private-owned media as well, but the owners are often affiliated with dominant political parties. Oppositional and alternative journalism is found in the private media sector (Uyangoda in Orjuela, 2010). Regional media is not common in Sri Lanka, but some local press exist in Jaffna. The city of Jaffna is the Tamils' cultural capital, and the regional press is printed in Tamil (www.pressreference.com:1).

5.3 Freedom of Speech and Media Guidelines

Arguing on behalf of the freedom of expression and liberty to publish, democratic values are commonly used. Effective democracy is conditioned by freedom of expression (Keller, 2011). The freedom of expression is one of the Human Rights, stated by the United Nations. Article 19 in the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights proclaims: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” (www.un.org:1). Grounded in the notion of free expression, Sri Lankan journalists are supposed to work in accordance to two main curriculums: the Code of Ethics and the Media Charter. Both of these value a pluralist media environment, press freedom and social responsibility (www.cpalanka.org:1; www.fojo.se:2). Sri Lanka has an independent press institute, Sri Lanka Press

6. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Collecting information on Sri Lankan media has proven difficult. There is research originated from the country, which I cannot access since the research is in Sinhala or Tamil. English literature on this subject is limited, and often outdated. Although, Peiris (1997) presents research where media in Sri Lanka is described in various ways; from origins, frameworks and trends to evolution and the contemporary media scene.

Bolin (2006) conducted a field study in Sri Lanka for her master degree via the MFS programme. She investigated how public interest was perceived by journalists and editors. Through interviews she concluded that the view is scattered, and most differences are to be found between private-owned and state-owned newspapers. Although, the author could state that the journalists in general thought their role should be to work in public interest and take social responsibility, even though this was problematic on how to achieve this. An obstacle among state-employed journalists was the political agenda, whereas for the Tamil journalists threats were a major problem. Difficulties in collecting accurate information were recognised as an obstacle for all informants.

What differs in my study from previous research is firstly, the stronger focus on politics in Sri Lankan media. Secondly, my thesis is conducted when Sri Lanka is at peace. The research I have mentioned has been executed during the period of war. How this can affect journalism in this thesis is only speculative, but reports from Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders assert the Sri Lankan media climate has changed since the civil war (www.en.rsf.org:2;  www.freedomhouse.org:1).

7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework utilized in this bachelor thesis will mainly include two overall areas: media theories and democracy theories. Specifically concentrating on these areas, we discover theories on media systems, democracy models, the notion of the public sphere, media during elections and types of regulations. A wide theoretical spectrum is presented since I strive to analyse the complex relation between media and political structure. The theoretical frame is built on critical theory with a normative approach to examine the current situation of the Sri Lankan media climate.
First though, it is important to reflect on the fact that I am using Western theories and applying them on a non-Western country. In the search of relevant theories it has become clear to me that media research is most often originated from a Western context, and therefore adjusted to the specifics of the West. Hence, it can be problematic to use the theories in another context. These obstacles are reflected on in the following chapter.

7.1 Non-Western Media Studies

Curran and Park (2000) aim to expand Western perspectives, and to provide alternatives in how to understand media theory, systems and cultures. They strongly suspect nations to be highly important factors to analyse, in a media research world that has been revolving around globalisation for a long time. They claim that essential communication is foremost national, and nationally produced. The nations have specific laws, regulations and licenses which affect the media. Also, it is, according to Curran and Park, relevant to recognise the nation as a marker of difference in the aspects of language, history, culture, politics and international relations. Maybe most importantly, expressed with the authors' own words “/.../ media systems are shaped /.../ by a complex ensemble of social relations that have taken shape in national contexts.” (Curran & Park, 2000:12). With this in mind, it is crucial to examine Sri Lanka from the country's own conditions and circumstances. It also stresses, and questions, the utility of Western theories in a non-Western context.

7.2 Comparing Media Systems

Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's Four Theories of the Press has dominated as a tool for comparative media studies since the launch of their work in 1956 (Curran & Park, 2000:3-5; Hallin & Mancini, 2004:1-2; Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2011:15). The core of the theory is rooted in the belief that media system and political structure correspond to each other, creating different media landscape from different political climates. The four theories described are called the Libertarian Model, Social Responsibility Model, Authoritarian Model and Soviet-Communist Model (Siebert et al., 1956). Criticism towards the theories has been pointed out from several directions, for example from McQuail (2005; 2006), Curran and Park (2000) and Hallin and Mancini (2004).

Instead of using Siebert et al.'s theory, the approach to the empirical material will be based on the work of Hallin and Mancini (2004). They stand by the idea of the close relationship between politics and media, also recognising political history, structure and culture. As an attempt to modernise comparative media studies they concluded three models from the Western world's
perspective: the Polarized Pluralist Model, the Democratic Corporatist Model and the Liberal Model.

**Polarized Pluralist Model**, also called the Mediterranean Model, can be found in countries where democracy was constituted relatively late compared to other Western countries. Examples of countries with this specific media system are Italy, Portugal, Spain and Greece. The state has a strong role, but the political spectrum is wider and more distinguished than other Western countries, and that is referred to as polarised pluralism. The media tends to have close bonds to politics, and the commercialisation of the press is not as widespread as in the two other models. The state, or political parties, politicians, and persons politically associated tend to intervene in media in different ways, for example as owners. These types of ties between media and politics is referred to as parallelism. Where the Polarized Pluralist Model is found, clientelism is not unusual in society. Clientelism is found in societies with modern institutions combined with traditional authority or legitimacy. In practice, this often leads to abuse of power, resulting in corruption or a system where “favours” between people are common (between so called patrons and clients). Some argue though that there can be democratic clientelism. In the world of journalism, clientelism can take expression in personal contacts between journalists and politicians, with one of them being friendly to the other, or threaten them with negative consequences (Hallin & Mancini, 2004:89-142).

The press generally does not have a high circulation, but readers tend to be educated and interested in political and social issues. The journalism is often commentary-oriented. Journalistic education and training is relatively low and instituted late, and self-regulating systems are limited in its development. Instead instrumentalization can be noticed, when media is used as a sphere for political interference. During election periods political influences are common, as well as restrictions or regulations on communication. To sum up the Polarized Pluralist Model up; it is characterised by a strong political media climate, important social role of the state, a pluralistic media landscape, clientelism and instrumentalization occur, and journalism tends to be elitist. Hallin and Mancini note that the public sphere does not seem to be less open than in other Western countries. (Hallin & Mancini, 2004:89-142).

**Democratic Corporatist Model**, or the North/Central Europe Model, can be found in, for example, Norway, Sweden and Germany. In countries where this model is applied, mass circulation of the press is high. Historically strong traditions in party press are noticed. The mass media is directed to a wide public, and is commentary-oriented as well as ideally objective. The political climate is democratic and has worn their political models since, more or less, the beginning of the twentieth
century. Political parallelism is coexisting with journalistic professionalism, and circulation is high, due to the long tradition of the press. Market-driven journalism is developed, but social responsibility is taken seriously (Hallin & Mancini, 2004:143-197).

