Television Journalism, Market-orientation, and Media Democratization in Bangladesh

by

Anis Rahman

MA, Goldsmiths University of London, 2008
MSS, University of Rajshahi, 2007
BSS, University of Rajshahi, 2005

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the
School of Communication
Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

© Anis Rahman
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Fall 2017

All rights reserved. However, in accordance with the Copyright Act of Canada, this work may be reproduced, without authorization, under the conditions for Fair Dealing. Therefore, limited reproduction of this work for the purposes of private study, research, education, satire, parody, criticism, review and news reporting is likely to be in accordance with the law, particularly if cited appropriately.
## Approval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Anis Rahman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree:</td>
<td>Doctor of Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>Television Journalism, Market-orientation, and Media Democratization in Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examining Committee:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair:</td>
<td>Gary McCarron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuezhi Zhao</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Supervisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Hackett</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Anderson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart Poyntz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Examiner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen McDowell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Examiner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Communication and Information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida State University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Date Defended/Approved:    | December 15, 2017        |
Ethics Statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

a. human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics

or

b. advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University

or has conducted the research

c. as a co-investigator, collaborator, or research assistant in a research project approved in advance.

A copy of the approval letter has been filed with the Theses Office of the University Library at the time of submission of this thesis or project.

The original application for approval and letter of approval are filed with the relevant offices. Inquiries may be directed to those authorities.

Simon Fraser University Library
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

Update Spring 2016
Abstract

This dissertation critically examines the emergence of a neoliberal market-oriented media system in Bangladesh and its impact on news production in both television channels and broadcast policymaking. The dissertation dissects the ownership structure and politics of licensing private television channels by successive governments between 1995 and 2017. It surveys the trends in the commercialization of television news to assess the symbolic and economic influence of advertising on journalism. It argues that the politically concentrated ownership of television and the practices of market-oriented television journalism in Bangladesh are symbiotically embedded with the political and social transformation of the nation-state, a postcolonial quest for nation-building, as well as an asymmetrical integration with the processes of neoliberal globalization.

The analysis draws insights from critical and transcultural approaches to political economy of communication. Based on a mixture of multisite case studies, in-depth interviews, and documentary research methods, the study reveals multiple areas of journalistic struggles and democratic deficits in the television industry. It shows that with the rapid growth of private television channels and online media, state-administered television in Bangladesh is faced with a higher pressure of political instrumentalization and advertising dependency. The study demonstrates that although news production in private television channels appears to be less hierarchical, the ideology of market-orientation serves as an unwritten in-house self-censorship policy. It is evident that there is a mutual relationship between the ownership of television channels and ways in which news are produced and commodified within an urban-centric, exploitative and gendered division of labor.

The study further reveals that the process of broadcast policymaking in Bangladesh, despite its inclusion of multiple stakeholders, is dominated by the same forces in a politico-commercial nexus which also owns and leads the private television industry. The study concludes that policy reform alone can achieve very little in the context of a postcolonial-turned-neoliberal nation-state like Bangladesh, as the problems are deeply rooted in political practices and social relations in which public participation in policymaking is either made structurally impossible or rendered invisible to the masses. To make the media system more democratic and inclusive, policy reform must be aligned with a broader and more progressive socio-political movement for social change.
Keywords: Bangladesh; Television Ownership; News Production; Market-orientation; Broadcast Policy; Qualitative Research
To my mother Nurunnahar Begum, who sacrificed her life by bearing the pain of losing four children and our father, while I left her alone in our village to get my degrees

To my brother Mizanur Rahman, who raised me for half of my life but gave up his to keep up his dignity in the face of an unequal and unjust society
Acknowledgements

This dissertation is an arduous project. Many people have directly and indirectly contributed at various stages of my undergraduate and graduate life to make this dissertation a reality. First, I am indebted to my supervisory committee, made up of Professors Yuezhi Zhao, Robert Hackett, and Robert Anderson, for providing me with diligent mentoring and enduring supports.

Professor Zhao—with her high energy optimism, intellectual sophistication, and kind patience—walked me through a rigorous intellectual journey during my coursework, comprehensive examination, and the entire dissertation writing and revision processes. As the Senior Supervisor, Professor Zhao went beyond and above the call of duty to make sure that I complete all requirements on time. Professor Hackett provided me with meticulous methodical guidance to improve the theoretical consistency and analytical rigor of the thesis. Professor Anderson’s compassionate and gentle role modeling gave me power and self-confidence during the time of crisis. I am very thankful to the examiners of this thesis, Professors Stuart Poyntz (SFU School of Communication) and Stephen D McDowell (Florida State University), who carefully examined the thesis and gave me important suggestions and new directions in the post-defense stage.

I am indebted to the encouragements and intellectual motivations that I received from many faculty members of the School of Communication, including Professors Richard Gruneau, Gary McCarron, Catherine Murray, Adel Iskandar, Katherine Reilly, Enda Brophy, Shane Gunster, Zoe Druick, Jody Baker, Daniel Ahadi, and Dal Yong Jin. I am thankful for the patience supports from the highly efficient and friendly staff of the School of Communication including Lucie Menkveld, Denise Vanderwolf, Neena Shahani, Amy Soo, and Jill Baryluk. Special thanks to Graduate Program Coordinator Jason Congdon who was always available to advise and support.

I am thankful to my friends, cohorts, and colleagues at the School of Communication who supported me for years and made me feel the School as my second home, including Byron Hauck (Who meticulously helped me with the editing work of nearly half volume of my dissertation), Robert Neubauer, Robert Pray, Sylvia Blake, John Hughes, Indranil Chakraborty, Nawal Musleh-Motut, Gopa Biswas, Betty Ackah, Sibo Chen, Shan Wu, Julie Frizzo-Barker, Kyle Thompson, Graeme Webb, Vincent
Andrisani, Maggie MacAulay, and Matthew Greaves. I am lucky to have this incredible support group. Also, thanks to the well-wishers and friends beyond the School, including Sylvia Roberts (SFU Communication Liaison Librarian), Sarah Louise Turner (SFU Teaching and Learning Centre), Ian Chunn (Columbia College), Sylvia Richardson and Stuart Richardson, Gretchen Ferguson (Simon Fraser University), and Melissa R Meade (Temple University).

I am grateful to several scholars and mentors who cared about my doctoral project and inspired me to excel, including Professors Gregory Ferrell Lowe (Northwestern University Qatar), Minna Aslama Horowitz (St. John’s University), Ali Riaz (Illinois State University), Juraj Kittler (St. Lawrence University), and Azmat Rasul (Florida State University). I am also thankful to my mentors at Goldsmiths University of London, Professors James Curran, Des Freedman, and Peter Lee-Wright.

I want to express deep gratitude to my undergraduate and graduate teachers and mentors in Bangladesh who shaped my academic character and given me hope and inspiration to come to this level of my academic career and to get this project done, such as Professors Salim Reza Newton (University of Rajshahi), A-Al Mamun (University of Rajshahi), Pradip Kumar Panday (University of Rajshahi), Dulal Chandra Biswas (University of Rajshahi), as well as Professors Fahmidul Haq (University of Dhaka), Gitiara Nasreen (University of Dhaka), SM Shameem Reza (University of Dhaka), Abdur Razzaque Khan (University of Dhaka), Kaberi Gayen (University of Dhaka), Abu J M S Alam Bhuiyan (University of Dhaka), Mohammad Sahid Ullah (University of Chittagong), and Syed Saad Andaleeb (BRAC University).

This thesis would be nothing without the helpful participation of all interviewees listed in the Appendix. I am thankful to all of them for their time and participation. I want to specially thank my friends and senior cohorts who helped me during the data collection stage, in addition to providing life-long supports and motivations, including Tofael Ahmad (Maasranga TV), Mahfuz Mishu (Jamuna TV), Arafat Siddique (NTV), Abdullah Al Mamun (BTV), Zannatul Bakeya Keka (Channel i), Atikuzzaman Russel (New Age), Benaul Islam Kajal (Prime Minister’s Office), Mahmudur Rahman Sohel (Australia), Ashrafual Alam Naser (Sweden), and Wolilul Kabir Asif (Dhaka).
Thanks to my Bangladeshi friends in Vancouver, Sanjeeda Nasreen, Shakil Seeraji, Suhash Shimon, and Mahmud Hasan Tipu, who were curious of my thesis and wanted me to do it well. Thanks to the helpful staff of the Starbucks at Station Square in Burnaby, who not only gave me a much necessary space to write a large chunk of this dissertation, but also cheered me up with a smile and strong caffeine.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to my wife Afsarina Runi—my ex-classmate and lifelong partner-in-crime—who never gave up on me, who supported me tirelessly. We gave birth to the two most precious in our lives- Aurora and Orion, and my wife has singlehandedly taken care of our two children. I cannot thank her enough for giving me unconditional love and support through taking charge of everything in the family. I am thankful to both Aurora and Orion for their cheerful presence in our lives and inspiring me every day. I know, I have deprived them of my timely presence and this thesis could not be possible without their sacrifice. I hope someday they will write a better thesis than I did. Also thanks to my father-in-law Azizul Haque who supported me mentally to finish the dissertation. I am thankful beyond words to my mother Nurunnahar Begum, father late Lokman Hossain, and brother late Mizanur Rahman, all who shaped my life with unconditional love and boundless hope for my wellbeing and academic development. Also thanks to my nieces Fahmida Mizan Rafa and Faria Mizan Riya, and nephew Imdadul Haq Badhon for thinking very high of me, and keeping expecting me to come back to home soon as soon as I finish this project.

If there is anything good in this project, it belongs to all those above-mentioned names who helped me to achieve it one way or another. All the flaws belong to me.
# Table of Contents

Approval .................................................................................................................................................. ii  
Ethics Statement ................................................................................................................................... iii  
Abstract ................................................................................................................................................ iv  
Dedication .............................................................................................................................................. vi  
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................ vii  
Table of Contents ................................................................................................................................. x  
List of Tables ......................................................................................................................................... xiii  
List of Figures ......................................................................................................................................... xiv  
List of Screenshots ............................................................................................................................... xv  
List of Acronyms .................................................................................................................................... xvi  
Maps ....................................................................................................................................................... xvii  

## Chapter 1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 1  
1.1. Research Questions and Key Arguments ......................................................................................... 11  
1.2. Notes on Theoretical Frameworks ................................................................................................... 13  
1.2.1. Global Capitalism and Neoliberal Globalization ...................................................................... 14  
1.2.2. Critical Political Economy of Communication ........................................................................ 20  
1.2.3. Market-oriented Journalism ...................................................................................................... 26  
1.2.4. Media Democratization and Media Policy Reform ................................................................... 30  
1.3. Notes on Methodology ................................................................................................................. 33  
1.3.1. Multi-site Case Studies .............................................................................................................. 34  
1.3.2. In-depth and Key-informant Interviews .................................................................................. 37  
1.3.3. Documentary Study .................................................................................................................. 39  
1.3.4. Triangulation ............................................................................................................................ 40  
1.3.5. Research Ethics ....................................................................................................................... 41  
1.4. Chapter Outlines ............................................................................................................................ 41  

## Chapter 2. Media in Bangladesh ........................................................................................................... 45  
2.1. The Colonial Legacy ......................................................................................................................... 45  
2.2. The Postcolonial Transformations ................................................................................................... 51  
2.3. The Post-liberation Media Politics ................................................................................................. 55  
2.4. Democratization of Politics, Neoliberalization of Economy .......................................................... 57  
2.5. Rise of Private Television in Bangladesh ..................................................................................... 60  
2.6. The Global Context of Growth of Television ................................................................................ 62  
2.7. The Launching of Market-orientation ............................................................................................ 65  
2.8. The Broader Media Environment ................................................................................................... 67  
2.8.1. Radio Broadcasting: The Decline and the New Height ............................................................ 73  
2.8.2. Cyberspace and Changing Media Platforms ............................................................................ 74  
2.8.3. Social media and political participation ................................................................................... 75  
2.8.4. The Issues and Debates of Digital Divides .............................................................................. 77  
2.9. Chapter Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 80
Chapter 3. A Political Economy of State-broadcasting .......................................... 82
3.1. State-broadcasting in South Asia ................................................................. 83
3.2. Organization and Structure of State-broadcasting ....................................... 86
3.3. Transition from State-broadcasting to State Media ....................................... 87
   3.3.1. From Mono-platform to Multiplatform Mediation .............................. 87
   3.3.2. From Analog to Digital Broadcasting .................................................. 88
   3.3.3. Implication for Digital Switchover ...................................................... 89
3.4. Critical Issues of State-broadcasting ............................................................ 90
   3.4.1. Political Polarization and Struggle for Autonomy .......................... 90
   3.4.2. Structural Hierarchy and Division of Labor ........................................ 93
   3.4.3. Commercialization of State-broadcasting ........................................... 96
   3.4.4. Urban-centric News Broadcasting ...................................................... 98
   3.4.5. Efforts for Public Service ................................................................. 99
   3.4.6. Chapter Conclusion ........................................................................ 101

Chapter 4. Ownership Structure and Politics of Licensing Private Television
Channels ............................................................................................................ 103
4.1. Meet the Politico-Commercial Nexus ....................................................... 103
4.2. The Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) ............................ 105
4.3. A Beginner’s Guide to Getting a TV License in Bangladesh ....................... 109
   4.3.1. Preparatory Stage: Qualify the Nexus ................................................. 110
   4.3.2. Licensing Stage: Go through the Process ............................................ 114
4.4. TV Licensing by BNP Regimes ................................................................. 115
4.5. TV Licensing by Awami League regimes ................................................... 118
4.6. Conglomerate Ownership of Television .................................................... 124
4.7. Foreign Ownership of Television: Mission Impossible? ......................... 126
4.8. Shutting Down Television Channels ........................................................... 128
4.9. The Impact of Ownership on Television Production ................................. 130
   4.9.1. Political Instrumentalization of News Broadcasting? ...................... 130
   4.9.2. Struggles for Journalistic Autonomy ............................................... 133
   4.9.3. Wage as a Means of Control ............................................................. 134
   4.9.4. Gendered Division of Labor ............................................................... 136
   4.9.5. The Collateral Damage of Political Ownership of Television .......... 138
4.10. Chapter Conclusion ................................................................................. 139

Chapter 5. Market-orientation of Television Journalism ................................. 140
5.1. Market-orientation as a Global Trend ....................................................... 140
   5.1.1. Advertising as a de facto Licensing Authority? .............................. 141
   5.1.2. Integration of Television to Translocal Flow of Capital .................. 143
   5.1.3. All Hail Corporate-Branding! ............................................................. 145
5.2. Impact of Market-orientation on News Production .................................... 153
   5.2.1. Depoliticization of Public Debates .................................................. 154
   5.2.2. Market-Oriented as Self-Censorship .............................................. 156
         Direct Interference of Advertisers ......................................................... 157
         Indirect Ways of Interference: Through Newsroom Gatekeeping ....... 159
5.2.3. Advertisers as News, News as Advertising ................................................. 160
5.2.4. Legitimation of Symbolic Dominance of Advertisers ............................... 164
5.2.5. Talk Show: Making Any Difference? ....................................................... 166
5.2.6. Silencing the Voice of the Counterpublics? .............................................. 171
5.2.7. Rating as a Fake Commodity? ................................................................... 173
5.2.8. Perceived Loss of Credibility .................................................................... 174
5.2.9. Chapter Conclusion ..................................................................................... 175

Chapter 6. The Politics of Broadcast Policymaking and Prospects of Media Democratization .............................................................................................................. 177

6.1.2. Shifts in Policymaking ............................................................................. 181
6.1.3. The Politics of Broadcast Policy in South Asian Contexts ..................... 183
6.1.4. Major Policies Related to Broadcasting in Bangladesh ......................... 186

6.2. The Making of National Broadcast Policy 2014 .......................................... 188

6.2.1. Position of Stakeholders in National Broadcast Policymaking .............. 189
  The Ministry of Information – Key Stakeholder .............................................. 192
  Position of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) ........................................... 194
  Position of Civil Society Members ................................................................. 197

6.2.2. Public Participation in Policymaking ....................................................... 199

6.2.3. Policy Overload, Policy Conundrum ...................................................... 201

6.3. Community Radio Policy: A New Hope? .................................................... 203

6.4. Implications for Media Democratization ..................................................... 207

6.5. Chapter Conclusion ..................................................................................... 209

Chapter 7. Further Discussions and Conclusion ................................................. 211

References ........................................................................................................... 224

Appendix A: List of Interviewees ........................................................................ 247

Appendix B: Sample ‘No Objection Certificate’ aka ‘the License’ of a Private Television Channel Television (in Bangla) ...................................................... 249

Appendix C: Sample Application Form for Satellite Television ......................... 251

Appendix D: Meeting Notice to the Members of the National Broadcast Policy 2014 Committee (in Bangla) ................................................................. 253

Appendix E: Examples of Donor Agency Supported Media Initiatives on Public Issues in Bangladesh ................................................................. 254
### List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.1</td>
<td>Basic Types of Designs for Case Studies</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.2</td>
<td>Research Data Collection Tools and Sources</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.3</td>
<td>Chapter Organization of the Dissertation</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1</td>
<td>Types of Television During Various Governments (1964-2017)</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.2</td>
<td>Number of Satellite TV Channels in India (2013-2017)</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.3</td>
<td>Media at a Glance, 2014</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.4</td>
<td>Television in Bangladesh (1964-2017)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.5</td>
<td>Telecommunication and ICT Growth in Bangladesh (2012-2016):</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>According to International Telecommunication Union (ITU)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.6</td>
<td>Telecommunication and ICT Growth in Bangladesh (2012-2017):</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>According to Bangladesh Government (BTRC)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Bangladesh Television (BTV) at a Glance (2016)</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>Status of Digital Switchover in South Asia</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Gender Roles in Bangladesh Television (BTV)</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4</td>
<td>BTV Daily News Bulletins: Hour, Duration, and Broadcast type</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Patterns of TV License Ownership by BNP-led Government</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Patterns of TV License Ownership by AL-led Government (second</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>batch 2009-2011)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>Patterns of TV License Ownership by Awami League-led Government (third</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>batch 2013)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.4</td>
<td>Conglomerate Ownership of Television in Bangladesh</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.5</td>
<td>List of Television Channels Shut Down by Governments</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.6</td>
<td>Gender Roles in Channel-i Newsroom (2013-2014)</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.7</td>
<td>Gender Roles in Somoy Television (2014)</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.1</td>
<td>Time Distribution of News in Channel i: Content vs Advertising</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.2</td>
<td>Origin of Branded TV Programs in Channel-i (2003-2004)</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.3</td>
<td>Types of Branding of Television News in Channel-i</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.4</td>
<td>List of Sponsored Programs in Channel-i</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.5</td>
<td>Geography of Channel-i Program Sponsors: Local, Regional, and Transnational</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.6</td>
<td>Examples of Advertisements Camouflaged as News in Channel i</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assignment Schedule 10.30 PM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.1</td>
<td>Requirements for Down-linking Bangladeshi Channels in India</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.2</td>
<td>Members of National Broadcast Policy (2014) Committee</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.3</td>
<td>Examples of Television Owners’ Influence on National Broadcast Policy</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.4</td>
<td>Examples of Television Owners’ Influence on Private Television</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ownership, Establishment, and Operation Policy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## List of Figures

| Figure 1.1. | United Nations Map of Bangladesh ........................................................... xvii |
| Figure 1.2. | United Nations Map of South Asia .............................................................. xviii |
| Figure 1.3. | Thesis Map ....................................................................................................... xix |
| Figure 2.1. | The 1893 General Political Map of the Indian Empire ......................................... 46 |
| Figure 2.2. | India’s Chain of Broadcasting Stations Actual and Prospective, and the Areas Covered (1937). ................................................................. 50 |
| Figure 2.3. | Continental and Sub-continental Distribution of 24/7 Channels ...................... 62 |
| Figure 2.4. | Increase of Private TV Channels in Bangladesh, 1997-2014 ............................ 71 |
| Figure 2.5. | Growth of Access to Television Media, 1995-2013 .............................................. 71 |
| Figure 2.6. | Audience Reach Across Varieties of Media, 2006-2013 ..................................... 72 |
| Figure 3.1. | Newsroom Hierarchy in Bangladesh Television (BTV) ........................................ 93 |
| Figure 3.2. | Poster of a Popular Magazine Show in BTV: Ittadi ......................................... 100 |
| Figure 4.1. | Indian and Pakistani TV Channels Banned from Receiving Local Adverts Produced in Bangladesh .............................................................. 108 |
| Figure 4.2. | Preparatory Stage to Obtain a Television License .............................................. 111 |
| Figure 4.3. | The Licensing Process of a Private Television in Bangladesh ............................ 113 |
| Figure 5.1. | Vertical and Horizontal Integration of Local television to Translocal Flow of Capital ................................................................. 144 |
| Figure 5.2. | Sample Television Rating Point May 2016 ...................................................... 173 |
| Figure 6.1. | Stakeholders in National Broadcast Policymaking ............................................ 191 |
| Figure 6.2. | Ownership and Locations of Community Radio (2008-2017) .......................... 205 |
| Figure 7.1. | Theoretical and Analytical Models of the Dissertation ...................................... 211 |
| Figure 7.2. | Research Methods of the Dissertation ............................................................ 214 |
List of Screenshots

Screenshot 3.1. Private TV Channels Must air BTV News At least Once per Day ............... 97
Screenshot 3.2. A Folk Cultural Performance of Young Artists in BTV .............................. 99
Screenshot 4.1. Coverage of Owner in NTV .......................................................................... 116
Screenshot 4.2. ATN Bangla Owner’s Solo Musical Program ............................................. 118
Screenshot 4.3. Jamuna TV showing advertisement of Jamuna Future Park ..................... 127
Screenshot 5.1. Example of News Category Branding: Standard Bank Prime News in ATN News ................................................. 147
Screenshot 5.2. Example of News Slot Branding: Universal Food Presents Election Update in ATN News ................................................................. 148
Screenshot 5.3. Example of News Category Branding: Homeland Life Insurance Lead News in Channel i .................................................. 148
Screenshot 5.4. L-shape Advertising in Somoy News .............................................................. 149
Screenshot 5.5. Example of News Segment Branding: Mercantile Bank International News in ATN Bangla .................................................. 149
Screenshot 5.7. Example of Pervasive Multiple Corporate Branding and Advertising in Somoy News ................................................................. 152
Screenshot 5.8. Example of News Slot Branding: Social Islami Bank Special News in Channel i ................................................................. 162
Screenshot 5.9. Example of a Brander Becoming a News in Channel i: Social Islami Bank Business Review Meeting ................................................. 162
Screenshot 5.10. Example of Commodified Nationalism as News in ATN Bangla ............. 163
Screenshot 5.11. Example of Multi-sponsor News Slot Branding: Trust Bank DLF IPL News in Channel i ................................................................. 164
Screenshot 5.12. Example of a Commodified Talk Show with Audience Engagement in Somoy News ................................................................. 168
Screenshot 5.13. Grameen Phone Tritiyo Matra: A Branded Talk Show .............................. 168
Screenshot 5.14. Channel i Tritio Matra Talk Show ................................................................. 169
Screenshot 7.1. An Example of Award Winning Reporting on Transgender Issues ........... 220
Screenshot 7.2. Example of a Report on Industrial Pollution in Dhaka City and its Impact on Child Health ......................................................... 221
Screenshot 7.3. Example of a Reputed Agricultural Program in Channel i: Hridoye Mathi O Manush ................................................................. 221
Screenshot 7.4. BBC Bangladesh Sanglap - A Popular Dialogue Talk Show ............... 222
# List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIR</td>
<td>All India Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATCO</td>
<td>Association of Television Channel Owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAL</td>
<td>Bangladesh Awami League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEA</td>
<td>Bangladesh Economics Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEXIMCO</td>
<td>Bangladesh Export Import Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BGMEA</td>
<td>Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>Bangladesh Nationalist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNNRC</td>
<td>Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTRC</td>
<td>Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTV</td>
<td>Bangladesh Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPEC</td>
<td>Critical Political Economy of Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>Community Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBCCI</td>
<td>Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDI</td>
<td>Foreign Direct Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTA</td>
<td>Free Trade Agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBC</td>
<td>Pakistan Broadcast Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEMRA</td>
<td>Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSB</td>
<td>Public Service Broadcasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSM</td>
<td>Public Service Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTV</td>
<td>Pakistan Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJSC</td>
<td>Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAI</td>
<td>Telecom Regulatory Authority of India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSIS</td>
<td>World Summit on the Information Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Maps

Figure 1.1. United Nations Map of Bangladesh
Figure 1.2. United Nations Map of South Asia
This map represents the key events, factors, and outcomes that are interconnected to the state of television ownership, journalism, and broadcast policymaking in Bangladesh. The colors represent proximity between different areas subject to open interpretation by its readers.
Chapter 1. Introduction

This dissertation focuses on the growth of Bangladesh’s television industry, an epicenter of a thriving media system in South Asia, where political and corporate interests have begun to shape the news in greater measure. Although it has existed for centuries – as a part of the British colonized subcontinent, and then as the eastern province of Pakistan (1947-1971), the country emerged as an independent nation in 1971 (Riaz & Rahman, 2016; Riaz, 2016). With an area of 147,570 square km and more than 160 million population, Bangladesh is almost surrounded by India, with short frontier with Myanmar, and a southern coastline on the Bay of Bengal (Figure 1.1).

Since its independence Bangladesh has faced adverse situations. It became widely known for being an overcrowded country overwhelmed with famine, cyclones, military coups, and endemic poverty. However, this scenario has changed in the last three decades with a political shift from authoritarianism to multi-party democracy and subsequent economic liberalization in 1990s. While the country lacks a reputation for its media industry, Bangladesh witnessed the remarkable emergence of a market-based media and communications industry paralleling the growth of its industrial manufacturing and service sectors following this political liberalization. During this period of economic growth successive governments have worked at taming a high rate of population growth as well as dealing with political instability and widespread corruption practices, making considerable progress in many social fields. The contradiction of growth despite instability is known as ‘Bangladesh Paradox’. Political scientist, Ali Riaz sums this up in his widely circulated book, *Bangladesh: A Political History Since Independence* (2016):

Bangladesh is a country of paradoxes. The eighth most populous country of the world, it has attracted considerable attention from the international media and western policy-makers in recent years, often for the wrong reasons: corruption, natural disasters caused by its precarious geographical location, and volatile political situations with several military coups, following its independence from Pakistan in 1971. Institutional corruption, growing religious intolerance and Islamist militancy have reflected the weakness of the state and undermined its capacity. Yet the country has demonstrated significant economic potential and has achieved successes in areas such as female education, population control and reductions in child mortality. (Riaz, 2016)
Indeed, Bangladesh is seeing tremendous GDP growth, with 7.1 per cent growth rate in 2016, ranking 33rd in the world by purchasing power parity. A former British diplomat joins Ali Riaz with a rave review, “Bangladesh has become a ‘lower-middle-class income country’, with the world’s second largest readymade garments industry, migrant worker remittances providing 11 per cent of GDP, and sharply rising agricultural production despite the loss of cultivable land to development” (Fowler, 2017, p. 159). Fowler’s remark points towards the major industrial feat the country achieved through massive restructuring of economic policies and infrastructural development in its post-authoritarian era, which has enabled a large amount of foreign direct investment in a very short period. In less than two decades, Bangladesh has become a leading exporter of readymade garments, contributing more than US$25 billion to its economy in the 2014-2015 fiscal year alone (The Daily Star, 2016, July 17). Not surprisingly, once a fierce critic of corruption in Bangladesh, the World Bank recognizes Bangladesh as a role model for developing countries, stating:

Born out of a devastating war, Bangladesh was shattered in 1971. Forty-five years later the country has transformed itself into a model of human and economic development. Its success in improving the standards of living of its people is rooted in a resilient population, strong partnerships between the government, NGO’s and the private sector. Bangladesh holds lessons for other emerging economies and this year, the World Bank Group will celebrate End Poverty Day in Bangladesh. [World Bank, 2016, Oct 17]

This is the mainstream narrative of economic growth in Bangladesh, which is celebrated and promoted by successive and incumbent governments; as each claims major credit for it. However, there is another narrative for recent events, which presents a stark contrast to the celebratory view of economic growth. In this view, the rapid industrial and economic growth comes at a high cost, as the country has to undergo a massively difficult political and economic metamorphosis. Bangladesh followed a socialist economy after its independence from West Pakistan in 1971 by nationalizing all industries. Soon after its independence, like many other peripheral countries in the world economy, Bangladesh was targeted by the World Bank-International Monetary Fund (IMF) Structural Adjustment Programs to integrate the country into the global system of monopoly capitalism, which included so-called fiscal discipline, reordering of public expenditure priorities, tax reform, liberalizing interest rates, competitive exchange rates,
freeing up trade and foreign direct investment, privatization, and deregulation.¹ Leftist economist and renowned scholar Anu Muhammad notes in *Monthly Review* that the impacts of these reforms in Bangladesh were devastating for many. Some are worth noting in his own words:

- Big public enterprises were dismantled; large mills were replaced by export processing zones, shopping malls, and real estate.
- Export-oriented garment factories became the mainstay of manufacturing. Incidents like the Rana Plaza collapse in April 2013 showed the extent of danger in these death traps.²
- Permanent jobs in factories were replaced by a system of temporary, part-time, outsourced, and insecure work.
- The biggest source of foreign exchange has been remittances; existing side by side with a huge outflow of profit by foreign companies, and transfer of accumulated wealth by local business groups, legally and illegally.
- Energy resources and power have been systematically privatized.
- Land grabbing, occupying public spaces by private business, and deforestation have uprooted many.
- Rural branches of state-owned banks have closed down, squeezing the access to cheaper finance for rural people, and forcing them to go to microcredit, which has higher interest rates. (Muhammad, 2015)

Within a few decades of implementing structural adjustment programs, the neoliberal reform resulted in economic growth, but it also resulted in highly inequitable distribution and a concentration of wealth among a handful of political and commercial elites, compounded with an abundant circulation of “undisclosed” or “black” money³ and an “informal” or “underground” economy.⁴ The concentration of wealth and the new modes of urban-centric economic production are contributing to deepening existing class inequality and social disparity between the handful of super-rich and the uprooted poor.

¹ For a very succinct history of economic integration of Bangladesh into the global system of monopoly capitalism, see, Muhammad, 2006.

² For discussion on the worst factory collapse that killed at least 1,134, see Anu Muhammad’s article “Bangladesh RMG: Global Chain of Profit and Deprivation,” May 17, 2013, Retrieved from https://opinion.bdnews24.com/2013/05/17/bangladesh-rmg-global-chain-of-profit-and-deprivation/

³ Undisclosed money stands for the money, wealth or property that individuals and organizations have not included in their tax returns. Economists, however, term it “black money” which also includes money or wealth accumulated through unlawful or criminal activities. In a 2014 estimation, the size of black money in Bangladesh amounted to 5 to 7 trillion Taka, equivalent to USD $60 - $80 billion (BDNews24, 2014, June 7).