**Liberal Model**, also named the North Atlantic Model, is characterised with free, commercialised media. The model exists in developed democracies such as the U.S., Canada and Great Britain (which is considered as a borderline case). With objectivity as a key word, the often educated journalists create informative media for a large public. Instrumentalization is noticed even though media is separate from political parties or other social organisations, and the diversity is not preferable since it is not widely ranged (Hallin & Mancini, 2004:198-248).

As observed, focus is on the Polarised Pluralist Model, since that model corresponds mostly with Sri Lanka's media system, judging from pre-understanding. Indeed, the models are based on analyses of the West, but the points made clear are possible to apply to non-Western countries as well. Models are not constant, and the countries categorised within them might not respond to all criteria. A reflection on the models from an international perspective, is that models seem to be missing when trying to apply them to developing countries where both institutions and authority are traditional, which could be called a neopatrimonial society. Also, as Hallin and Manicini themselves stress, East European systems do not fit in either of the models, due to none of the models are managing a Communist background (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Furthermore, Hallin and Mancini argue that journalism cannot be totally neutral, due to the consistently strong connections between politics, society and culture (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2011:20). The awareness of the limitation in using the models when analysing a non-Western country is crucial, but theoretically useful in this case. Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011:23) argue it can be worthwhile using the models especially when analysing a former colonised country, hence, the system could have similarities with its coloniser.

### 7.3 Media's and Journalists' Role in the Society

Journalism across cultures has its diversities, as Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011) states. How journalism operates is dependent on culture, technology, social and economical factors, political and juridical framework as well as the globalisation context. This chapter firstly focuses on media as an institution's role in the society, reflected on using Habermas' theory on the public sphere. Moreover, the journalists' profession in terms of key words such as objectivity and transparency is discussed, as well as how the media can be restricted and used as a political instrument.
7.3.1 The Public Sphere

Jürgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere from 1962 (translated to English 1989) is widely discussed within the disciplines of social sciences and humanities. The public sphere is described as a notion of rational-critical debate; a relevant public conversation about the common interest. The debate, conducted by citizens, ought to reflect on both the private market as well as state affairs and agenda. The potential of societal integration is a significant purpose of the use of the theory. (Allan, 2010:5, Calhoun, 1992:6). The public sphere is an interesting point for this thesis, it is an overall idea that acknowledges the system of discussion and deliberation in a society aiming for, or maintaining, democracy. Allan (2010:17) points out the democratic function of the public sphere in relation to media and journalism. Journalists are supposed provide the public with information on common interest, and are responsible to do this in a truthful, ideally objective, manner. Additionally, a pluralistic media environment stimulates and supports free press. Moreover, Allan concedes propaganda (the notion of deliberate deceiving, for the goods of the dominant ideology) to be incompatible to journalism and news (Allan, 2010:23). The question is, nevertheless, whether and how the public sphere of Sri Lanka operates. Media as a public sphere can be restricted, and examining how this affects the liberal principles of the public sphere is crucial.

7.3.2 Journalistic Ideals and Political Interference in Media

The objectivity ideal is well implanted in the Western world's media sphere. Key words as neatrality, unbiased reporting, balance and transparency are connected to the idea of good journalism. These notions are supposed to be pillars in journalism, a foundation from which 'good' journalism is created. However, the political structure of nations can affect the possibility to achieve objectivity in reporting (Allan, 2010). Hadenius, Weibull and Wadbring (2008:24-25) ascertain three major ways that politics can interfere with media using it as a steering instrument. Firstly, policies regarding structure and organization can be applied. In practice this can be transposed as market regulations for instance, all rights reserved for a media company or prohibition of different kinds. The content is another area that is possible to control with regulations concerning media ethics. A third way appears to be non-existing media policies, where instead the market seems to function as the steering instrument.

Wilson defines censorship as when editorial content is restricted “for reasons outside the normal processes of independent writing” (1996:207). There is always media ethics and regulations stating what you can and cannot express in media, for instance, respect for reporting sensitive news like
suicide. These types of restriction do limit the freedom of expression, but the reason is accepted and well argued. Wilson also discusses whether or not restricted information freedom is censorship. He exemplifies this with documents of public interest that in some countries are accessible for journalists, and in some not. Prohibiting or hindering journalists from collecting certain information can be perceived as censorship. As Wilson claims, censorship often operates with smoother methods than having officials from the government using the “blue pencil” at the actual editorial office (Wilson, 1996:207-210). The methods of controlling media are relevant to this thesis as the intention is to clarify how political reporting functions in practice.

Another aspect of censorship is when it occurs automatically at the editorial office, so called self-censorship. Self-censorship, according to Wilson, considers the deletion or discretion of politically characterized media content. Journalists and editors are probably experienced in coping with consequences of publications, thus they do not publish content they might be rebuked or punished for (Wilson, 1996:211).

7.4 Media and Democracy

Democracy as a political concept is spread throughout the world, resulting in some countries with a different interpretation of the term. The notion of democracy seems to be associated with a fair system providing freedom for the people. Or as more cynical contributors would say: the best option we have so far (Held, 1987; Strömbäck, 2004). As Held (1987:17) concludes, it almost appears to be all states' way of finding legitimacy in its ruling.

7.4.1 Democracy Models

Nord and Strömbäck (2008) present three models of democracy and accordingly, respective vision for media and journalism. These models are (freely translated from Swedish) the procedural democracy, the competitive democracy, the participatory democracy and deliberating democracy (Nord & Strömbäck, 2008:21-23). What similarities with the different models Sri Lanka might have is yet to be discovered. The models are, according to Nord and Strömbäck, not fixed, meaning one country can show indications towards more than one model.

Procedural democracy is a society where democratic values are maintained by the state. The citizens do not necessarily have to be involved in politics. The most important task for media is to pay attention when the rules of democracy are broken (Strömbäck, 2004:56-58;88-89). Competitive democracy is a system where elites are chosen through elections, where the political candidate's role
is to act and the citizen's duty is to react. Sometimes the elections held according to competitive
democracy is the backward-looking model of sanction; focusing on the current government and
politicians' responsibility for their time at power. This demands journalism to investigate how the
nation has been managed during the past mandate period. Otherwise, the forward-looking model of
mandate could be applied, where the elections is an opening for people to give mandate to
politicians for executing their politics. Media's role then, is to provide information about the
competing parties' policy programmes (Strömbäck, 2004:58-61;90-91).

The participatory democracy puts more value in activeness of the citizens. The more people engage
in politics during elections and in between elections, the better the situation is, in the sense of
democracy. Therefore, should media and journalism contribute to political mobilization among
citizens. Reporting in the public interest is central, as well as informing about problems and
solutions. The voice of the citizens ought to be mediated. (Strömbäck, 2004:61-65;92-95).
Generally, the deliberating democracy agrees on the values the participatory democracy stands for,
but they also advocate for citizens to participate in political debates and conversations. The
discussions should be built on equality, understanding, rationality and intellectual openness, and
those key words are supposed to characterize journalism as well. Media should provide both
information and an arena for debate open for all groups and individuals in society (Strömbäck,

Strömbäck (2004:97) points out that procedural democracy is probably the most realistic type. For
the analysis these models are a functional basis for comparing the Sri Lankan journalists' view of
democracy, and especially the link between media, journalism and democracy.