⁴ The size of the “underground economy” is a minimum of 40 to 50 percent, and a maximum of 83 percent, of Bangladesh’s GDP. According to Anu Muhammad, “this particular economy encompasses bribery, crime, the arms trade, the employment of professional criminals, corruption, resource grabbing, trafficking of women, illegal commissions from questionable deals, and leakages from different government projects, especially “foreign aided” ones.” (Muhammad, 2015)
The Bangladesh Economics Association (BEA) expresses grave concerns that in the past 30 years, the criminalization of politics, economics, and an anti-poor developmental path have transformed the urban-rural class structure of the country. Consequently, 105 million of 160 million people are still under the poverty line, and 80% of them live in rural areas. On the one hand, a vast majority of the lower and lower middle classes in the rural and suburban areas have become more dispossessed of land and wealth; on the other hand, a great deal of wealth and power has been concentrated in the hands of a few people from the upper class (4.4 million or 2.7% of the population) and who mostly live in urban areas. Furthermore, as little as 10% of Bangladesh’s super-rich population control 90% of this class’s wealth (Bangladesh Economics Association, 2016).

Muhammad (2015) warns that the rise of the super-rich and their domination over policy makers makes it easy for them to promote their agenda; for example, some secure prestigious political positions, and in general privatization gives huge opportunities to this class to grab common property while under the protection of major political parties. Therefore, it is evident that class inequality in Bangladesh is growing while a handful of super-rich make their way into the politics. These contradictory events demand a critical inspection of their impact on the media industry. How do the political affiliations of business elites translate into media ownership policies, and how do the political affiliations of media owners, in turn, impact journalistic practices?

In retrospective, the development of mass media in Bangladesh, especially electronic media, was always an urban phenomenon—and a class-project—given that the majority of the poor and illiterate rural population have never had any kind of ownership over the means of media production. Both print and broadcast media in Bangladesh were born during the colonial period. Media outlets expanded amidst major political turmoil throughout 1905 and 1947, withstanding the long-lasting anti-colonial movement, the religious-based partition of the sub-continent; as well as the postcolonial

---

5 These class disparities can also be seen as the result of what David Harvey calls an instable trend of “accumulation by dispossession” as it involves displacing people from their land as well as replacing public ventures with private enterprises. By “accumulation by dispossession” Harvey (2004) refers to a crisis of overaccumulation in global capitalism with rapid geographical expansion and intensification for absorbing capital and labor by depriving the public of their wealth or land.

6 The report also informs that in the past 30 years, the population has increased by 60%, but the number of poor people has increased by 76%, this includes 14% of lower-middle class who turned into poor class. Meanwhile the number of middle-class people has risen to 31.3% of which 47% are lower-middle class people who are struggling to remain in the middle-class (see, Bangladesh Economics Association, 2016).
language movement and the struggles for Bengali nationalism between 1947 and 1971. As a result, there was a remarkable parallel between political transformations and the development of a highly partisan vernacular press in postcolonial Bangladesh; as well as in the greater sub-continent (Mahmud, 2013). The post-liberation political events, between 1975 and 1990 including consecutive military coups and economic collapses, were relatively unfavorable for media expansion. The most significant structural transformations of the mass media were achieved only during past three decades following the political transition of the country from an authoritarian to a democratic electoral system alongside an immense economic liberalization and structural reforms.

The market liberation and deregulation of industries, including communications and media industries, in the 1990s, required a wave of policy reforms and institutional rearrangements in greater South Asia and South-East regions. The transformation enabled private print and electronic media players to influence government regulatory bodies and policy frameworks in the interests of private enterprises. Successive ruling political parties have taken advantage of strengthening their political power by welcoming private capital into the political party system by using formal mechanisms, such as public-private partnerships, joint venture investments, interlocking shareholding, and trade contracts based on informal mechanisms, such as accepting donations and bribes, forging kinships, and co-opting businessmen with extensive private sector background networks. This resulted in entrenching “patron-clientelist politics” (Lewis, 2014), blurring the visible boundaries between mercantile elites and political elites as many key actors represent both sides. Doing politics and business at the same time may not be intrinsically harmful to a multiparty democracy, but it could be so indirectly. In Bangladesh, the integration of political leadership and wealthy businesses has gradually resulted in the disenfranchiselement of civil society and community leaders, workers union leaders, women politicians, and grassroot leaders in rural areas as well as many small national political parties of political power, including the Maoist fraction of the leftist parties, as they were unable to compete with the newly minted businessmen-cum-politicians who brought in high-intensity private capital and informal networks into the party (Sarkar, 2015; Begum, 2009). This dissertation examines how the formation of such nexus between private capital and political power among the two leading political parties—namely the Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party—has resulted in a complex political polarization of the ownership of private television channels.
A salient indication of such nexus between the super-rich and the current political regime is the curious case of Salman F. Rahman who owns the Bangladesh Export Import Company (aka the BEXIMCO Group), and is arguably the first person from Bangladesh to be listed in *Hurun Global Ranking* as one of the wealthiest people in the world. Salman F Rahman chaired Bangladesh’s largest association of elite businessmen, the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), in mid 1990s when he also decided to enter politics. After failing to establish a party by himself, he joined the Awami League. Meanwhile, his company became the largest business conglomerate in the country with expansions in pharmaceuticals, textiles, ceramics, real estate, energy, engineering and construction exporting products in 43 countries. In 2009, he became the “private sector development affairs adviser” to Bangladesh’s prime minister Sheikh Hasina. Soon enough Salman F. Rahman’s company turned into the largest bank defaulter in the country, owing Taka 49.44 billion (nearly USD $600 million) to the four-state owned banks. The government then granted a special privilege to the company to carry on its businesses despite the debt. Salman F. Raman has also been accused of draining billions Taka abroad by manipulating the stock prices which resulted in no significant investigations. In less than a year of his appointment as the adviser of the prime minister, Salman F Rahman received a license for his 24/7 news broadcast channel *Independent*. This, combined with his two print media outlets opened a cross-media advertisements strategy for BEXIMCO products. By 2017, he was the leader of the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO), an apex organization of the private owners of Bangladeshi TV channels whose job is to protect the interests of private television channels. He is still serving as the adviser to the prime minister. A parallel example of the integration between mercantile elites and political elites is the case of (late) Anisul Haq, the former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), who also chaired the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) representing the interests of the garment owners. Anisul Haq obtained a license for his television channel (*Jadu TV*) in 2013 from the ruling party Awami League. He was also elected as one of the city mayors of Dhaka, Bangladesh’s capital city, in 2015 after being nominated by the same party. Examining such powerful actors requires us to go beyond the comfortable binaries of state vs. market forces or political vs. commercial power.

---

In contrast to the mainstream narratives of economic and industrial growth in Bangladesh, these examples present a microcosm of a highly complex relationship between the transformation of the state, integration of capital, and subsequent concentrations of wealth and increasing class inequality as well as an intricate and unsettling interdependence between political power and the expansion of private enterprises, resulting in a politically concentrated private television industry. What are the implications of such transformations on television journalism? How does integration with global capitalism trickle down to journalistic practices in a peripheral nation-state? How do the country’s growing class-inequalities and urban-rural disparities reciprocally influence the expansion and operation of state-owned and private television industries? This dissertation aims to explore these multidirectional questions by situating the growth of television in Bangladesh in the context of contemporary neoliberal expansion of media industry as well as within the country’s political and economic backgrounds (Figure 1.3).

Bangladesh’s colonial and postcolonial histories are marked by a multitude of class struggle and identity politics, and media was never away from it. Both during postcolonial and post-liberation periods, state-administered television has been subjected to persistent political interference with the dubious excuse of nation-building. In the neoliberal era, a new layer of socio-political tensions has been added to the politics of nationalism, which is increasing politicization and commercialization of the country’s private media system. In a very intricate way the macro-relationship between neoliberal globalization and political powers on one hand, and their impact on micro-scale of journalistic practices on the other hand, have begun to unfold. Consequently, the relationship between television, political elites, and market forces has generated a number of concerns among journalists, columnists, and media scholars. A growing body of scholarship with critical media analysis in Bangladesh has explored the extent of domestic mass media commercialization. A prominent leftist intellectual and media scholar Salim Reza Newton (2003) argues that the most dominant print media in Bangladesh, the *Daily Star* and the *Daily Prothom Alo*, which are owned by TRANSCOM Group, a wholesale distributor of consumer commodities, carry forward the collective interests of the business class, and that they are embedding their readers into the ideology of consumerism by giving selective promotional coverage of transnational corporations in return for advertisement and sponsorship revenue (such as from Nestle). Drawing from Newton’s work, Rahman (2007a) investigates how corporate-media
partnership trends have structurally influenced news gathering and processing in ATN Bangla, a leading private television channel. Other academics and members of civic society also articulate concerns that the trend towards market-orientation in news production has undercut the independence and impartiality of the media for commercial ends (e.g. Khan, 2007; Ferdous, 2007). Haider (2007) draws a similar conclusion that the discourse of the private television channels is highly pro-market, pro-privatization, and urban-centric. All of these channels are operating within the frame of market-driven journalism (Haq, 2011a). Haq (2011b) further argues that both print and electronic media in Bangladesh have become increasingly market-oriented, and, as a result, news has become a sellable commodity in neoliberal Bangladesh, effectively ending the legacy of partisan journalism. Ferdous (2009, p. 29) is quick to point out that mass media in general in Bangladesh is more like a “middle-class media” and a “male-dominated media”. While this literature makes valuable contributions to the trend of critical media analysis in Bangladesh, they offer a limited historical explanation of the marketization of television journalism and its historical relation to class struggles or global flows of capital and commodities. Mindful of this lacuna, this dissertation attempts to demonstrate that domestic imperatives for neoliberal market-orientation and external compulsions for integration with global capitalism both play pivotal roles in expanding the media industry in general, while political affiliations and class relations continue to facilitate the structural transformations of the television industry.

With regard to journalism, a sizable alliance of liberal academics criticizes Bangladeshi political powers for curtailing freedom of the press (such as, Ahmed, 2009, 2012; Shoesmith, Mahmud, & Reza, 2013; Bhuiyan, 2012a; Anam, 2002). Drawing from a neo-institutionalist theoretical approach, Ahmed’s (2009) study suggests that political powers frequently misuse the power of press regulations in Bangladesh to control media content. However, this approach does not take account of the power of commercial elites to influence and to shape policy discourses. It therefore fails to critique the market forces, that both surround the press and are intertwined with political forces. On the whole, mainstream media scholarship in Bangladesh is less interested in seeing the market as a threat for “press freedom”, and instead celebrates the market as liberating journalism from the tyranny of the state’s politics. This dissertation departs from the celebratory view of the market. I situate this work within the school of critical political economy that addresses the intersecting relationship between the state, market, and
media. In my earlier work, I argue that emerging television channels in Bangladesh are owned and controlled by political and business elites, who are driven by their own personal agendas (Rahman, 2009). However, with the recent increase of television channels, the issues of political affiliation of the owners, and successive government efforts to regulate the industry have become more contentious. This includes giving television licenses to owners who have political affiliation with whatever party controlled government on the one hand (Khan, 2013), and shutting down television channels affiliated with opposition parties on the other (Rahman, 2012a). At the same time, political conflicts have intensified. While the two major political parties of Bangladesh, Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party, both claim credit for the recent economic liberalization, an incomplete “quest for a national identity” including debates over Bengali versus Bangladeshi and between the Muslim majority vs Hindu, Christian and tribal minorities continues to characterize a bitter division between the political parties; leading the multi-party democracy to “reverse course” as the current government is becoming more authoritarian (Riaz, 2016). Why is there such division between the parties and how did it evolve? What is the impact of such division on television ownership and news production? How does the political culture motivate and shape the course of broadcast regulation? These questions warrant a critical inquiry of the political nature of the state, and thus necessitate the dissertation to review the issue of identity politics during the colonial era and its postcolonial transformations. The dissertation shows that the political division not only underscores the complex vectors of current political struggles and discontents but is also mirrored in the ownership of television channels as well as in the broadcast policymaking processes.

Whereas only a few Bangladeshi researchers address the issue of media policy and governmental politics, the issue of broadcast policymaking has emerged as a critical area in South Asian media scholarship in general (e.g. Reza, 2012). There are competing views to what extent policy measures can democratize the media system within the existing political culture. A convenient line of argument is that formulating exact policy guidelines is crucial for disciplining a growing media system, especially in post-autocratic nation-states. For example, in Khan’s (2013) view, a well-articulated broadcast policy is absolutely required to help Bangladesh’s media democratization process. Khan (2013, p. 193) concludes:
The lack of concrete and transparent broadcasting policies is a big obstacle for the emerging private television sector in the country. If a strong, comprehensive and holistic broadcasting policy for private televisions is not initiated by ruling party and lawmakers then this private television boom will not be a boon for the country. Rather it will become a boon for the crony capitalism and crony capitalists in the country.

Ironically, Khan's analysis shows that the ruling party and lawmakers themselves are part of the “crony capitalist” system in Bangladesh in which, “the ruling party always favors it cronies [such as party members, close relatives, business affiliates] in giving licenses of private television channels” (Khan, 2013, p. 36). What if the “crony capitalists” themselves are a part of the policymaking process? How can the government initiate a regulatory measure and exercise its crony practices at the same time?

Research into developments within India and Pakistan provide useful insights for understanding the informal contexts of media policymaking in Bangladesh. From the Indian context, Paula Chakravartty and Srirupa Roy (2013, p. 357) foreground informal politics, “where policy formation and political decision making increasingly takes place through non-accountable, opaque sets of “backroom” deals rather than through the institutional structures of democracy” as an element that has become particularly noticeable in the present context of economic liberalization. In the case of Pakistan, a pre-existing informal political interdependence between the government and media owners dictated the creation of formal media regulatory structures, such as the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), which was crucial for the liberalization of the airwaves. Azmat Rasul and Stephen McDowell (2012) argue that the owner-friendly media policies of PEMRA have resulted in a concentration of ownership, which in turn has facilitated the diagonal growth of a handful of companies that control the majority of private television channels in Pakistan. Such informal and pre-existing relations and negotiations between the government’s political interests and the interests of commercial enterprises is a characterizing feature of media policymaking in South Asia. This dissertation shows that such informal relations are now institutionalized in Bangladesh through the domination of political and commercial elites who are the owners of television on the one hand and the key stakeholders in policymaking on the other. Grounded in this reality, formulating new policies or reforming existing media policies can do very little to make the media system more plural and inclusive, given that the problems are deeply rooted in divisive political practices and unequal social relations that were inherited from the colonial period and extended in the postcolonial era.
1.1. Research Questions and Key Arguments

The previous discussion indicates that television has emerged as an important political medium in Bangladesh, and that the academic study of it is growing too. But there is a dearth of literature that can offer a cross-cutting analysis of politics, economy, and media in Bangladesh and that traces the relationships to the broader impacts of neoliberal globalization on television journalism. This dissertation aims to fill this void by integrating discussions of media ownership and television news production into the debates of political power and broadcast policymaking. The objective of this dissertation is to critically examine the emergence of a neoliberal market-oriented media system in Bangladesh and its impact on news production in both television channels and broadcast policymaking.

The dissertation plans to address the following research questions:

- How do neoliberal deregulation and privatization shape the ownership of television media? How is Bangladesh’s state-broadcaster responding to this?
- What is the impact of political divisions between two mainstream political parties on the ownership of television in Bangladesh?
- How are television channels licensed in Bangladesh and what does it tell us about the political economy of the country?
- Who are the owners of the television channels? How do they impact its news production? How do they influence broadcast policymaking?
- How is television news commodified? How does commodification impact news production?
- How is broadcast policy made in Bangladesh? Who are the key stakeholders of the policymaking processes? What is the role of policy reform in media democratization in Bangladesh?

The dissertation strives to answer these questions based on a mixture of multisite case studies, in-depth interviews, and documentary research methods, and it reviews numerous academic and journalistic references in this process. It is broadly organized into four segments (historical transformation of the state and the origin of mass media, state-broadcasting, private television, and broadcast policymaking). The study begins by highlighting the colonial origins of the media, postcolonial tensions for nation-building, and post-liberation industrial and structural adjustments and resultant
socio-economic inequalities that underpin the political layering of media ownership in contemporary Bangladesh (Chapter 1 and 2). Following this foundation, Chapter 3 argues that with the rapid growth of private television channels and online media, state-administered television in Bangladesh is faced with political instrumentalization and advertising dependency, yet it manages some public services that no other television channels can match. Chapter 4 contends that the politically concentrated ownership of television and the practices of market-oriented television journalism in Bangladesh are deeply embedded with the political and social transformation of the nation-state, a postcolonial quest for nation-building, as well as an asymmetrical integration with the processes of neoliberal globalization (e.g. privatization, deregulation, and marketization). To establish this argument, the chapter dissects the ownership structure, process, and politics of licensing private television channels by successive governments between 1995 and 2017, and it is followed by an empirical analysis of the production and commercialization of television journalism in Chapter 5. It surveys multiple areas of journalistic struggles including production (such as news and talk show), structuration (such as newsroom hierarchies and divisions of labor), and commodification (such as symbolic and economic influence of corporate branding and media-advertiser joint ventures on journalism). It reveals that there is a symbiotic relationship between political concentration in television channel ownership and the ways in which news is produced and commodified under an urban-centric, exploitative and gendered division of labor. Although news production in private television channels appears to be less hierarchical, the ideology of market-orientation serves as an unwritten in-house self-censorship policy. All these discussions lead the dissertation to examine the policy responses to the identified problems. Chapter 6 aims to measure the distance between the role of broadcast policy reform in democratizing the media in theory and the role it plays in practice. The chapter reveals that the process of broadcast policymaking in Bangladesh is dominated by the same forces as the politico-commercial nexus that also owns and leads the private television industry despite its inclusion of multiple stakeholders. The study concludes that within the political economic reality of the country and the greater South Asian region in general, policy reform alone would not be sufficient to make the television industry less market-oriented and more democratic and inclusive. Reform initiatives must be aligned with a broader and more progressive socio-political movements for political and social changes. As the chapter highlights, the emergence of community radio indicates that such movement has already begun in Bangladesh.
1.2. Notes on Theoretical Frameworks

This study employs multiple theoretical frameworks to advance its analyses. While the study focuses on Bangladesh as a nation-state, it aims to position the growth of the media industry in Bangladesh in the global circuits of commodity production and capital accumulation by local, regional and transnational businesses. In doing so, the study brings in theoretical critiques of global capitalism, neoliberal globalization, and its postcolonial characteristics (Harvey, 2005; Wallerstein, 2004; Amin, 2005a; Prashad, 2012). These frameworks broadly guide the discussions in Chapter 2 (media in Bangladesh), Chapter 3 (political economy of state-broadcasting), Chapter 4 (ownership structure and politics of private television industry), and in Chapter 5 (market-orientation of television journalism in Bangladesh and its impact on news production).

The analysis of this study draws insights from a critical political economy framework to investigate four interconnected facets of television journalism in Bangladesh: a) the growth and transformation of the media industry, b) the extension of corporate reach, c) the impact of commodification, and d) changing role of state and government intervention (Murdock & Golding, 2005; Mosco, 2009; McChesney, 1998). However, instead of reproducing a predictable critique of ‘state authoritarianism’ in conventional liberal political economy analysis, the study embraces a transcultural political economy approach to engage with the complex history of colonial legacy and postcolonial identity formation (Chakravartty & Zhao, 2008; Chakravartty & Roy, 2013; Umar, 2004). This enables the study to account for additional structural inequalities, including, urban-rural divides, and gender discrimination into the discussion of news production and newsroom hierarchy in both state-owned and private television channels.

Chapter 3, 4, and 5 engage critiques of the “market-orientation of journalism” (Curran, 2000, 2002; McManus, 2005) to assess the symbolic and practical influence of advertising on journalism. The study also engages a critique of public sphere theory (Fraser, 1992) to identify the scope of a commodified public sphere in marginalizing contending voices in television news production. Chapter 6 (broadcast policy) is cemented by theoretical discussions of media democratization (Zhao & Hackett, 2005) and media policy reform (Freedman, 2008). The following section briefly elaborates these theories, which in turn helps to define and to operationalize the key terminologies of this dissertation.
1.2.1. Global Capitalism and Neoliberal Globalization

Brian Shoesmith and Jude Genilo (2013) make an important observation in their edited volume, *Bangladesh’s Changing Mediascape: From State Control to Market Forces*: that with an increasing expansion of economic globalization, market forces are replacing the state’s control over media. The underlying assumption of their claim is that the market should be seen as an entity separate from the state. While there is cogency in such a claim, it suffers a tendency of conceptualizing media control through a “state versus market” binary, and it fails to see how a postcolonial state itself, following the path of Western capitalist states, serves as an integrator and entrepreneur in the market system during neoliberal globalization. In order to comprehend the integrative and entrepreneurial roles of Bangladesh alongside its regulatory agency vis-à-vis communications industries, one must consider the endogenous transformation as well as its exogenous compulsions that come with the processes of economic globalization.

There are several competing paradigms of globalization that address the role of the state from multiple dimensions, including: political, economic, historical, sociological, cultural, and technological. Critical paradigms of globalization such as *world-system* (Wallerstein, 2004) and *global capitalism* (Robinson, 2004, 2011; Harvey, 2003, 2005; Wood, 2003; Panitch & Gindin, 2004, 2012) are particularly useful to theorize the role of nation-states in shaping communications industries at the macro level. The purpose of this discussion is to show that the liberalization of the media industry in Bangladesh is profoundly and historically intertwined with the integration of the state with global capitalism, and especially with its neoliberal restructuration.

Originated as a theory that examines issues of development and world inequalities, the world-system paradigm serves a ‘precursor’ to globalization theories from a historical sociological perspective. A world-system is a historical social system of interdependent parts that form a bounded structure and operate according to the logic of the international division of labor, distinguished by a trimodal structure of strong and weak states that constitute three distinct geographical and relational regions: center (or core), periphery and semi-periphery (Wallerstein, 2004; Arrighi, 2007; Amin, 2005a).*8*

---

*8 Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) outlines several key features that characterize globalization of world-economy such as continual and endless accumulation (p. 24), fierce inter-capitalist rivalry yet
According to this paradigm, capitalist nation-states play an indispensable role in maintaining a hierarchical structure by participating in a chain of local, regional, and global commodity production; ultimately sustaining the flow of direct profits to monopoly producers in the core and protecting the overall capitalist economy (e.g. by enforcing property rights, deploying monetary and military policies, and guarding trade routes). Compared to a statist approach, which focuses on the modes of production within a state, world-system analysis is particularly useful to explain the logic of the capitalist world economy and the location of the state within that world economy.

Another proponent of the global capitalism thesis, William Robinson, takes a transnational approach to theorize the integration of states with global flows of capital. He critiques the world-system paradigm for ignoring the changing association between production-relation and geography. He also argues that the world-system paradigm suffers from ‘nation-state centrism’ and ‘state structuralism’ that impede the theory’s ability to conceptualize the dynamics of globalization. In response, Robinson puts forward his theory of “global capitalism” that is characterized by two structural processes: the emergence of a transnational capitalist class (TCC), a class group grounded in new global markets and circuits of accumulation, rather than national markets and circuits; and rise of transnational state (TNS) apparatuses9 (Robinson, 2004, 2011). According to his global capitalism theory, national production systems and circuits of accumulation, which were once connected by internationalization, have now become fragmented and integrated into decentralized and deterritorialized global circuits of accumulation by the processes of transnationalization as a result of the increasing power and activities of supranational agencies and transnational corporations (Robinson, 2004, p. 10-14). Robinson’s work thus implies that the power of nation-states is being weakened by transnational corporatization.

Contrary to Robinson’s view, strong support for a renewed role of nation-states comes from the new imperialism thesis (Harvey, 2003; 2005). In theory, neoliberalism refers to political economic practices where the role of a state is to create and to

---

9 TNS comprises of supranational economic forums such as IMF, WB, ADB, WTO, and supranational political forums like G-8, G-22, the UN, OECD, EU as well as regional groups such as ASEAN, NAFTA, and APEC. These “transnational state cadres”, notes Robinson, “act as midwives of capitalist globalization” (Robinson, 2004, pp. 100-101).
preserve an institutional framework for private property rights, a free market, and free trade. It also protects the interests of private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations and financial capital (Harvey, 2005, p. 2-7). However, in practice, the state plays a crucial role in implementing the processes of ‘accumulation by dispossession,’ with four key features: a) corporatization, privatization and commodification of public assets; b) financialization, deregulation, and merger and acquisition; c) the management and manipulation of crises, and d) state’s reformation of policies (Harvey, 2005, pp. 160-165). Neoliberalism, in David Harvey’s account, does not necessarily weaken the power of nation-states. In fact, neoliberalization cannot even occur if the state does not perform its crucial role to deregulate and privatize the market by endorsing the required neoliberal policies (Harvey, 2005, pp. 2-3). A similar argument is posed by Canadian Marxist scholars Panitch and Gindin (2004, 2012), who stress that globalization is not a process to bypass or to override the nation-states. States are the authors of globalization, not its victims.\(^\text{10}\) Ellen Wood (2003) argues in the same line: capitalism, no matter how global in its extent, always requires the support of the extra-economic coercion that the state provides. Even in the era of global capitalism, the nation-state “remains the single most effective means of intervention” (Wood, 2003, pp. 65-67). This observation validates structural Marxist Nicos Poulantzas’ theory of the “relative autonomy” of nation-states, which is still guided by asymmetrical interdependence and shifting power-relations between core-periphery and semi-periphery (Wallerstein, 2004).

The debate over the power of the state in relation to neoliberal globalization gains further momentum in the study of global media. Proponents of media globalization (such as Giddens, 1991), resemble Robinson’s theories and see global capitalism as a decentered, disembedding and deterritorialized power that enables global media to promote local by eroding the national. In contrast, critical scholars like Nancy Morris and Silvio Waisbord (2001) and James Curran (2002) argue that national governments are still key sites of power, particularly in forging communication policies. Despite the exaggerated reports about the demise of nation-states, they remain “important agents in shaping the global media order and the structure of media markets” (Morris & Waisbord, 2001, p. ix-xvi). Although the coercive and discursive power of state control over

\(^\text{10}\) Notwithstanding Robinson’s view of global capitalism, Panitch and Gindin clearly oppose deterritorialization hypothesis. Citing from Marx’s rare quotation, they explain that despite capital’s expansionary nature, it does not weaken state’s governing power: while national barriers are “constantly overcome,” so are new ones “constantly posited.” (Panitch & Gindin, 2012, p. 2)
communications remains highly asymmetrical, transnationalizing forces have not unilaterally taken over the national. Therefore, it would be premature to conclude that a post-state era has arrived (ibid, pp. ix-x).

While literature on globalization is useful to reaffirm the regulatory agency of the nation-state, it comes with a risk of homogenizing the agency of strong/core states for the rest of the world; especially given that most of the authors engaged in the debate take developed nation-state as the key reference point to draw their arguments. Ali Riaz (2005) contends that the Bangladeshi state is characterized by its peripheral location within the production circuits of the global capitalist system; however, its historical specificities is marked by postcolonial state formation process, which is common in many countries in the Global South (Riaz, 2005, p. 5-6). ¹¹ This duality makes it imperative for the study to bring in the postcolonial characteristics of the Global South into the discussion of global capitalism and neoliberal globalization. Samir Amin (2005b) identifies that the greater Indian region was engaged with the processes of global capitalism, a long time before neoliberal globalization, as a result of colonial restructuring of class and social relations that turned the countries into peripheries of the modern global economy. The class struggles took new forms in postcolonial India. ¹² The Indian anti-colonial movement against the British Empire was characterized by a hegemonic identity of nationalism that privileged the upper-class bourgeoisie and the upper-caste. In addition, the internal struggles of class politics and identity politics within the formation of the nation-state resulted in inconsistent and uneven integration of peripheral and semi-peripheral economies to post-war global flows of capital dominated by core countries. In the wake of the new imperial formation, many countries in the decolonized Global South formed a movement for New International Economic Order (NIEO) aka the ‘Third World Project’ demanding the new geographies of global production to be fairer. However, the

---

¹¹ Riaz deploys the concept of the periphery drawing from the Marxian analysis of production and reproduction. In the world-system the core countries dominate both the means of production and the means of reproduction of the labor force as they continue to expand the accumulation of surplus by outsourcing production works to semi-peripheries and peripheries. On the contrary, the peripheral countries depend on the reproduction scheme that comes with wage goods and wage services, which contributes to a greater flow of surplus towards the core countries. As a result, the full circuit of capital production and reproduction cannot take place within the countries themselves. In turn the struggle for integration to world-system changes the patterns of class formation, class relations, and form of state in the peripheral societies. (Riaz, 2005, p. 5)

¹² Amin (2005b) elaborates In India, the colonial inheritance is aggravated by the persistence of the caste system. The “lower castes” (today known as the Dalit) and the tribal populations given the same status account for a quarter of the population of India (around 250 million people).
Third World movement faltered, especially with the new industrialized counties (NICs) breaking up with the historic alliance of the Global South, and subsequent rise of the BRICS (Brazil, India, South Africa, and China) nations as the “locomotives of the South”. “From the ashes of Atlantic liberalism and the Third World project rose global neoliberalism” writes Vijay Prashad (2012, p. 17).13

Prashad cautiously avoids a top-down approach to theorize neoliberalism that makes the states of the Global South look like a mere receiver of neoliberal globalization. He sees it as a collaborative project. Prashad criticizes David Harvey for ignoring the southern input in the formation of neoliberalism, worth quoting at length:

… What Harvey does not relate is the necessary demise of the Third World Project, and so the opening up of the countries of the South to the new geographies of production; ... Neoliberalism had a polycentric rival—in the G7, of course; but so too in the capitals of the Pacific Rim and in the emergent “locomotives of the South” (Brazil, India, South Africa, and China). The ruling classes in these societies had, like their European and American cousins, long wanted to abandon the cultural stricture of old Nationalism: the requirements of the social-democratic Welfare state in the Atlantic sector; and the requirements of the anticolonial Third World State in the continents of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Small pockets of elite opinion harbored resentment at the anticolonial heritage. Out of those pockets came new intellectual agendas, including the revival of the Hayek school of liberalism, holding that the state must be excluded from the economic activities as much as possible. Cultural ideas of individualism and enterprise were celebrated in the corporate media, at the expense of the national liberation ideas of socialism and the collective good. The impatient elites wanted to set themselves apart from the obligations of the postcolonial state. (Prasad, 2012, p. 6-7, my emphasis)

Prashad’s observation is relevant to the ideological transformation of Bangladesh from a postcolonial state to a neoliberal state and the impact this has had on the media industry. He notes that the “locomotives of the South” developed their own variant of “Neoliberalism with Southern Characteristics” (Prasad, 2012, p. 12).14 This characteristic

---

13 For an excellent discussion of the rise and demise of the Third World movement, see Vijay Prasad’s book, The Poorer Nation: A Possible History of the Global South (2012).