7.4.2 Media During Times of Election

Strömbäck (2004) argues the importance of journalism and media in times of elections. One of the
primary statements is that media and journalism should provide neutral information in order to
enable people to make free and independent decisions, and formulate opinions in social issues. To
achieve this, Strömbäck and Nord (2004:272-274) demand election journalism should be accurate,
relevant and comprehensive. They also stress the news space should be in proportion to news value,
and transparency regarding sources is ideal. Furthermore, Strömbäck (2004:99-100) lists five types
of information crucial in political reporting during election periods: 1) The parties' descriptions of
reality, 2) Ideological principles of the parties, 3) Opinions on different political questions, 4) How
the political options have acted during the past mandate period, 5) Probable consequences if
respectively political alternative would be elected. A critical aspect is the power over the journalism. As long as the media has control over the content, an ideal way of reporting becomes closer to reality. Strömbäck (2004:101-103) states that the power of the journalism is conditioned, meaning it is simultaneously affecting and being affected. These conditions can be political, juridical or financial. Media is also conditioned by cultural values, technology and by the sources. Applying Strömbäck's and Nord's theories on this thesis, it is useful in the analysis of the newspapers' eventual political ties, and in crystallising how, in practice, this can be noticed.

7.4.3 Defining Democracy

Defining democracy for the thesis, Dahl's (1998) democracy description functions as the base. The ideal of democracy is, according to Dahl, a political system that is responsive towards the citizens. In order to obtain democracy seven criteria ought to be fulfilled: Free and fair elections, elected policymakers, universal suffrage, the right to candidate for election, freedom of expression, freedom of information and freedom of organisation. Moreover, Nord and Strömbäck (2004) defines democracy from a perspective that places emphasis on the freedom of speech and right to public information. They conclude that a nation that does not respect these rights is not democratic, an opinion I agree with. This also supports the importance of free media, an opinion on which this thesis is built on. Regarding Sri Lanka's claim that they are a democratic country, there seems to be several factors that conflicts with this. This is something that has been taken into consideration when analysing the media and democracy relationship. Moreover, it is crucial to reveal the Sri Lankan journalists' meaning of democracy in order to make an accurate analysis.

8. METHODOLOGY

8.1 Qualitative Research

The aim of this study is to obtain knowledge about the relationship between politics and journalism from the journalists' perspectives. Hence, the method must facilitate the collection of a complex, personal content of material. To achieve this, the method of qualitative interviews have been chosen, since its purpose is to describe and interpret the themes of the informant's life (Kvale, 1997:170).
8.1.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interview is characterised by openness and flexibility. The intention is to let the informants speak freely about set topics and themes, although it is steered in a relevant direction by the interviewer (Gillham, 2008; McCracken, 1987). Conducting 17 interviews for a bachelor degree is a great quantity of material to handle in a limited sized study. Therefore, the lengths of the interviews were approximately 30-40 minutes. Further in-depth interviewing could have led to more complex answers, and the possibility for the informants to elaborate extensively. I judged it to be more fruitful to include a wide selection of informants rather than longer interviews for two reasons. Number one, and the most important, is to cover a broad range of different informants. Interviewing only a few, could be less representative, especially since I was not allowed to choose the informants myself (See chapter 8.3 Selection and Contact with Newspapers). Including a variety of attributes was essential, and because of the differences in languages and ownership in Sri Lankan print media, a substantial number of informants was inevitable. Secondly, longer interviews, I believe, would have been more difficult to set up with an informant constantly working under pressure. The lengths of the interviews could have been reluctantly shortened due to the informants' time schedules, or to the editor's restrictions.

8.1.2 Observations

I was invited to conduct observations of the daily work at two newspapers. The opportunities are valuable as material to the thesis, but not to be seen as crucial or fundamental for the analysis. The observations were not planned, and therefore the validity of them can be seen as arbitrary. Nevertheless, observing work in progress was an experience that enhanced my understanding of the informants' situation. The observations should be seen as an indicator of tendencies rather than pure facts.

8.2 The Interview Guide
(See Appendix 2)

Planning and preparing for the interviews are crucial, according to Kvale (1997:91-98) and Gillham (2008:104). Therefore, the interview guide constructed is based on the questions at issue, and an active correspondence to the theoretical framework. Gillham states the researcher should try to adopt a 'naïve view' towards the informant (Gillham, 2008:105). Due to this, I have scrutinized my actual, or believed, knowledge about my material, and overlooked those perceptions in creating open questions for my interview guide. I sought to thematise the questions, and order them in a
logical way, supposedly to be easy to follow in the real interview situation. The themes are initialised with a part called 'Background', with the purpose to make the informant comfortable and ready to talk. Thereafter, following themes line up: 'Media and Society', 'Editorial office and Media Content', 'Media and Politics', 'Media and Democracy' and 'Obstacles and Possibilities'.

The questions are primarily open in their nature, giving the informant the opportunity to self-reflect and answer freely. There is a usage of more directing questions, due to two reasons. Firstly, in order to cover all themes, I can, with awareness, lead the informant into relevant terrain. The directed questions are followed up with more open questions if not answered elaborately.

I did not have the possibility to perform a test interview, because of the need to include all informants in my study. This is recommended by the method researchers Kvale (1997) and Gillham (2008). As a result, the first interviews tended to be more unstructured, jumping back and forward between the themes. Some questions were redundant, but regardless of that I kept them in the interview guide. This was for my own sake, sometimes one question lead to an answer to a question in another theme, and sometimes it did not. I wanted to assure no question was left out when working with the interview guide.

8.3 Selection and Contact with Newspapers

Together with the Sri Lankan Press Institute (SLPI) six daily newspapers were chosen as representatives of Sri Lankan press, as well as two weekly newspapers (see Appendix 1). These are large newspapers by circulation, and are both state-owned and private-owned. The papers are written in three different languages, Sinhala, Tamil and English. SLPI contacted the editorial offices on my behalf, with a letter from me attached where I explained my study and requests (see Appendix 3). Moving on from that point was different depending on the editors; some of them set appointments via employees at SLPI and some of them contacted me directly. In all cases I firstly met the chief editors or directors (the title can differ, but the meaning is the same). In some cases I interviewed this person instead of a news editor. This was determined by the chief editor that considered her/himself to be the relevant person to interview.