14 This observation also applies to explain the unique nature of “neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics” that David Harvey (2005, p. 120) acknowledges. Yuezhi Zhao expands that the integration of neoliberalism as a political project by the Chinese state resulted in a hybrid form of socialism with the market economy, with embedding its communication system as an integral part of it. Zhao argues that “The Chinese party-state has not only embraced the market rationality and committed to the unleashing of individual entrepreneurial freedoms and other new sources of private power and interests, but also set in motion—either directly sanctioned or indirectly failed to constrain—a whole range of neoliberal and predatory practices involving “accumulation by
is helpful to explain the political reality of economic growth of Bangladesh, and the state’s hesitation to leave behind its postcolonial obligations. Surrounded by the Indian media universe, Bangladesh developed its own logic of integration to global capitalism, and the government seamlessly explains why and how it opened up its entire market to the new geographies of production but kept broadcasting ownership on a tight leash. Soon after its independence the country moved away from dictatorship towards a liberal democratic form of political rule and began to act in accordance with the neoliberalization rules of the World Trade Organization by implementing deregulation, privatization, and multilateral Free Trade Agreements. For instance, Bangladesh punches above its weight by using its reserves of cheap labor as a currency to lead in exports of readymade garments to the core countries of the global economy. This in turn helps to increase the flow of capital to domestic industries, which, with transnational investments in the media and telecommunication sectors, was crucial to prepare the ground for the expansion of private TV channels (see Chapter 2). Here, postcolonial identity politics exist in the news production processes and structures of both state-bROADCASTERS and private television channels, while they also adapt neoliberal market-orientation practices (Chapter 3, Chapter 5).

This trend is common in South Asia. The Indian state-administered broadcaster (with the status of a corporation) has grown to be the largest public media organization in the world in terms of number of stations. At the same time, it competes with highly partisan as well as highly commodified regional, national transnational private media enterprises. For example, most of the major U.S. media conglomerates have substantial investments in India, including Fox (Star Television), Disney (UTV) and Viacom (Viacom 18). This is because the Indian government allows foreign companies to fully own non-news channels. However, unlike India, media ownership in Bangladesh is heavily politicized and its broadcasting system is protected from foreign ownership by the state. Similarly, Pakistan allows full foreign repatriation of profits from its telecommunications sector but not from its media industry. In both cases control of the media is an important dispossession,” from the privatization of state-owned enterprises to the seizure of farmlands, and from the commodification of a wide range of cultural forms to the destruction of the environmental commons.” (Zhao, 2008, p. 6-7)

15 Since 2015, the Indian government decided to lift restrictions of foreign ownership on television, and allow up to 49% in news and current affairs channels on TV and on radio. Previously it was 26%. For further information, see, Frater, 2015, November 10.
marker of the country’s contention over the politics of its identity and the preservation of its national image. This indicates that the integration of global capital in South Asia is unevenly distributed across different sectors in different countries. This also means that neoliberal globalization has not overridden the power of the state vis-à-vis media industries, but enables the state to perform its role of integrating the media system with global capitalism via advertising and telecommunications industries while retaining control of media ownership in the hands of local political and commercial elites. In this sense, the era of the nation-state is far from being over as Giddens (1991) or Robinson (2004) prophesizes, but rather a new era of nationalism-driven political power has arrived in the postcolonial terrain; a power which is deeply territorial in nature.

1.2.2. Critical Political Economy of Communication

The critique of neoliberal globalization gains significant support from the critical political economy of communication (CPEC) framework, which is defined as “the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources” (Mosco, 2009, pp. 2-3). McChesney (1998) defines CPEC with paying attention to ownership policies of media: “the political economy of communication looks specifically at how ownership, support mechanisms (e.g. advertising), and government policies influence media behavior and content. This line of enquiry emphasizes structural factors and the labor process in the production, distribution, and consumption of communication” (pp. 2-3). Canadian media scholar, Robert E. Babe (2009) defines political economy as a scholarly discourse which “studies power relations affecting the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth, income, and resources – including information and communication resources” (Babe, 2009, p. 13).

The post-World War II origin of CPEC was in part a reaction against functionalist, pluralist, and behavioral science approaches to study social phenomena, which became evident in the early works of neo-Marxian political economists.16

16 To elaborate, Frankfurt School critical scholars Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, as well as Belgian-born-British Marxist-thinker Ralph Milliband. Karl Marx’s view of production relation deeply informs the Western genealogy of CPEC, which corresponds to material forces of production and reproduction that constitute the underlying economic structure of the society. Ralph Miliband (1969, pp. 219-246) argued that mass media in advanced societies mainly
political economics also lies in the tension between the critiques of Frankfurt School theorists (i.e. Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972; Marcuse, 1964) and liberal pluralists (i.e. Hayek, 1994/1944; Shils, 1962). Over time, CPEC has evolved through various historical, ideological, and epistemological debates and disagreements.¹⁷ Anglo-American traditions of CPEC agree on the question of the discipline's four core characteristics. CPEC is: a) holistic, it focuses on totality of social relations; b) historical, it pays attention to social change, historical transformations, shifts and contradictions that unfold over long loops of time; c) centrally concerned with social justice and democratic practice; and d) oriented towards praxis or practical action for change (Wasko, Murdock, & Sousa, 2011, p. 2; Murdock & Golding, 2005, p. 61).

Murdock and Golding (2005, p. 64-67) delineate five historical processes that are particularly central to a "critical political economy of culture": a) the growth of the media, b) the extension of corporate reach, c) commodification, d) the universalization of citizenship, and e) the changing role of state and government intervention. A rich body of literature in this approach explores the primacy of the state in sustaining and mobilizing global communications industries in the neoliberal era (e.g. McChesney, 2001; Schiller, 2007). Noted critical political economist Dan Schiller states “national governments played a key role in the media sector because unremitting political intervention was paradoxically necessary to actualize something approaching a free-market regime in the media sector” (1999, p. 2). In the CPEC perspective, government, political parties, corporations and media are best understood as partners in advancing the global voyage of market liberalization (see, McChesney & Schiller, 2003).

It is important to note that CPEC as a mode of analysis is not free of analytical biases. There is a western-centric bias in the prominent works of CPEC advocates. By western-centric bias I mean a tendency to provide geographically (spatial) and historically (temporal) selective empirical data/evidence and observation from western play a “functional” role to convey dominant ideas of the ruling class, where media itself is weapon in the arsenal of class domination system, and a means of reinforcing the system.

¹⁷ One major example of the divergence within the Anglo-American origin of CPEC is the debate on the famous blind spot of Western Marxism as initiated by Dallas Smythe (1997, 1981) that continued for two decades and still prevalent in the era of digital capitalism. Another area of contradiction is the domain of class and ideology where the role of labour continues to be debated.
history to support a theory, while generalizing its orientation and results as universal.\textsuperscript{18} Such western-centric bias can be seen as a byproduct of broad Euro-American epistemological, theoretical, and methodological biases of the critical political economy of communication that few political economists have ever addressed.

The consequences of Western-centrism for CPEC are troubling. Given that the majority of the evidence of CPEC literature derives from select few core or emerging centers of capitalist power, with occasional evidence from semi-peripheral economies,\textsuperscript{19} the historical specificities and the political agencies of a large constellation of smaller and peripheral \textit{nation-states} in the Global South often remain under the radar of contemporary political economic studies of global communication.\textsuperscript{20} The founding figures of this field showed a genuine interest in exploring the decolonization movement and struggle for power in the non-Western countries (for instance, Schiller & Smythe, 1972; Dorfman & Mattelart, 1971/1984). It is ironic that while the Euro-American CPEC is highly vocal on the issues of neoliberal imperialism, global structural inequalities, historical transformations, social justice and resistance, with a slim exception, most of the current literatures of CPEC show little or no awareness of Euro-American biases evident in the field. While Euro-American CPEC offers a perspective mostly from the north, it mostly focuses on the \textit{role of the state} rather than the \textit{nature of the state}, leading to a “theoretical blind spot for postcolonial nation-state” (Zhao, 2011, p. 561). An adequate analysis would not only focus on the role of the state regarding the production,

\textsuperscript{18} For example, in his early work, British political economist Nicholas Garnham (2011) argued that while capitalist cultural production can reinforce continuous surplus generation, at the same time the commodity it produces can be “profoundly subversive” to dominant ideology. While his argument is valid, it is based on European observation of counter culture within advanced industrialist nation-states, which cannot be generalized in many developing economies where the bourgeois capitalist class were not fully developed due to colonial encounters. The subversive resistance in colonial regions did not originate from commodity production but from anti-colonial movements. A similar limitation can be identified in the work of Murdock and Golden (2005) whose empirical supports mostly come from a British context but makes claims about a “universalization of citizenship”, which itself is a creation of European Enlightenment.

\textsuperscript{19} For instance, the work on the political economy of media in India by Thomas and Nain (2004); Latin American CPEC by Bolaño, Mastrini, and Serra (2012).

\textsuperscript{20} The United Nation Development Program (UNDP, 2013) defines the term “South” or “Global South” as “developing countries, which are located primarily in the Southern Hemisphere.” Using the term Global South in this dissertation I do not intent to invoke a simplistic ‘us versus them’ dichotomy with the Global North, neither I imply the Global South as a homogenous and categorical force. I rather use the term to highlight the historical specificity and political agency of Bangladesh as a nation-state in relation to the heterogeneity of other postcolonial countries in the world that shares similar historical trajectories and political economic tensions.
distribution, and consumption of communication resources in collaboration with the market, but would also situate the nature of the state in the broader historical terrain of colonial consequences. At the same time this analysis would build upon the discussion of the impact of neoliberal globalization beyond the Euro-American ambit, as the previous section shows, explaining how neoliberalism acquires postcolonial characteristics by taking into account the resistance it faces from postcolonial states. Such an integrative framework is crucial to explain the historical trajectories of transformation of states in the South, South-East, and East Asia with each country having its own dynamics, agency, and discrepancy to negotiate the terms of integration with global capitalism. One example of such agency and disagreement is that Facebook’s Free Basics program, which is also dubbed as ‘fake internet,’ was banned by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) due to strong local opposition (Bhatia, 2016, May 12), while the same project was welcomed by the government of Bangladesh resulting in Facebook partnering with the biggest transnational telecom operator in Bangladesh, Grameen Phone. In this line, Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 show that media ownership in Bangladesh is a contested terrain where transnational forces have to constantly negotiate and collaborate with local politics and local elites in order to gain access and to expand, but are occasionally met with nationalistic protectionism.

With a view to complement the critical political economy analysis with a non-Eurocentric theoretical and methodological synthesis, Chakravartty and Zhao (2008) foreground a “transcultural political economy” approach that draws upon postcolonial critiques and critical race theory, and considers structural biases, socio-economic divides, urban-rural divides, and cultural politics (also, see Zhao, 2009, 2010, 2011). A transcultural political economy framework enables one “to integrate institutional and cultural analyses and address urgent questions in global communications in the context of economic integration, empire formation and the tensions associated with adapting new privatized technologies, neoliberalized and globalized institutional structures, and hybrid cultural forms and practices” (Chakravartty & Zhao, 2008, p.10). Such theoretical synthesis also helps us to overcome a West/non-West dichotomy. Zhao notes:

A communication studies that reproduces the “hub-and-spoke” power relationship between the United States and the rest of the world is clearly no longer (if it ever was) adequate, as the new phase of economic and cultural globalization engenders more east-south and south-south financial, technological, and cultural flows. (Zhao, 2010, p. 549)
From the perspective of China, Zhao (2010) suggests a two-fold approach to update the study of political economy of global communications. First, communication researchers need to prioritize the analysis that unfolds the biases, socio-economic divides, and cultural politics within a non-Western country (such as urban-rural divides, working class-transnational class divisions, and coastal-inland dichotomies). Second, researchers should examine and compare the implications of national and regional media political economies for communications, not only between the West and the rest, but also between the East-South and South-South (Zhao, 2009, 2010, 2011). Following the first cue, this study brings forth the issues of urban-rural divides, socio-economic division, and cultural politics into the discussion of social and political transformation and television news production. Furthermore, guided by the second cue, the study brings in Southern media aspects in several chapters.

A transcultural political economy analysis also necessitates a discussion of “national identity and gender, racial, and ethnic differences” (Chakravartty & Zhao, 2008, p. 12). While the population of Bangladesh is composed of a largely homogenous Bengali ethno-linguistic identity (98%), it is also home to a diverse group of indigenous and tribal ethnicities, including Chakma, Marma, Garos, Santhals, Manipuri, as well as Bihari (stranded Pakistani citizens from Bihar region). The Bengali ethnic group also spans over the neighboring West Bengal province of India. The transformation of Bangladesh from colonial East Bengal to postcolonial East Pakistan resulted in an inner-colonization of multiple existing identities into a boiling contest between the Bengali versus Bangladeshi identity debate of the post-liberation era. Two major political parties—Bangladesh Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)—appeal to these two identities to solidify voter loyalties. AL believes in secularism, democracy and Bengali nationalism, while BNP endorses pan-Islamism and Bangladeshi nationalism. The owners of the private television channels more or less subscribe to these political ideologies of the two major political parties (Khan, 2013, p. 168). Consequently, the television industry as well as its programming reflect a hegemonic nationality of either ‘Bengali’ or ‘Bangladeshi’ nationalism that defeats and subsumes all minority ethnic and religious identities under it. The state-broadcaster adopts the identity dictated by the political party in power, but, its programming mandate for indigenous ethnicities has remained consistent. Chapters 2 and 3 expand this issue.
Some CPEC studies that focus on non-Western regions show the tendency to take a single nation-state as unit of analysis, falling in the trap of methodological nationalism. Noteworthy, is that most of CPEC literature, which originates from non-Euro-American contexts, is heavily dominated by the study of semi-peripheral nation-states such as India, Korea, Russia, South Africa due to their bigger economic footprint and larger geopolitical impacts (see, Thomas & Nain, 2004; Thomas, 2010). Such a trend results in two visible consequences: First: the comparative picture of the semi-periphery as a whole is less documented, as the study of single nation-states dominate political economic understandings; and second, as a result of over-concentration on core and semi-periphery states, the history and cultural specificity of small peripheral nation-states has become marginalized, almost nonexistent, in the study of global political economy of communication.

The case of India is particularly noteworthy in this as its experience is often used to homogenize the whole subcontinent. A classic example of the Indianization of South Asian is the book *International satellite broadcasting in South Asia: political, economic, and cultural implications* (eds. Melkote, Shields, & Agrawal, 1998), which contains fifteen chapters from many well-known media scholars, the majority of whom focus on no country in South Asia other than India. Such work thus suffers from a spatial and temporal amnesia assuming that India can continue to represent the subcontinental whole, as it was used to do so in the colonial past.

Drawing from an Indian perspective, Paula Chakravartty and Srirupa Roy (2013) contribute to a growing body of literature that cautions against using the European and North American examples as the model or benchmark to measure media transformation in societies “beyond the West”. Their rationale is that, “While the origins of modernity were European, its subsequent expansion in non-European societies cannot be extrapolated from trends based on the European (or American) experiences” (p. 350). As a solution, they make a case for “context-driven methodology” or “place-based knowledge formation” where comparisons are made with “contextual considerations” instead of borrowing any modular template or paradigm from another society. To demonstrate how this can be done, they present an inward-looking “intranational approach” to study the diverse media systems of Indian provinces and regions as units of comparative analysis rather than the Indian nation-state as a whole (p. 365). On several occasions Chakravartty and Roy (2013, p. 351, p. 364) imply that their model of
analyzing the political origins and implications of televised news can be extended to *other democracies* of the global South. However, contrary to this claim, the authors neither presented any “contextual consideration” nor a single example of any democracies beyond Indian provinces. Thus, their chosen units of analysis with a cover of “intranational approach” remain comfortably trapped within the political boundary of a single nation-state, paradoxically reifying an India-centrism of media scholarship while dismissing Eurocentric models of comparison as ‘provincialism’.

In order to overcome such paradoxes involved in choosing a “unit of analysis”, this study brings in some important “contextual considerations” of political cultures and regulatory practices from other countries, especially from Pakistan and India. While I do not claim that this dissertation is a comparative study, I still find it imperative to draw references to relevant South Asian contexts, given that Bangladesh, despite its many differences, has shared its political history, structural transformations, and many common cultural traits with these two countries. Some of the political developments that Chakravartty and Roy claim as *distinctive* contexts are in fact common in Bangladesh and Pakistan; and some of them are indeed unique to India. I find the following contextual considerations from their work relevant to my study: a) extra-economic logics of television ownership, b) mixed capitalist constitutions of the news media industry, and c) political dualism. Chapters 2 and 4 further explain why these structural features are special characteristics for the ownership of private television channels in Bangladesh, and how they problematize both television licensing and broadcast policymaking.

### 1.2.3. Market-oriented Journalism

While CPEC provides a solid base for the macro-level analysis, it is inadequate to explain the impact of global capitalism at the micro-level of journalistic production. Michael Schudson (2000) argues that a political economy approach can work well to explain sociology of news production and its institutional circuit (p. 177). Yet the discursive realm of journalism needs an anchor to explain its production processes. To complement this analysis, the study engages the critiques of *Market-oriented Journalism*, primarily building on the works by James Curran and John H. McManus. James Curran explains how neoliberal globalization encourages media to expand as ‘increasingly big business’ (Curran, 2002, p. 149), and it stimulates ‘market-oriented journalism’ (Curran, 2000, p. 128-129) within the micro context. Market-orientated
journalism (also, similar to market-driven journalism) emerged as a macro-socioeconomic trend since the 1980s that attracted critical investigation from theoretical, quantitative, qualitative, and even from semiotic perspectives. While there is a presence of both market-oriented and market-driven journalism in Bangladesh, there is some difference between these two theoretical constructs. For example, Randal Beam (2003) offers a liberal view on market-oriented journalism that differs from John McManus’ (2005) critical view on market-driven journalism. However, researchers have also used these two constructs interchangeably (see Curran, Iyengar, Lund, & Salovaara-Moring, 2009). From the perspective of media in Bangladesh, the difference between market-oriented and market-driven journalism is marginal in the case of television journalism because these trends are still emerging and being subsumed by the political affiliation of the media owners and advertiser relations, defined as a ‘politico-commercial nexus’.

In an era of neoliberal globalization, the potential public role of television news has been increasingly challenged on grounds of economic rationalization and the commercialization of news. Thus, in most parts of the world, the news media have become more market-driven and entertainment-centered (Curran et al., 2009; McManus, 2005; Underwood, 1993). Market orientation, which is the key principle for market-driven journalism, is considered to be one of the principal dimensions of journalism culture everywhere (Hanitzsch, 2007). In the liberal view, market orientation calls for more efficiency and professionalism in journalism; as Randal Beam defines it, “a market-oriented organization assumes that its long-run success depends upon identifying the customers that it wants to serve, determining what those customers want with respect to the organization’s products, and developing a coordinated program to meet those customers’ wants and needs” (Beam, 1998, p. 4). In theoretical neoclassical economics, market-oriented journalism gives people what they want. However, there is a difference between how market-orientation works in theory and how it is exercised in practice. In practice it encourages more commodification of news as a substitute to standardizing journalism. In practice, this type of journalism problematizes media’s democratic potentials in two major ways:

First, it considers the target audience as consumers instead of citizens (Hanitzsch, 2007; Underwood, 2001). Moreover, advertisers, not the audience, are the media’s most important customer. Therefore, it follows market logic of news selection and prioritizes the interest of the advertisers instead of the public interest (as cited in
McManus, 2005, p. 224). As a result, news organizations compete ‘to offer the least expensive mix of content that protects the interests of sponsors and investors while garnering the largest audience advertisers will pay to reach’ (McManus, 1994, p. 85). This study, especially chapter 5, carries forward this critical view of market-orientation.

Second, consumers can only value what they are offered. Media markets may ‘give the people what they want’ but will do so strictly within the limited range of offerings that can generate the greatest profits (McChesney, 2004, p. 199). More importantly, media can manipulate public preference, and promote alternative tastes (McManus, 2005). Chapter 5 shows that such manipulation is visible in Bangladesh in the practice of branding news items with names and logos of a sponsor/branding corporation or its product. An actual example is, if there is a news item on Channel i television that BATA Shoes is giving a 1 per cent discount on every purchase you make, it would be news not because the audiences (or let’s say “customers”, in Beam’s view) want to hear it or they need to hear it, but precisely because the Sales and Marketing Department of Channel i specifically asked the newsroom to send a camera man to cover BATA Shoes’ product promotion as news. It would also be news because BATA is a premium advertiser that Channel i cannot afford to lose.

Chapter 5 demonstrates that the market-orientation of television journalism in Bangladesh is corrupt, and that this has unmistakable consequences on television news production and for the democratization of public spheres as it makes the subaltern counter publics invisible. The notions of public sphere and subaltern counter publics are significant to understand the relationship between television, state, and the prospects of media democratization. While I refer to the Habermasian “public sphere,”21 I depart from its Eurocentric orientation.22 Instead of advocating for a nation-state centric single and unitary composition of public sphere, this study assumes a plural conception of public spheres, which are comprised of multiple publics with contending views and resultant

---

21 In The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1989) Jurgen Habermas traces the genealogy of public use of reason and charts the emergence of a “new space for opinion-making”. Habermas argues that a variety of social changes in early modern Europe (Germany, France, and Britain) gave rise to bourgeois public sphere. In salons and coffee houses, private people like merchant capitalists, bureaucrats and intellectuals left behind the status of their wealth, authority and private connections to “come together as public” to discuss serious political issues (p.27).

22 Gunaratne (2006) argues that the Habermasian public sphere, along with his theories of civil society and rationality suffers from the weakness of ‘Eurocentricism’ leaning solely on the experience of Europe despite claiming for universalism.
unfolding struggles at the macro level of national politics as well within the micro level of journalistic productions. In line with Fraser (1992) \(^{23}\) and Zhao (2008a) \(^{24}\), I acknowledge the exclusionary and class-dominated nature of the “bourgeois public sphere” and its potentially antagonistic relationship with “subaltern counterpublics”. Subaltern counterpublics is defined as the formation of counter-discursive ideas, opinions, and identities that exist and develop in parallel to hegemonic and class-dominated public spheres and “where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1992, p. 123). Fraser warns that not all counterpublics are virtuous, on the contrary, some of them can be explicitly anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian. This critique is pertinent to the contradictions between counterpublics in Bangladesh. \(^{25}\)

As discussed earlier, Bangladesh still carries a postcolonial split-identity between a pre-partition Bengali identity and a post-liberation Bangladeshi identity, which continue to shape the nature of party politics, cultural politics, as well as the politics of media representation in contemporary Bangladesh. This dissertation presents television as a mediator of cultural politics in its projection of a national public sphere—which is class-biased, male-dominated, urban-centric and driven by a hegemonic market-oriented ideology—marginalizing any contending voices against excessive commercialization, displacement of rural population, extraction and environmental pollution, and industrial labor exploitation embedded in neoliberal economic growth. I argue that television at large in Bangladesh has failed to accommodate any subaltern counterpublics, especially, leftist and progressive discourses.

\(^{23}\) Fraser coins the term from Gayatri Spivak’s “subaltern” and Rita Felski’s “counterpublic”, arguing that counterpublics are formed as a response to the exclusions of the dominant publics and that their existence better promotes the ideal of participatory parity under systemic social inequalities.

\(^{24}\) In Chinese context, the supposed “national bourgeoisie” is continuously challenged with a variety of “counter-bourgeois publics” including peasants, workers, women, ethnic groups, nationalists, as well as socialists and communists (Zhao, 2008, p. 13-14).

\(^{25}\) In the context of Bangladesh, some of the counterpublics can be quite contradictory and disruptive to democratic norms. An example of such contradiction is the rise of a new wave of Islamists groups in Bangladesh in this decade, named Hefajat-e-Islam, who uses mass support of the rural and sub-urban population to demand Shariah Law and Islamist Blasphemy law in Bangladesh. Although the moderate Awami League-led government is against implementing Islamist Blasphemy law, subdued by voter politics, the government was forced to reckon with the Hefajat-e-Islam’s demand by shutting down secularist blogging sites and arresting bloggers. This contradicts the popular myth of Bangladesh as a peaceful land of religious tolerance and freedom.
1.2.4. Media Democratization and Media Policy Reform

Neoliberalization marks a profound shift in the role of nation-states in communications industries as well as in policymaking process (Chakravartty & Sarikakis, 2006). Critical scholars and media reform activists around the world push forward an agenda of media reform, which is imperative to democratizing global and local media and public communication (McChesney, 1999; Zhao & Hackett, 2005). There is no simple definition of media democratization that is agreed by all, but in general it implies political and regulatory strategies to make a media system more democratic and participatory by reducing the monopoly of profit-seeking corporate media on the one hand, and encouraging various forms of public communication on the other (e.g. public service media, independent media, and horizontal means of communications). Zhao and Hackett (2005) outline three major perspectives of media and democracy, which can also be interpreted as three approaches of media democratization. These include market liberal (neoliberalism) and conservative critiques, the ‘Public Sphere’ liberal approach, and radical democracy and direct participation perspectives.

In market liberal (neoliberalism) and conservative critiques, the idea of defending private property, private ownership, individual rights, freedom of choice, consumer sovereignty, and autonomy—free of state’s intervention—become prominent. Although the conservative critique is concerned with violations of morality, ethics, sexism, sensationalism, invasion of privacy, it fails to explain the consequence of commercialization of media upon public discourses. Therefore, communications reform, in this perspective, ignores hidden-market agendas. ‘Public Sphere’ liberalism is based on Habermas’ notion of “Communicative democracy” and “Public Sphere” theory. It emphasizes individual rights, press freedom, quality and equality of public debate, independent watchdog role of press, civic engagement and public participation and participatory democracy. Radical democracy and direct participation perspectives acknowledge the value of public sphere liberalism but also emphasizes a more critical stance on social order with equality, equal rights and “equitable participation in decision-making” at all spheres of public life, including in communications policy-making and media reform actions. In this view, citizens are expected to exercise equal legal and political rights, and to apply these rights to enact a total transformation of inequalities.

---

embedded in the capitalist society. In the approach, commercialized and corporate dominated media systems in the West “contradict democratic equality and participatory citizenship” (Zhao & Hackett, 2005, p. 12).

A growing body of literature in Western academia indicates a convergence of public sphere liberalism and radical democracy and direct participation (for example, Carpentier, Dahlgren, & Pasquali, 2013), in which the proposition of participation in the media as well as through the media gains momentum. A more recent maxim for media democratization, promoted by the Vancouver-based Media Democracy Project is, “know the media, be the media, change the media”, and has been acknowledged and adopted in media scholarship (see, Cross & Skinner, 2016). In this view, broadly, media policy reform is a precondition to democratize a media system, and it can be achieved through institutional arrangements, such as, by establishing autonomous, independent and impartial regulatory commissions (Freedman, 2008) but more importantly through spontaneous and self-organized social movements with the participation of both citizens and practitioners. Here media reform is not limited to media ownership only but also extended to democratizing investigative journalism, spectrum management, speech rights, broadband access, network neutrality, the surveillance apparatus, digital literacy, and so on (Freedman, Obar, Martens, & McChesney, 2016, McChesney, 2009).

There is a debate between whether media reform should be seen as a part of a broader social movement or a movement-nexus (Hackett & Carroll, 2006) or a stand-alone social movement (Napoli, 2007). Both views converge on the point that media policymaking must be transparent and held accountable to the public (Freedman, 2008). On way to achieve that is to make the policymaking process more inclusive, therefore, the idea of multistakeholderism (participatory political decision-making process involving multiple actors) in communications policymaking is gaining momentum in global media policymaking processes (Raboy, Landry, & Shtern, 2010). However, how useful are these Western-centric theories and examples to imagine media democratization in a non-Western context? To what degree can policy-reform initiatives by the government solve problems that are embedded in the governance of media? Chapter 6 tackles these questions and provides an empirical analysis of the broadcast policymaking process in Bangladesh while engaging in a discussion of media democratization and its limits.
Amin Alhassan (2004) argues that the agency of state and nation in postcolonial states are shaped by both local and international pressures, as well as by their historical trajectories. A postcolonial political economy of culture and communication must pay attention to these factors. The construction of global communications policy in postcolonial states is also a contested site of domination of language and discourse. This becomes evident in Alhassan and Chakravartty’s (2011) discussion where they show how postcolonial media policy is still guided by the colonial legacy as the authorities in postcolonial nation-states in Africa, Asia, Latin America continue to enforce exclusionary practices in the name of modernization and development. However, there are examples that regulatory reform can lead to democratizing communication if it is accompanied by a self-organized social movement of non-elite civic groups and the general public both in policy reforms and in media programming.

Chapter 6 embraces this insight and investigates: to what extent is the making of national broadcast policy in Bangladesh democratic? Combining the issues of ownership, political culture, and party politics the chapter examines the political reality of government-led policy reform in Bangladesh. It also engages a discussion of the level that different publics participate in policymaking, and the structural and procedural constraints to such participation.

The study does not limit the discussion of media democratization in policymaking only. Throughout Chapters 3, 4, and 5 the dissertation identifies extents of inequalities in the television industry and in the news production practices of the state-broadcaster and private television channels. Do grand narratives of democratization, even progressive ones, too often bypass or marginalize the question of hierarchies of race and gender? Following Zhao and Hackett’s (2005, p. 27) provocative question, the study addresses the issues of gendered and hierarchical division of labor in television news production, gatekeeping, and resultant journalistic struggles in the face of constant pressure of market-orientation. The questions of inequality, power, and democratization, thus serve as root inquiries and philosophical quests for the whole study that I deploy by probing into the challenges of state-broadcasting, licensing process of television, newsroom hierarchy, as well as the commodification of television journalism.
1.3. Notes on Methodology

There is no shortage of textual and quantitative content analysis in the study of television in Bangladesh (for instance, see, Ahmed & Osmani, 2014; Islam & Marjan, 2013). Using content analysis could provide valuable insights for measuring the frequency and degree of news coverage on an area, but it might offer limited insights about the processes of news production and its internal and external factors such as ownership, influence of advertising, policy issues. Acknowledging the value of content analysis, this study departs from the conventional way of analyzing television journalism in quantitative terms; instead it aims to contribute to the body of knowledge by offering a structural analysis of news production based on qualitative methods.

A qualitative study produces context-bound methodological assumptions based on inductive process where the researcher interacts with what is being researched, and develops an understanding of mutual shaping of factors (Creswell, 1994, p. 4). The research outlined here can be categorized as both exploratory and explanatory in that it poses “how” and “why” questions that use multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2014). For example, how are television channels licensed in Bangladesh and why? How is television news commodified? How does it impact news production?