Selecting journalists was managed by the chief editor. A wide range of of journalists in terms of gender, age and experience was an aspiration. This was requested during the briefing with the chief editor about journalist informants. Indeed, a broad selection in every newspaper was impossible since only two persons were to be interviewed, but in the bigger perspective of the study this was
fulfilled. Kvale (1997:142-145) brings up the importance of morality in conducting interviews, making a point of the willingness of the informant. The informants were, by all means, requested by the chief editors to be interviewed. No one disagreed to this, though it can be discussed if they actually wanted to participate. My perception was that the informants agreed with no negativity towards participation.

The interviews were conducted anonymously (Kvale, 1997:142; Gillham, 2008:33). This precaution was taken in case the journalists felt insecure having their name published in the study. The answers from the informants could become more exhaustive from this choice due to the study's sensitive subject.

8.4 Conducting Interviews

All interviews were conducted at the informants' editorial offices. The interviews started with a short presentation of my thesis and what topics I was going to cover. The informants were briefed on informant anonymity and the usage of a recorder (McCracken, 1987:37-38), which no one objected to.

8.4.1 The Interview Locations

When interviewing a chief editor instead of a news editor, the interview was held in this person's office. Journalists and news editors shared working space in open office environments. Finding a place to interview these informants was difficult. In the beginning I was keen on finding a quiet, private place. This turned out to be impossible in some cases, and those interviews were conducted in the actual office, close to their co-workers. If the informants' answers could have been different because of the interview location, this can only be speculated. The informants themselves did not seem to oppose being interviewed near by their colleagues. One problematic issue conducting the interviews in the open editorial office was that the informants in some cases were disturbed by their colleagues needing to ask something. This led to a slight distraction, both for me as an interviewer, and especially for the informant. Important phone calls interrupted some interviews. Beyond question, journalists work under time pressure, and I could not avoid these disturbances from occurring.
8.4.2 Language Difficulties

The majority of the interviews were conducted in English. English is not my mother tongue, nor was it of the informants I interviewed. At times, it was difficult to understand each other in matters of terminology or accent differences. To solve this, I humbly asked the informants for clarifications, when the language barrier was causing a problem. The informants did not always comprehend my question, whereas during the interviews I had to reformulate, explain, or sometimes even exemplify what I meant. Coping with this I had to go outside theoretical methodology, regarding open questions, the interview guide and hence, perhaps even the replicability of my study. Furthermore, due to the language difficulties, I judged it to be inappropriate to analyse the linguistics, word emphasis, hesitation or pauses of my interviews, since the vocabulary of the informants' can be limited.

For two interviews in a private-owned newspaper an interpreter was necessary. The interpreter was the news editor of the paper where the journalists worked. When arriving to the editorial, I did not know an interpreter was needed, whereas the news editor volunteered to act as one. The translation in terms of answer lengths seemed to correspond well with the informants answer. The informants understood English to a certain extent, the questions were asked in English, but their replies were in Sinhala. This, I believe, can raise the quality of the translation since the informant could correct or add information as the translation was executed. The interpreter being the news editor can have an effect on the answers of the informants. Having their superior listening could have caused self-censorship to avoid professional conflict. In the editorial office where an interpreter was used, the climate seemed to be rather free. A problem I encountered though, was that the interpreter occasionally added extra information from his point of view, which I have chosen not to analyse.

8.4.3 Covering Themes

In the actual interview situation, the interview guide was taken in to consideration very liberally. The order of the questions and themes were manipulated depending on the informants' answers. To the furthest extent, the intention was to let the informant talk freely about their thoughts and experiences, whereas it was inevitable to alter disposition from time to time.

It became clear after interviewing private and state-owned newspapers, that queries ought to be adjusted to reach the same information. Many informants of state-owned newspapers described
their situation from a governmental perspective, which they also stated they did. To reach their own opinions on some matters, for example ideals, a detour around the questions were necessary.

8.5 Analysing the Interviews

8.5.1 Transcriptions

The interviews are transcribed (see Appendix 4) in order to alleviate the analysis. Using the transcriptions I have been able to structure, organise and thematise the content of the qualitative material. Since no linguistics was to be analysed, the transcription is simplified meaning pauses and hesitations are excluded, instead focusing on factual content. Moreover, most humming and insignificant words have been removed. When an informant stutters around words that provide no function to the meaning, those words are omitted in the transcription. As a result, the transcriptions are more or less composed word by word, with only few exceptions, which strengthens the reliability and validity (Kvale, 1997:213).

8.5.2 Thematising the content

Conducting the interviews made me aware of similarities between newspaper with equal ownership. Therefore, I divided the transcriptions into two groups, state-owned newspapers and private-owned newspapers. The analysis began with an overview of the themes in the material, according to Kvale's (1997:178-180) analytical method of categorisation. Kvale acknowledges three advantages with the method, namely structuring the complex material and providing an overview. Furthermore, quantifying attitudes and opinions makes it possible to examine the frequency of them. Comparisons are also facilitated.

The numbered questions at issue (see 3. Questions at Issue) was used as a compass. When analysing the material, parts concerning each question were marked with a respective number. A fifth number was added, namely 'Democracy'. From this number coding, seven themes were distinguished: 'Journalism's/Media's Role', 'Newspaper/Media and Politics', 'Political Reporting', 'Democracy Definition', 'Democracy and Media', 'Difficulties in Sri Lankan Media Environment', and also 'Possibilities/Development'. Using colour and numeric coding, the analysis became tangible enough to be thoroughly scrutinized.
8.5.3 Meaning Concentration

After coding the material as above, meaning concentration was applied (Kvale, 1997:175-178). Longer sentences were shortened down to more precise meanings. Extensive descriptions and lengthy elaborations could result in just a few words. This facilitated the aspiration to observe patterns in the informants statements. When the material was prepared accordingly, I arranged the meaning concentrations in each theme where I discovered and determined the most essential and abundant information. From here patterns and attitudes were possible to overlook.

8.6 Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of the thesis is high, but has a few questionable factors that might affect the verification. I have mentioned some doubtful situations previously in the text, such as the issue of the interpreter and the sporadically conducted observations. The selection has also been questioned since the individual informants were not selected by me. The journalists whom served as informants were selected by the editors, although I was allowed to make requests regarding gender and experience. Moreover, the analysis is exclusively conducted by me. My reliability, as an interviewer and an analyser, has not been controlled by any other persons. The thematisation of the content could have gained reliability if it would have been controlled. Acting as an interviewer, the quality of myself as a research tool can be criticised. Was I asking the optimal questions, and did I follow up the informants' responses in a fruitful way? On the other hand, it could be beneficial that only I was the one conducting interviews, making sure same themes were covered through similar questions. (Kvale, 1997:188; 206-228). In some cases, I had to question the reliability of the informants. Especially the state-employed journalists and editors tended to answer in a way I believe they were encouraged to because of the ownership. When this occurred, the strategy was to lead the informants into talking about personal experiences, for example, rejection of articles or more abstract questions about theoretical ideals and the media environment.