Questions are addressed through a multi-site case study using in-depth and key-informant interviews with semi-structured and open-ended questionnaires, and documentary research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Methods also include a range of analysis of image of news commodification wherever applicable. The data collection methods of this research require traveling to interview informants and sources of documents and archives. Given the volume of work required, I conducted two fieldtrips to Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, between September 2013 to August 2014. The fieldwork is limited to Dhaka city, where all television channel headquarters and all government offices involved with policymaking, are situated. Given that Bangladesh is a small country with a high density of media offices in the capital city, a field visit to Dhaka is deemed justified for the purpose of this study. In order to keep the data up to date with recent developments, I followed up with some of the participants and conducted a few new interviews over the telephone in 2017.
1.3.1. Multi-site Case Studies

There is a great deal of literature that addresses case studies as a scientific method of enquiry in social science research (e.g. Flyvbjerg, 2006; Gerring, 2004; Yin, 2014; Stake, 1995). This study is informed by Robert Yin’s definition of case study method:

- **A case study is an empirical inquiry that**
  - investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
  - the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.
- **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, 2014, p. 13)

There are debates on strengths and limitations of case study research just like any other qualitative research method (such as ethnographic or phenomenological study). On the one hand, case study research constitutes an all-encompassing method that covers the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis (Yin, 2014). On the other hand, the effectiveness of case study research depends on a researcher’s training of interviewing, observation, as well as on the sensitivity and integrity of the researcher. Another limitation assumed against case study research is that it cannot produce any valuable general knowledge given that the findings come from a case specific context. Bent Flyvbjerg argues that this is simply a misunderstanding. He posits that context dependent knowledge driven from case study can be more valuable than universal theoretical knowledge (2006). Case study methods, if based on a carefully chosen case (or cases), can contribute to scientific development (see, Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 66-77; Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Yin (2014, p. 39) provides four types of designs for case studies in his argument. The matrix in Table 1.1 below is based on the assumption that single- and multiple-case studies reflects different design consideration and within these two types there also can be unitary or multiple unit of analysis. Yin notes that it is necessary to decide, prior to any data collection, on whether a single-case study or multiple cases are going to be
used to address the research questions. This allows relating the data to the theories in an inductive and dialectical way, refining the dialectics between data and theory as the work progresses and making value judgments regarding the relative strength of aspects of each approach for different sections of the study (Creswell, 2003, p. 132-4).

Table 1.1. Basic Types of Designs for Case Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single-Case Designs</th>
<th>Multiple Case-Designs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holistic (Single unit of analysis)</td>
<td>TYPE 1</td>
<td>TYPE 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded (multiple unit of analysis)</td>
<td>TYPE 2</td>
<td>TYPE 4 (This Study)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adopted from Yin, 2014, p. 39.

There are benefits for researchers to use more than one case, which include broader generalizability, wider validity, and greater flexibility for data collection. However, it also comes with the greater challenge to access multiple media organizations and to manage a bigger amount of data. Marshall and Rossman (2011, p. 103) argue “sample size in qualitative research depends on many complex factors.” They outline how the sample of case studies may consist of studying one person or one institution. In my previous Masters research, I employed a single-case design with holistic (single unit of analysis), taking NTV as a case study. But it represented a unique case rather than an embedded scenario (see Rahman, 2009).27 In that research, a crucial complex factor was not taken into consideration, that the case study sample was only one organization from the context of private TV channels. Thus, it failed to address why and how a state-owned TV channel may or may not be affected by neoliberal globalization.

For the purpose of this research, three television channels have been selected as core cases after a careful purposive case sampling. It means that most of the interviews of journalists and the journalistic information used in this study derives from these three television channels. This sampling allows me to include and represent at least one organization from diverse types of TV channels currently present in Bangladesh, which includes a state-administered broadcaster (Bangladesh Television, a general television channel (Channel i) representing the early generation of private

27 Given the breadth and scope of my Masters level research my Case Study has mainly attempted to illustrate market orientation trends in the News and Current Affairs department of a private television Channel rather than examining the whole contents of news, and other departments such as program, advertising and marketing etc. (see Rahman, 2007a, 2009).
television channels, and a 24/7 news channel (Somoy Television) representing the new generation of private television channels. Such multisite sampling allows flexibility to use various data collection methods, and increases the generalizability of the research findings. In addition to the core cases, the study is enriched with controlled random interviews of journalists representing six additional television channels.

A multisite case study may also contain multiple unit of analysis. Given that the research questions of this study are centrally concerned with commercialization and market-orientation in news production, examining one only unit, which Yin defines as part of his holistic design (Yin, 1994, p. 49), may not reveal the holistic perspective that a critical political economic analysis demands. For example, examining the production of news by interviewing the working journalists in a newsroom will merely disclose the extent of market-orientation from a journalist’s point of view, not the owner’s or marketer’s view. It is equally important to understand the marketer’s point of view to explain how the macro-ideology of neoliberalism is realized as well as contested at the micro-industrial level.

This study primarily focuses on news programs and the production of news in the selected television channels but also draws reference to other programs that are heavily commodified (such as drama show, cinema, talk show, and magazine programs). Media sociologist Michael Schudson (2000) points out that news is a systematic output that depends on how the newsroom interplays with advertisement demands, and the marketing cells of a media organization. As a critical political economy approach suggests, researchers need to look specifically at “how ownership, support mechanisms (e.g. advertising), and government policies influence media behavior and content” (McChesney, 1998, p. 3). In my previous discussion, the link between neoliberal globalization and transnational and local commodity production becomes evident. This raises the question, to what extent is news commodified by other commodities? How do transnational or local advertisers influence the production of news in television channels? Why is the ownership of television channels important to understand such linkages? What is the role of government to foster the integration of capital with local media production? This study finds answers to these questions through employing a range of crosscutting interviews between journalists, media owners, marketers, media regulators, and academics. Table 1.2 showcases a range of data collection tools from various sources used from the case studies for this research.
Table 1.2.  Research Data Collection Tools and Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Unit of Analysis</th>
<th>Data source/positions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>News and Current Affairs</td>
<td>Director, Head of News, Chief News Editor, Assignment Editor, Staff Reporter, Correspondent, Executive Producer, Producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advertising and Marketing</td>
<td>Director of Sales and Marketing, Marketing Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government officials</td>
<td>Minister, Secretary, Joint Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Assistant Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policy experts</td>
<td>University Professor, Program Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Study</td>
<td>News and Current Affairs</td>
<td>Assignment schedules, Program Schedule, List of employees, Organizational structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advertising and Marketing</td>
<td>Advertising rates, List of advertisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policy Stakeholders</td>
<td>Policy drafts, Meeting documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-participant Observation (Occasional)</td>
<td>News and Current Affairs Advertising and Marketing</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For a list of all positions interviewed see Appendix A

The interview sampling is comprised of multiple divisions from the media industry, such as a few media owners, senior and mid-level journalists from News and Current Affairs division from various television channels, and head of Sales and Advertising who makes decision on advertising. The sampling also includes government high officials and policy stakeholders such as television channel owners, NGO representatives, civil society members, and journalists, who comprise a small group of people. I have also interviewed several media industry experts and academic scholars who shared their valuable experience of studying and observing the growth of mass media in Bangladesh for over a decade. I also spoke to several acquaintances who helped me to access the media. This makes the case study design of this research an *embedded* (multiple unit of analysis) and a *multiple case design* at the same time (Table 1.1). A list of all interviewees, with their titles and affiliation, is placed in Appendix A.

### 1.3.2. In-depth and Key-informant Interviews

About 34 subjects have been interviewed during two fieldwork excursions (see Appendix A). In-depth interviews ranged from 30-45 minutes, and key-informant interviews were 45-90 minutes long. Initially I interviewed 25 participants. As I started
data gathering I felt a need to interview a few more participants and ended up interviewing 40 participants in total. Out of the 40 participants, three interviewees participated in my study anonymously, and four interviewees participated only by telephone. Participants consisted of: a) senior executives and mid-level television journalists mostly from two highly prominent private satellite television, Channel i (representing one of the ‘general’ television channels), Somoy TV (representing one of the ‘24/7 news’ channels), b) senior executives and mid-level television journalists one state-owned television Bangladesh Television (representing the only terrestrial and state-administered television), c) senior officials from the Ministry of Information, responsible for broadcasting policymaking, and d) policy experts and academics.

I have also interviewed several senior and mid-level journalists from other television stations, including Ekushey Television, Independent Television, NTV, Maasranga Television, Boishakhi, and Jamuna Television to yield a greater generalizability and reliability of data obtained from the core cases (Somoy TV, Channel i, and BTV). For example, when interviewing a Channel i senior executive I learned that some of the owners of private television channels have considerable influence on the policy-outcomes made by the government. To examine the validity and reliability of this finding, I interviewed a high official from the Ministry of Information as well as a senior executive of Boishakhi (television) who served as a journalist member in the National Broadcast Policy (2014) committee. Once I obtained enough insider information about the policymaking process, I felt a need to further investigate the leaders and directors of the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO), and later secured an interview with a senior correspondent of NTV who regularly covers ATCO news.

Gaining access to the television channels and government offices was the biggest obstacle of the fieldwork. To gain access to interview subjects I had to depend on the help of acquaintances who are close to media social networks. I obtained verbal approvals from the authority of the institutions prior to beginning of the research. The Right to Information Act, 2009 empowered me to obtain data from the public, autonomous and private organizations. Whenever the interviewees permitted, I recorded the interview with a digital device to use it for future reference while proceeding with this study. All participants provided informed consent to participate in the interview orally.
Throughout the interviews I was aware of interview bias, the concern that the interviewees may be encouraged to provide certain types of answers by the phrasing and the delivery of questions by the interviewer (Deacon, Murdock, & Pickering, 2007, p. 385). It is impossible to completely eradicate such bias in a study, because a researcher poses questions from a subjective position, and the questions cannot be completely value-free. However, such bias can be minimized by asking open-ended and semi-structured questions that allow both interviewers and interviewee to reach a middle ground. An open-ended and semi-structured interview questioning method allow a researcher to build a question based on the answer of a previously posed question. For example, while interviewing a journalist at Ekushey Television I learned that he is about to leave the job. Instead of posing a leading question like “what is wrong with this television channel?”, which could induce a negative connotation in the interviewee’s mind I asked him “could you give some reasons to why are you leaving this channel?”.

1.3.3. Documentary Study

Documentary study is a useful method for “locating, identifying, retrieving and analyzing documents for their relevance, significance and meaning” (Altheide, 1996, p. 2). As the political economy approach suggests looking at the historical transformation of the media institutions, I have analyzed a range of primary source data, such as ownership information obtained from the Registrar Office, organizational structures of television channels, assignment schedules of news production, broadcasting policy drafts and meeting procedures, lists of media organization employees, and lists of TV channel advertisers. These documents were obtained through interviews and with the verbal permission of the authority of each organization. Owing to the Right to Information Act 2009, most of this data and documents are available to the general public and are considered to be in the public domain. However, it is relevant to note that some of the documents are not available to the public ‘by design’, which means they are neither restricted to general public, nor made available to the public in any platform. I obtained two crucial documents of this nature by interviewing key personnel who were in possession of such documents. For instance, while interviewing a high official of the Ministry of Information, I obtained a “Meeting Notice” document, which shows who are the members of National Broadcast Policy committee. Following the paper trail, I interviewed a top executive of Channel i television who provided two feedback letters
from the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) to the Ministry of Information, which provide empirical evidence of how the owners of private television channels are influencing and shaping the policy outcomes to their favor.

One of the key challenges I faced with obtaining primary source documents is that many interviewees declined to reveal financial statistics and ownership information due to organizational restrictions and conservative corporate culture. The private television channels are not publicly traded companies; therefore, they are not bound to release annual reports and financial data to public. Therefore, I could not obtain some crucial financial documents, such as, annual budgets, annual turnover, annual profit, and share prices, which could further strengthen the arguments of this research. I checked internet databases such as Google Finance and Lexis Nexis, but this information is not available there. The pertinent media companies did not wish to reveal such data as they consider it sensitive information that can give their competitors an unfair advantage.

To overcome this shortcoming, I have used secondary source documentary research using library sources, online databases, and the Internet. Secondary source data includes: advertising revenue, audience demographic surveys, rating and marketing information, advertiser-media interlocking networking data, company profiles and mission statements, news articles and analysis, survey results, as well as relevant academic research conducted by other researchers. I took all precautions to identify the bias in any given document and avoided importing any promotional or celebratory messages.

1.3.4. Triangulation

The study triangulates the data collected from these three methods (multi-site case study, interviews, and documentary research), while offering a combination of analysis and value judgments as the discussions go on. While triangulation, in general, refers to the process of combining insights from different qualitative and quantitative methods, and multiple theoretical perspectives, it may also refer to combining several qualitative methods (Denzin, 2015; Flick, 2014, p. 182). The biggest advantage of triangulation is that it can produce insights that go beyond the knowledge made possible by one approach. However, the drawback is that in a multi-method study, the researchers might be tempted to cherry pick findings while triangulating data.
This study carefully acknowledges wherever any differences emerged, rather than to “resort to selective, epistemic prioritization as a get-out clause” (Deacon, Bryman, & Fenton, 1998). For example, while triangulating information about Bangladesh Television’s (BTV) news production I learned about the internal disagreement among BTV staff in terms of whether the channel should become an autonomous station or remain under the state as a government office. Although as a researcher I believe in the autonomy of public broadcasting, I carefully acknowledge both the for and the against arguments of state-broadcasting. Chapter 7 (further discussion and conclusion) offers a combined insight from the triangulated findings.

1.3.5. Research Ethics

The research protocol complies with the provisions of Chapter 8, Article 8.4., TCPS2 (http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter8-chapitre8/#toc08-1). The research design is informed by the core principles outlined by the TCPS2: Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare, and Justice. To my knowledge, no research ethics bodies exist in Dhaka pertinent to this research. Therefore, I conducted this research with a single Research Ethics Board (REB). My research was guided by the rules governing research involving humans as indicated by the REB at my home institution: Simon Fraser University. The study protocol is considered to be a Minimal Risk as defined by TCP2 Policy, Section C1. My interview method or question did not pose any threat to the subject or possible harms implied by participation in the research greater than those encountered by the subject in his or her everyday life that relate to the research.

1.4. Chapter Outlines

This dissertation is organized with seven chapters (table 1.3). This chapter lays out the foundation for key theoretical discussions and debates and defines the key concepts and terminologies. It also explains the rationale for the methodology of this study.
Table 1.3. Chapter Organization of the Dissertation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>Transformation of the State and Development of Media in Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>A Political Economy of State-broadcasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>Ownership Structure and Politics of Licensing Private Television Channels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>Market-orientation of Television Journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>The Politics of Broadcast Policymaking and Prospects of Media Democratization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7</td>
<td>Further Discussions and Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 2 (Media in Bangladesh) provides a brief historical and informative overview of the development of the print and electronic media in Bangladesh and situates the growth of media in the wider context of South Asia. This also helps to locate the television industry in the broader context of the historical, political, and social transformations of the country. Drawing from primary and secondary literature, the chapter contextualizes the development of media in the Indian subcontinent during the colonial era and points towards the problems of the post-partition press. It explains why media ownership in Bangladesh is a highly sensitive issue for successive governments and how it is deeply intertwined with the political and social transformation of the country from a postcolonial to a neoliberal nation-state.

The chapter illustrates that over the past two decades, the reach of the media in Bangladesh has extended from national to global audiences. At the same time, media ownership patterns in Bangladesh have expanded from state-ownership to commercial and non-governmental actors, and the mode of distribution has shifted from state-controlled monopoly to multiplatform mediation. Chapter 2 also shows that the rise of India as a regional superpower has partially influenced the growth of the news media and media competition, particularly of satellite television in its neighboring countries including Bangladesh. The chapter situates the growth of television in Bangladesh in the context of the rise of 24/7 satellite television around the world and demonstrates that despite the breathtaking growth of new media and multiplatform mediation, television remains central to media power in many countries in the Global South, especially in South Asia. This helps us to prepare the ground for the discussion of media ownership and the structure of the television industry in the three subsequent chapters.
Chapter 3 (A Political Economy of State-broadcasting) focuses on Bangladesh Television (BTV), the state-administered broadcaster in Bangladesh and charts its neoliberal transformation. The chapter goes beyond the narrative of the propaganda role of state-broadcasting, and enquires into the key challenges BTV faces with the growth of a highly commercialized private television industry in the era of multiplatform mediation. Based on a combination of in-depth interviews and documentary analysis, the chapter locates four problematic areas including political instrumentalization, commercialization, struggle for autonomy, and contradictory policy responses – all which impede BTV’s ability to perform as a public service media. The chapter makes a point that this inability has to be understood not as a failure of state-broadcasting but as a result of colonial legacy, postcolonial transformation, as well as a derivative of neoliberal market-orientation of communications in Bangladesh.