The verification should conclude the reliability and validity to be satisfactory due to its transparency, honesty and reflective questioning. The analysis attempts to provide a solid explanation in how the results were concluded. From planning the project, to conducting interviews, analysing and discussing the results, the approach has been anchored in theories and has worked with transparency, reliability and validity throughout the project. Albeit, no claims regarding generalisation are made. This is due to the highly subjective material. If including more informants in the material, the result of the analysis could turn out differently, whereas generalisation is not a suitable claim, nor aspiration, for this thesis (Kvale:1997:206-228).
9. ANALYSIS

The analysis is divided in two sections: 'Media's Role in the Society' and 'Media and Politics'. The chapters are followed by a conclusion and discussion of the results of the analysis. The informants' identification tags begin with either a 'P' (for Private-employed) or a 'S' (for State-employed), followed by 'I' for Informant and an individual identification number. See Appendix 4 for transcriptions of the interviews.

10. MEDIA'S ROLE IN THE SOCIETY

In general, the informants consider media's role to be important, and that it has a prominent role in the society. Both state-employed and privately employed informants recognise media as an institution; it is a natural part of the Sri Lankan society, as is media when described by Strömbäck (2004). One informant explains that “Journalists are the pillars of the society. What happen to the roof if the pillars are taken out? Society falls down.” (PI9). Subsequently, there is no question about media's existence, rather a discussion about what media actually means to the society. Print media is pointed out by many informants to be particularly important because of its distribution in the rural areas (where TV and Internet is uncommon) and also for its explicative and political content. What the media's duties are, is similar among the informants, but the meaning of the duties differ as well as the way of implementing them. Media's duties include, according to all informants, to inform. Informative news seems to be one of the most fundamental responsibilities newspapers have. The subject of the news varies between the state-owned newspapers and private-owned.

10.1 Informing and Educating the People

Even though both private-employed and state-employed informants consider informing to be essential in media, the views on what the information should contain are different. Informants working for state-owned newspapers place heavy emphasis on reporting government activities. The news should be positive and highlight what the government is doing: “/.../ being a state media you always cover government things /.../ Basically the positive things.” (SI2). Criticism can be given space, but it ought to be constructive criticism, according to some state-employed informants. According to others, no criticism can be published. Media seems to be a tool for the government to inform the citizens of the actions conducted by the government. Informants working for the state press agree on that, and claim that it is an important function. Whether or not it is considered good journalism though is unclear. Some informants believe state press functions well, whereas one
informant accuses it to be bad journalism. All private-employed informants believe state press has difficulties in unbiased reporting.

The informants working for private media also consider providing information to be the newspapers' main duty. They underline the importance of informing in a balanced way, and encourages the concept of exposés. To these informants, the journalists should work with uncovering the truth, and report about unacceptable conditions; “People need to know the truth, as opposed to knowing the flowery side of the story, because the flower can have a thorn as well. We present the thorn, whereas others present the flowers.” (PI1). Analysing the informant's following statements, the “others” in the sentence seem to be the pro-government newspapers. The way informing is viewed upon by the private-employed informants are in line with Allan's (2010) keywords concerning objectivity to a further extent than the state-employed. For Tamils, it is important to inform the people about minorities, discrimination and Tamil rights.

Educating the people is another important duty. In general, informants mention a responsibility to educate the people. Indeed, informing and educating is closely related, and some informants tend to use the words synonymously. When difference is found between the terms, it seems to lie within how the informants perceive their profession. When educating, you teach the people about subjects such as society, economics and culture as a provider, a tutor. One informant describes his duties to be conducted with a “/.../ sense of social responsibility. You are responsible for society in the ways we are looking. You are moral values through your work.” (SI1). Only a minority of the informants use the term social responsibility, but a majority of them illustrate its meaning according to Allan's (2010) description.

The result of informing the people is connected to people's everyday life. Informants believe that informing and educating through media can create a better life for the individual. To state-media informants, that mostly concerns the right to live a happy, peaceful life. Private-employed informants rather talk about the importance of the people's right to accurate information so they are able to make informed decisions.

10.2 Media's Effect

Not only is media and journalism considered to be important, it is also acknowledged to be powerful in affecting people as well as politicians. The people can, according to the informants, be
affected in various ways; their attitudes and opinions for example. Rural areas are considered to be easier to influence.

10.2.1 Two Reasons for Affecting the People

When informants recognise media to be influential, they can generally be divided into two standpoint groups. The first group believe that the media has a responsibility to affect, in order for society to change. They consider it as important to show social, political and cultural alternatives to the people in order for the people and the society to improve. By reading newspapers, opinions are to be made by the people, as Informant PI6 says: “...one of the tasks of newspapers is creating opinion among the people. The newspapers have an impact on the readers.” (PI6). Similar responses also highlight the people as an active public that reflects and, perhaps, takes a position when reading the newspaper. This change-oriented group of informants are almost exclusively private-employed, but equal tendencies in thinking are noticed among younger state-employed informants.

The other group views media's possibility to affect as a tool of serving the people. The journalists' role is to help the people obtain a good life: “...majority people want to live a peaceful, happy life. And the state I believe makes that possible to a great extent, and when you work for a state-owned newspaper you serve those people.” (SI1). These informants are working for the state, and they also claim to uphold a functioning and positive society through their journalism. This group seems to view the people more as a passive customer of the state, compared to the active public the first group recognises. The first group has resemblance to the participatory democracy model, and the second to the procedural democracy model (Nord and Strömbäck, 2008), based on the demands on the journalism.

10.2.2 Affecting Politicians

The majority of the informants suggest that newspapers have the possibility to cause an impact on politicians, and most importantly, the current government. When the newspapers research and publish stories about anomalies informants believe they can affect the government's actions. Examples on such stories has been given from some informants, and can be exemplified by Informant PI1. The informant tells a story about a Sri Lankan woman who had been working in the Middle East, who was brutally abused by her employers and escaped back to Sri Lanka. When the newspapers reported the issue, not only did the government react, but also took action. “So the newspapers, by collectively focusing on this issue, became the voice of the voiceless.” (PI1) In
addition, the woman was financially helped by reporting this story, which affirms media's effect on the politicians. To be the ‘voice of the voiceless’ is frequently mentioned by many informants. This duty, the informants recognise is another reason why affecting politicians is important.

Furthermore, media plays a part in creating the system, which directly affects the politicians. People's view of the politicians is mediated, which empower the newspapers' influence. Informant X claims: “The media in Sri Lanka is very powerful. /.../ Media have made political characters, and media has destroyed political characters.” (PI8). In conclusion, this aspect suggests that newspapers have an effect on politics.

10.3 Media as a Public Sphere

The informants all strive to take the people's perspective when reporting stories. The newspapers are supposed to exist for the sake of the people, according to the informants. Informant SI2 says: “When they [the government] say something, it's not like anyone on the street can come up and say, 'Oh that's wrong, what about me?'. That's what we're supposed to do.” (SI2). On the other hand, one informant considers the newspapers to be the voice of the voiceless but people in rural areas are seldom in the spotlight. Along with this, the informants, as previously mentioned, believe providing information is a main responsibility of the media. However, the state-owned media has tendencies to approach propaganda reporting (Allan, 2010). The state press seems to face difficulties in creating a public sphere, when the political information regarding the government is restricted to be angled in a positive way (Wilson, 1996). Private media seems to promote a more open public sphere for rational-critical debate (Calhoun, 1992), and the private-employed informants desire media independence opposed to the state-employed.

11. MEDIA AND POLITICS

The connection between media and politics seems to be vivid in numerous aspects. Before presenting this relationship, the political reporting will be examined.

11.1 The Ideal Political Reporting

State-employed as well as private-employed informants value balanced and fair journalism. They assert stories to be neutral in the sense of reporting both sides. For example, when writing on a political issue, both the government and the opposition should be covered. The editors of the newspapers insist on this, and the journalists write accordingly. The editor at one private-owned
newspaper says: “We try to give equal coverage to both sides. /.../ We try to balance it off.” (PI1). A similar response is stated from a state-employed informant: “We should give same opportunity to every party to create a real public opinion” (SI3), but as the analysis later concludes this is not necessarily fulfilled. Informants mention other keywords for reporting in reality, such as to be “careful” and “tactful” (SI6), and to work “politely” and “honest” (PI10). The informants also acknowledge the power of the media should be taken in to consideration when publishing stories. It is regarded as important to double-check information, as explained by a private-employed editor: “/.../ when a reporter comes with a story I make sure they have both sides. If there's doubts about the authenticity of a story, of course I can't ask to reveal the source. But we double-check it”. (PI1)

11.2 Content of Political Reporting

Political reporting is central and considered as an essential section in the newspapers. A majority of the informants believe this is necessary to support the citizens' right to make informed decisions about their lives (Strömbäck, 2004). To achieve this, not only reporting what the actions of the politicians is sufficient. The opinions of the citizens are desired, most informants declare: “Normally she [the informant] goes to the people and get their views on the performance of the government and the opposition's fighting with the government.” (PI4) Newspapers are supposed to report on social issues from the citizens' perspective. For the state-employees it is also preeminent to report the government's views and opinions from a positive perspective. In reaction to that, the private newspapers appears urged to report on the behalf of the opposition. Tamil newspapers prioritise minority reporting and cover news from the political party TNA (Tamil National Alliance). Human rights are an important topic regardless of ownership.

Reporting during elections appears to be centred on the candidates and their opinions as well as their visions for Sri Lanka. How the party would, or have, implemented the ideas should be reported on. The various political parties' basic ideology should also be highlighted. Almost all informants consider stories on how the current government has governed the country are important. The political content should be reported on a regular basis, not only during election periods. Moreover, individual candidates are featured, personifying the party for the citizens. The five information types for political reporting listed by Strömbäck (2004) are hence covered by Sri Lankan newspapers, but all types are not emphasised by every informant. How the space is divided between the political parties, as well as how the stories should be angled according to the ownership of the respective newspaper, seem to affect how these information types are reported about. This is further investigated in following chapters.
11.2.1 The Difficulty of Finding Accurate Information

The main responsibility of the newspapers, according to the informants, is to provide information, it is principal to mediate accurate news. At times the quest for correct information can be problematic, especially for the private newspapers. The state journalists primarily use state institutions for gathering information which is easily accessible for them. Some private-employed informants highlight the difficulties of finding trustworthy sources: “Sometimes it's problem when we can't find the right information and correct documents.” (PI4). Private-employed informants emphasize the non-existing freedom of information in Sri Lanka. According to these informants, the lack of transparency in official institutions creating complications in collecting accurate information; a political impediment as described by Hadenius, Weibull and Wadbring (2008) and Wilson (1996).

11.3 Guidelines and Restrictions

How the informants work, and how they receive instructions on how to perform their job varies. The majority of the informants recognise experience and practical training to be the best way to learn respective newspapers standards. The guidelines are often given orally from editor or senior journalist to the new employee, instead of using written guidelines. The guidelines are not always instructions; it can also be reactions to the new journalist's work. In practice, this is experienced by the journalist informants when their stories are rejected, or when they are urged to be re-angled. After many similar incidents, the informants stop writing those sorts of stories. One informant commented the way instructions and guidelines are implemented in her private-owned editorial office:

“They make sense, but the problem isn't the written guidelines, it's the unwritten ones. It's just understood you don't write about certain issues, you don't tackle them in a certain way. There might be consequences.” (PI3).

First, the informant recognises the need of self-censoring (Wilson, 1996), and second, she anticipates consequences on contravening the unwritten guidelines. State-employed informants also follow unwritten guidelines, where the most prominent one is to cover the state from a positive point of view. Guidelines at private newspapers contain keywords in how to report, such as neutrality, fairness and presenting both sides of a story.
11.3.1 Censorship

Restrictions are usually applied on political stories; those are considered to be the most sensitive in news reporting. Depending on the ownership the type of restriction differs. Both state-employed and private-employed informants point out the notion of self-censorship (Wilson, 1996): “You have to exercise self-censorship. It's a shame it has to happen, but unfortunately you have to be careful about what you write.” (PI3). The informants that explicitly use the term are a minority, but all journalists and a majority of the editors describe restrictions correlating to the meaning of it. Informants at private newspapers cite fear as a reason for self-censorship, and this is emphasised by Tamil informants. The aforementioned fear has two dimensions; first personal security is the issue, and second, financial penalties on the editorial office. Informants specify the situation to be characterised with “many cases of assassinations of media people” (PI9), threatening letters and phone calls, attacks on media companies and retraction of licenses. The word ‘intimidation’ is often brought up when informants are talking about consequences for reporting on sensitive issues. Nevertheless, informants perceive the threat to be less prevalent now than compared to the period during the war.

11.4 Approach During Elections

11.4.1 The Honestly Biased

Informants from state newspapers emphasise their ownership at an early stage of the interview, using it as the basic fact from which the newspaper should be interpreted. The state point of view is to be upholding in the political reporting: “/.../ in state media all should be positive about the state. /.../ no criticism against the government” (SI5). During times of election focus is on government candidates. As a consequence: “Little space is given to the opposition” (SI4), which the other state-employed informants agree on, in contradiction to their idea of ideal reporting. The informants discuss the conditions under which they are reporting. It is a wide range of thoughts on the subject. Some informants, mainly editors, believe that state media is an important tool in the society for the government, and as long as the government is fulfilling their duties it is no problem. On the other side of the spectrum, journalist informants question the state journalism, and accuse it to be “not a good journalism” (SI5). Whether or not the informants’ personal political conviction is a factor to the different statements is unclear, since that information was not requested during the interviews. However, the state-employed informants are clear and honest about how they report on politics, and assert that the readers are aware of the newspapers’ standpoint. Private media informants problematise state media, claiming they are biased and tend to provide inaccurate news.
11.4.2 The Supposedly Unbiased

Private-employed informants strive for independence. When comparing themselves to state media they conclude that their political reporting to a further extent is unbiased, neutral and that they cover both sides. Contradictory, the private newspapers are often owned by politicians from the opposition, a trait that is found in the Polarized Plural Model and referred to as parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The majority of the informants do not experience direct influence from the newspaper management, but at the same time they perceive the editorial climate to lean towards the opposition's point of view. Informants at two newspapers explain that they function as the voice of the opposition: “/.../ we take the voice for the opposition, voice for the speechless.” (P14). Also, private newspapers have the ambition to cover all levels of society: “we basically represent everyone in our newspaper, the minorities, the majorities, the minority, the dissenting voice, and even for that matter, the government” (P12). The informants believe they have the possibility to uncover exposés and criticise political parties more than the state-employed newspapers. In contradiction, informants highlight the ownership's power in determining political angle, and subsequently certain criticism is not welcome to be published. Furthermore, government criticism is sensitive in this sector. One of the newspapers is newly introduced on the market and has not yet experienced an election. Those informants hope to be able to report in a balanced way, but are not convinced that will be the case, based on their experience from the media industry.

It seems as though private newspapers enjoy more independence than state newspapers, they have strong connections to politicians due to the ownerships. Albeit, private media can, or at least they aspire to, cover stories more independently as opposed to state newspapers. On this point, state-employed informants agree, but some of them emphasise that private media is not as unbiased as they promote themselves to be. Furthermore, investigating the ownerships of the newspapers, informants have shown tendencies to parallelism due to their politicisation. Politicians owning newspapers is a typical sample of parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

11.4.3 Influencing the People

Most informants note that the public is politically involved, or at least aware of the viewpoints of the newspapers. Some informants instead believe readers, particularly in rural areas, do not question the accuracy or reflect on angles in news and political reporting. The active reader seems to belong to an “elite”, similar to that of the editorial staff’s status (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Moreover, the informants state that the active readers buy newspapers that align with their own political beliefs. Whether or not newspapers actually affect the readers is unclear. Half of the informants believe
newspapers can affect people's political conviction, and also affect the outcome of an election. The other half takes a more hesitating stand on the issue, arguing newspapers can provide information about an election, but not determine the outcome. “They decide what they read, and they decide what they should choose, and to vote.” (SI2). Even though political stories may be angled, these informants deem the effect to be rather insignificant. Compared to the view on media's general effect, this conflicts with the majority of the informants' view that media can be highly influential on the people.

11.5 The Connection between Media, Journalists and Politics

11.5.1 The Duality of State and Private Media

The existence of state media seems to be the root of the private media's oppositional orientation. Informants in the private media sector view their purpose to be to enable a vast political reporting. Likewise, state-employed informants believe that the less space given to the opposition in state media is not an issue, since the opposition can channel through private media. “the opposition has the privately owned media to go to. /.../ They [the government] have only the state media to come.” (SI1). The division of political belonging in newspapers is clear, all informants agree on the state media's role to advocate governmental affairs. Private media informants perceive themselves to be less biased, but the majority of them assert private media to have a responsibility to publish content regarding the opposition. Some informants state their newspapers support the opposition, and similarly some state-employed informants recognise private newspapers to be biased in favour of the opposition.

The informants' opinion on the state-owned and privately owned newspapers is first and foremost that it is two different types of sectors, even though they work within the professional field. The duality 'state' and 'private' media seems to uphold itself, justifying its reporting referring to the other's way of conducting political news. The private-employed informants think that they need to cover the opposition extensively, due to the lack of space given to them in state media. Similarly, state-employed informants consider private media to write more in favour of the opposition, therefore pro-government reporting is defendable. The informants do believe that the different political reporting is necessary in Sri Lanka, and explain it to be so due to the current media system. The media environment, as well as the political parties, appears to be polarized (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) and the differences between them are distinct. The polarization creates a vacuum in the newspaper sphere, according to the informants. The vacuum can be filled by newspapers with different stand-points.
11.5.2 Why Upset a Friend?

Not only do the informants mention the ownership to influence the newspapers' content or cause restrictions, the reporting is also dependent on contacts within the political sphere. Informants claim friendly relations between newspaper employees and politicians to be a factor to be taken in to consideration. When asking about newspapers' ownership the informants, mainly from private media, list owners and their other political assignments to prove the close relationship between journalism and politics. Personal contacts are said to be common as well. Informant PI1 describes favours between media and politicians, such as politicians helping out with electricity bills. When accepting a favour, the editorial is in debt to the provider. Such situations are typical examples of clientelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In line with this, Informant PI9 reflects on the relationship between journalists and politicians:

“They're [journalists] depending on politicians. They don't wanna make them angry. If I write the truth the minister might be angry with me. If minister is my friend, why would I make him angry? Some journalists think so, not all of them, but some think so. They have good relations with ministers or chairmans or authorities. They're friends. And they're reporting.”

The informant describes a conditioned interaction between journalists and politicians, though not generalising the entire profession. Several private-employed informants recognise these circumstances exemplified by the informant. Political connections are an inevitable occurrence in the profession of journalists. State media informants are also conditioned by politics, but in a more structural way by reason of governmental ownership.

At one private newspaper, the coverage of a press conference was observed. Arriving at the press conference hall at a government department, the informant first went to the director's room. Soon the room was filled with the seven ministers holding the press conference; among others the minister of justice, education and health. The informant was the only media person in the room, and the informant warmly greeted the politicians. What is interesting with this observation is that the informant's newspaper is seen to be independent and relatively unbiased. Whether or not the actual reporting is affected by this can only be speculated in. The observation indicates that the Sri Lankan media climate can have resemblances to the Polarized Pluralist Model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Furthermore, it is a practical example of the relationship between journalists and politicians as it has been described by the main informants.
11.5.3 Journalism and Democracy

The meaning of democracy for the informants primarily revolves around notions of freedom and independence (Held, 1987; Strömback, 2004). An individual aspect of democracy is also connotated: “democracy is to live how I want to live” (Pl9). When it comes to comprehending the word in relation with politics, as a political concept (Dahl, 1998) focus is on the freedom of speech and right to information. When informants discuss media's role in general and during elections, they cover how they believe journalism can contribute to democracy, but without mentioning the term. Nevertheless, media has a democratic responsibility. This responsibility enables people to make informed decisions, and it includes to provide information about political parties and alternative lifestyles. State-employed informants perceive Sri Lanka to be a more democratic country than private-employed informants. The latter group question the concept itself, as well as the country's governance which they believe is flawed. The lack of press freedom and the non-existing right of information is commonly used as examples. The right to information is thought of as a valuable improvement for Sri Lankan media. The informants also stress the importance of uniting all journalists and editors, to form a movement that can act as a powerful force for the development of the media environment. Exactly what this organisation would do is not formulated by the informants, but the idea is common among them.

12. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This thesis concludes a complex relationship between journalism and politics in Sri Lanka. National laws and unwritten restrictions affect the media environment and journalism negatively. As Curran and Park (2000) assert, the nation itself has proven to be a highly interesting context to analyse a media system from.

12.1 Ideals and Reality

The correlation between the informants' descriptions of media's role and the political reporting does not fully correspond to each other. On the one hand there are role perceptions and profession ideals, and on the other hand, it is the actual political reporting. The dissimilarities between them cause conflict for the majority of informants. Terms relating to the objectivity ideal (Allan, 2010) are desired by the informants, but not put in to realisation when covering political affairs or elections. Private-employed informants address this as a problem, but state informants reflect less on the subject. The ideal media system for informants from private newspapers is more visionary where press freedom and independence are valuable. Furthermore, these informants advocate openness
and notions relating to objectivity (Allan, 2010). Some state-employed informants mention similar concepts, but ultimately they tend to refer to their ownership and its beliefs when reflecting on such matters. The reason for this is difficult to determine from the material, but speculatively it can differ due to more or less restrictive owners, whereas the state-employed informants might feel urged to answer in accordance to the state's point of view. In general, the state-employed informants problematised less, maybe because of the role perception with similarities in the procedural democracy model (Nord & Strömöck, 2004). Their demand on journalism is not as high as private-employed informants', who have aspirations for free and open media. Interviewing the informants sometimes seemed like interviewing two different groups of professionals. The contrast between state-employed and private-employed informants was considerably substantial, especially on how they view their own profession and the ideals and future of the field. Although, media is considered to be powerful by all informants; it is an institution with the ability to affect people as well as politicians. Recognising this is an important understanding on Sri Lankan media environment, and could be a reason why political restrictions are commonplace. Decision makers and politicians who acknowledge media's power might be intimidated by it, and hence impediments are, officially or unofficially, incorporated. But at the same time journalism affects politics, it is clear that politics affect media in an unhealthy way regarding the restrictions upheld by the Sri Lankan state. As a result, an anxious media environment is created with fear within the profession of journalism, judging from the private-employed informants' statements.

12.2 A Substantial Connection Between Journalism and Politics

Regardless of newspaper ownership, all informants recognise informative news to be media's prime responsibility. Presenting news in a fair and balanced way is an aspiration, but striving towards such reporting appears to be difficult when covering political affairs, which also is concluded by Bolin (2006). Informants experience political ties, due to ownership, that reduces the independence of the newspaper. The political interference differs in some ways between state and private media. Whereas the first explicitly, according to the informants, advocate the government, some private newspapers proclaim their independence but admit a certain bias. Nevertheless, tendencies towards instrumentalization as described by Hallin and Mancini (2004), is indicated in both state and private newspapers. Examples of clientelism and parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) are found in the analysis of the informants' statements. The sturdy connection between journalists and politicians such as personal relations or professional favours, is revealed. What this actually means to the Sri Lankan society is debatable. One possible conclusion is that it affects news reporting quality in terms of neutrality, unbiased news and balance (Allan, 2010), which is seriously disadvantageous
for the political reporting. The consequences of not reporting in line with mentioned keywords can disable the citizens in making informed decisions, one of the key functions for media especially during election periods (Strömbäck, 2004). Focusing on state newspapers the question about propaganda can be raised. State media fulfils a political purpose, and the analysis concludes that it is used in favour of the government both in general news reporting and during election periods. The material is insufficient to prove governmental propaganda tendencies, but self-censorship (Wilson, 1996) has been experienced by a majority of informants, both state and private-employed. Restricting the political content of newspapers is harmful for independent media and for democracy (Allan, 2010; Nord & Strömbäck, 2004). The restrictions on, and political interference in, Sri Lankan media is under all critique. Not only is state newspapers biased in their political reporting, but also private-employed informants witness political interference and biasedness at their editorials, even though they strive towards independence and objectivity. The informants seem to agree on the necessary balance that has arose as a result of the media environment – state media is pro-government and private media therefore, indirectly supports the opposition. But where is the independent media?

12.3 Moving Forward

Some might say, independent media is not necessary thanks to the current media polarization, but this argument is weak. As previously stated, press freedom and independence is a fundamental ingredient in a functional democracy (Nord & Strömbäck, 2004; Strömbäck, 2004). The newspapers can serve a purpose of a public sphere if freedom is present and respected. A public sphere does not appear to fully exist due to the concluded self-censorship, clientelism, parallelism and instrumentalization, even though Hallin and Mancini (2004) assert the public sphere to be open in a country with similarities to the Polarized Pluralist Model. According to the informants, newspapers cannot report from the perspective of all different citizens, groups or opinions. Today, the news reporting in Sri Lanka inevitably becomes more biased due to the current media system. The analysis shows the infliction of censorship due to political structure. The anticipated consequences for contravening the news reporting norm is alarming. Reporting on sensitive, political issues can be followed up by intimidation directed either towards the individual journalist, or towards the editorial office. The fear expressed by some informants, mainly private-employed, ought to be taken seriously. For the profession itself, as well as for non-governmental organisations, it is crucial to proceed with awareness and decisiveness to improve the media situation. Professional assembly and a plan for development are in order, as many informants requested. How to actually obtain increased press freedom and to ascertain safety for journalists is yet to be solved, since the
informants have not provided adequate solutions to this situation. The gorge between state and private newspapers appears critical. The first step could be to conjoin the journalists within the different media houses. Sri Lanka has a ubiquitous and highly present state where social responsibility is considered desirable. By diminishing the differences between the two types of journalists, perhaps social responsibility in media can be realised to a further extent. On a structural level, the intimidation of journalists ought to be obstructed, and the right to information must be constituted. Media must gain its independence, and be trusted with self-regulatory organs as opposed to censored news reporting. The war in Sri Lanka may be over, but the fight for press freedom has only started.
13. REFERENCES


Electronic references

CPA Lanka - Centre for Policy Alternatives

Fojo
1: http://www.fojo.se/international/international-projects/sri-lanka
2: http://www.fojo.se/polopoly_fs/1.1900!Code%20of%20Ethics-%20English.pdf

Freedom House
1: http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2011

Press Complaint Commission of Sri Lanka
1: http://www.pcces.lk/about_overview.php

Press Reference
1: http://www.pressreference.com/Sa-Sw/Sri-Lanka.html

Reporters Without Borders

Sida – Swedish International Development Cooperation Association:
1: http://www.sida.se/Svenska/Lander--regioner/Asien/Sri-Lanka/Lar-kanna-Sri-Lanka
2: http://www.sida.se/Svenska/Lander--regioner/Asien/Sri-Lanka/Program-och-projekt/Oberoende-pressinstitut-kammar-for-yttredelfrihet

Sri Lanka Press Institute
1: http://www.slpi.lk/about_background_slpi.php

UCDP - Uppsala Conflict Database Programme, (2011)
1: http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=144&regionSelect=6-Central_and_Southern_Asia

UD - Foreign Affairs Department of Sweden (Utrikesdepartementet)
1: http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/2520/a/14505?setEnableCookies=true
2: http://www.sweden.gov.se/download/6b07efc2.doc?major=1&minor=14505&cn=attachmentDuplicator_0_attachment
UN - United Nations