Chapter 4 (Ownership Structure and Politics of Private Television Industry) dissects the power-relations of the expansion of the television industry and the evolution of broadcasting regulations while tracing its neoliberal-transformation with postcolonial characteristics. It provides a historical overview of the rise of the private television industry in Bangladesh, and offers a political economic analysis of the concentration of media ownership in general. The chapter combines documentary data with secondary literature to unveil the process of television licensing in Bangladesh by various governments, and shows that television ownership in Bangladesh is deeply constrained by a politico-commercial nexus which advances its own agenda to use private television channels for political influence and business connections. The chapter also draws upon the impact of ownership on television news production in private television channels; including political instrumentalization, journalistic struggles, and declining credibility.

Chapter 5 (Market-orientation of Television Journalism) charts the extent of market-orientation in television journalism, and its impact on journalistic production. Building on the discussions on the growth of the media industry from previous chapters, this chapter extends the investigation empirically to two primary areas of political economic analyses, i.e. a) the extension of corporate reach, and b) the impact of commodification. The analysis of Chapter 5 delves into the issues of depoliticization of television news, self-censorship in news production, legitimation of commercialization, and most importantly the ideological consequence of silencing the voices of marginalized communities. It shows that television journalism fails to consider counter-
public spheres. The chapter also makes the bold revelation that moving away from dictatorship towards a liberal democratic form of political rule does not necessarily lead to a democratic media system. The commercialization of media poses a similar, to some extent more severe, threat to journalistic practices as that imposed by the authoritarian regimes, thus destroying the spaces of the television-mediated public spheres.

Chapter 6 (The Politics of Broadcast Policymaking and Prospects of Media Democratization) explores the ongoing contestation of media policymaking and discusses its implications for television ownership, news production, and media democratization in general. The chapter identifies the limitations of a multi-stakeholder approach at the national level. Based on the data collected from key-informant interviews and documentary research, the chapter examines the politics and power relations of broadcast policymaking and critically analyzes the stakeholders involved in the making of the Bangladeshi National Broadcasting Policy 2014, and Private Television Channel Establishment and Operation Policy 2012 (Draft). The findings of the chapter show that with the inclusion of multiple stakeholders in the National Broadcast Policy committee, the broadcast policymaking process in Bangladesh has apparently become more inclusive and dynamic. However, it is subjugated by a hegemonic politico-commercial nexus that legitimizes the state’s authority over media regulation in the era of neoliberalization. This process of policymaking excludes the grassroots from the power equation while maintaining status quo political oversight of television ownership. The chapter shows that the Community Radio Policy excluded its key beneficiary from the policymaking process. The chapter also suggests that any standalone policy reform is not adequate to resist the threat of unaccountable power of the politico-commercial nexus in Bangladesh. Policy reform, therefore, should be taken as an immanent agenda for democratizing media while keeping progressive social change as a long-term goal.

Chapter 7 (Further Discussion and Conclusion) briefly summarizes the implications of this study for critical political economy of media analysis at large. The overall research foregrounds a pressing need for democratizing the media ecosystem in Bangladesh. The findings suggest that media democratization can be achieved only when there is a wide scope of public debates, inclusion of counter-publics, and a culture of active civic engagement reducing the urban-rural disparity in media agenda setting. In conclusion, the research stresses a need for a public-oriented media policy reform to ensure the de-commodification of television journalism practices in Bangladesh.
Chapter 2. Media in Bangladesh

This chapter explains under which political, cultural, and social circumstances mass media were born in the greater Indian subcontinent, and how these underscores the political economy of mass media at present day Bangladesh. This retrospective is imperative to situate the political aspect of the ownership in its historical context. It is impossible to address all the historical contours and social struggles in such a limited scope. This chapter addresses the salient features that help us to understand the political reality in which media was deeply imbedded.

2.1. The Colonial Legacy

The foundation of print and electronic media of Bangladesh lies in the colonial era. In pre-colonial era the Pathan-Mughal rulers mastered an effective postal communication system, but it did not help the spread of information due to poor literacy and poverty rates. In the 18th century, the British Raj (Figure 2.1) developed the railway, the telegraph and uniform postage to expand British authority, but it had “also helped spark the touch-paper of early Indian nationalisms; the improved state of transport and communications allowing latent ideas and attitudes to travel and ferment into broader political movements” (Pinkerton, 2008, p. 168). The newspaper was the first viable vehicle for mass communication in the sub-continent. The early history of the press in the East Indian region is a history of control and resistance that underpins the current state of capitalist media in Bangladesh.

British colonization fundamentally transformed India into a dependent agricultural capitalist country by systematically establishing forms of private ownership of agricultural land that denied most of the farmers to access it, and transformed them into a poor, landless peasantry (Amin, 2005b). From a nationalist point of view, former diplomat and popular writer Shashi Tharoor pins the blame for poverty on the British East India company and subsequent colonial rulers who drained Indian capital to Britain through systemic industrial exploitation and political deprivation. Tharoor informs, “when the East


India Company took control of the sub-continent, in the chaos that ensued after the collapse of the Mughal empire, India’s share of world GDP was 23 per cent. When the British left it was just above 3 per cent” (Tharoor, 2016).

This is one side of the story, however. The colonization was also accompanied by further proletarianization of the working class by upper class Indian bourgeoisie and the highly inegalitarian but persistent practice of caste discrimination in the village communities (Amin, 2005b). Sahana Udupa argues that the liberal reasoning of public opinion in India was not marked by a unitary, cohesive, or collective nature but it was a “part of the pedagogical discourse of colonial power” which was also appropriated in the local struggles for political power by the upper caste to dominate over non-Brahmin movements (Udupa & McDowell, 2017, p. 5-6; Udupa, 2010).
Under this situation, the print medium started its journey in the sub-continent. *Hicky’s Bengal Gazette* (or the *Calcutta General Advertiser*), a weekly in published English by James Augustus Hickey and established in 1780, was the first newspaper in the Indian subcontinent.\(^{29}\) The monthly *Digdarshan*, weekly *Samachar Darpan*, and weekly *Bengal Gazette* (different from the one Hickey published) all appeared in 1818 and were the first newspapers in the Bangla language. Except for the weekly *Bengal Gazette* (1818), all the other publications of that time were owned and edited by Europeans – mostly Christian missionaries. James Silk Buckingham, an English author and traveler published the first daily newspaper of the region, the *Calcutta Journal*, in 1819. However, the first newspaper originating from the territory that comprises present day Bangladesh was *Rangpur Bartabaha*, in 1847.

While the British colonizers introduced mass media to the sub-continent, it came with a practice of press censorship. The rulers were not ready to tolerate any criticism:

From the very beginning, the newspapers came under the strict control and censorship of the British East India Company, which controlled the political and economic activities of much of the Indian subcontinent at that time. The newspapers critical of Company rule were eventually banned or their editors and publishers were sent back to Britain. For example, both Hickey and Buckingham’s publications were banned, and the editors were expelled from India by the East India Company. (Mahmud, 2013, p. 39)

Print took more than a century to evolve from a medium of colonial journalism into a medium of colonial resistance. Most newspapers during 1780-1846 were brought out from Calcutta, the capital of East Bengal on that time, and they were highly partisan in nature and highly vocal against the colonial rule. It is important to note that the mediation of resistance had an internal politics of marginalization, which reflected a complex mixture of gendered, religious and class politics of the nineteenth century Bengali society. The resistance took place at multiple layers involving multiple spheres of publics, but the newspapers primarily reflected the participation of literate middle-class males who drew energy from the cultural interior of the society. Historian Partha Chatterjee (1993) identifies a key dimension of identity building of in his seminal work, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. He shows that the nineteenth century Bengali identity on East Bengal was colonized by British rulers in the form of a ‘political nationalism” only from outside, but from inside it was a vigorous

---

domain of cultural and spiritual identities, practiced by peasants, women, and low-caste 
publics at family and local community levels, which could not be annexed by Western 
hegemony. In his analysis, it was the women who were enforced to be the keepers of 
cultural and spiritual identities, signs, and practices in the inner world while middle class 
males exercised their privilege to engage in both inside and outside worlds. Consequently, such patriarchal marginalization of women’s contributions to building 
momentum against colonial resistance is also reflected in the expansion of anti-colonial print media in the 19th century. Almost all newspapers were owned, operated, and 
contributed to by males. By 1873, there were 38 periodicals in then Bangla language, of 
which 10 were published from East Bengal. At least ten newspapers were published in 
various East Bengali locations at the end of the nineteenth century. Most newspapers 
were under Hindu ownership. The Muslim community, still lagging in literacy, “was slow 
to enter the newspaper world” (Rahman & Ahmed, 2015).

The potential for newspapers in East Bengal to demonstrate high sales and 
political influence became evident between 1900 and 1947. It was not motivated by the 
industrial growth of British enterprises but by the resurgence of a nationalistic spirit and 
with intense political activism that fueled a huge demand for a mass medium to vent 
collective repressed emotions expressing clear opposition to the colonial rulers. During 
this period, 173 newspapers were published in the yet-undivided Bengal, of which more 
than 65 came from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) (Khan, 2008, p. 104).

Broadcast media, however, evolved with a different impetus. It was primarily 
introduced as, what historian Alasdair Pinkerton denotes, ‘a complex geopolitical tool of 
contingent nature’ that Europe and the imperial metropoles were already preparing the 
ground for British India to experience soon. Historian Partha Sarathi Gupta writes:

Monopolistic control of information strengthens the authority of those in 
power, and one would expect a colonial state [i.e. British India] to make the 
most of this device. In the 1920s the Indian scene was characterized by 
social unrest and political agitation. Europe showed that the broadcasting 
medium could be used by Fascist Italy to manufacture an illusion of political 
consensus and by the Soviet Union to broadcast revolutionary messages 
through the length and breadth of the former Tsarist Empire. In Britain itself 
radio came to the aid of the ruling circles during the nine-day General Strike 
in May 1926.30

While the first radio broadcasts in India was launched by several enthusiastic ‘radio clubs’ in early 1920s in urban centers, the Indian Broadcasting Company (IBC), a private enterprise, was the first to be authorized to broadcast from two radio stations in 1927 using the British model (i.e. centralized, licensed monopoly). This resulted in the demise of the amateur ‘radio club’ model as the IBC exercised the rights and privileges (and authority granted by the Viceroy) to sustain a monopoly over the sale of radio licenses (in a pseudo-BBC mold). For example, the most successful of India’s radio clubs, the Madras Presidency Radio Club, was forced to close down in October 1927 (See, Pinkerton, 2008, p. 173). Thus, the prospect of a collective model of non-profit media was systematically replaced by the British government of India to give way to commercial media that could leverage the British voice to a wider audience. However, it did not go as planned. As Manjunath Pendakur (2003, p. 35) elaborates:

“By 1930 their [the IBC’s] pioneering effort to launch privately owned radio ran into trouble because of a lack of revenues. Broadcasting from their two stations, located in Bombay and Calcutta, they catered to the small European community and Westernized Indians while ignoring the masses.

Under these circumstances, the company was liquidated in 1930 and the government took over all of its assets and re-designed it first as the Indian State Broadcasting Service and later as All India Radio (AIR) in 1936, in the service of Indian state consolidation as Gandhi’s civil disobedience movements begun to spark. At the beginning, the broadcasting of AIR in the subcontinent was urban-biased (Figure 2.2), although it was hardly anything ‘all Indian’ as the name of the radio suggested. During the Second World War the colonial rulers felt an urge to use its External Service to broadcast in Pashtu “to deliver urgent propaganda” of the British Empire to counter radio propaganda from Germany directed to Afghanistan, Iran and the Arab nations (Agrawal & Raghaviah, 2006).

At the time of partition in 1947, All India Radio had six radio stations in India (Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Tiruchirapalli, and Lucknow) and three Radio Stations in Pakistan (Peshawar, Lahore and Dacca) (All India Radio, 2016a). The radio stations were expanded in the postcolonial era along with replicating the broadcast model to television medium.
Chapter 3 explains that the governments of the decolonized subcontinent carried on the colonial legacy of using media for the interest of the ruling party in the name of nation-building.
2.2. The Postcolonial Transformations

The postcolonial era was marked by two historical junctures – the partition of India in 1947 and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 – that reshaped the political fabric of colonial rule in the Indian sub-continent and paved ways for the religious-based formation of these evolving nations. Brian Shoesmith and Shameem Mahmud (2013, p. 15-16) interpret that both events largely shaped the basis of present media system in Bangladesh. At the same time, press laws and regulations developed during the British Raj and Pakistan era as well as the post-1971 independent Bangladesh, demonstrate continuity and together provide the regulatory frameworks under which media outlets in Bangladesh function. Agreeing to this general statement, in this section I provide evidence that if the exogenous factors of the colonial rulers and the postcolonial Pakistani regimes formed the exoskeleton of the media industry, the endogenous factors of class struggle and cultural politics molded its interior, i.e. the ownership and interest of the media.

The post-war decolonization of the subcontinent tore apart the cultural fabric of Bengali identities as the region was divided into two politically and religiously divided states, i.e. India and Pakistan. In 1940, through the Lahore Resolution, the Muslim League proposed to create separate states in Muslim majority areas of east and west India. Badaruddin Umar (2004) states that the partition of India, and consequently Bengal and the Punjab in 1947, instead of solving the religious minority problem in each region that it promised, firmly consolidated the rule of the already existing religious majorities that constituted British India. What became clear was that in the name of the independence movement both political parties, the Congress and the Muslim League, “were trying to consolidate the interests of the Indian feudal-bourgeois classes belonging to the Hindu and Muslim majority communities respectively” (p. 1). Umar further elaborates that by expressing support for the partition, various minorities were used by both political parties in the interests of the capitalists and landlord classes of their own religious communities with tragic consequences not only for religious and other minorities, but for the entire population of what is now called South Asia. Subsequently, the narrow vision of the Muslim League leader Mohammad Ali Jinnah on the majority question excluded important minorities (such as Sikh and other major racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities in Bihar, north-east India and in the South) from the dialogue of
nation-building, and made it possible for upper-caste big Hindu capital to consolidate their power through the Congress party “under the deceitful garb of Indian nationalism.” (Umar, 2004, p. 3) By the time the Communist Party of India (CPI) entered the scene as a powerful political force it was too late for them to redirect the course of “one nation” as a history of struggles of many national minorities.

In the post-partition period, the class struggle and politics of religion and language became more pronounced in newly independent Pakistan that was divided in West Pakistan and East Pakistan on the basis of Islamic religion despite their vast linguistic, ethnic, and cultural differences. A large number of peasants and middle-class Hindu population and peasants of tribal origin from the East Pakistan part were silently forced to migrate to West Bengal losing their wealth, and were still reeling from the Bengal famine during the second world war. On the other hand, a much smaller number of Indian Muslims, mostly from middle class migrated to East Pakistan. This had an impact on the future of print and electronic media on both sides of the border. The East part of Pakistan inherited only a little portion of the pre-partition sub-continental media properties. In 1947, East Bengal had few regional newspapers, one state-run radio inherited from AIR, and no television stations. However, shortly after the partition, most of the Muslim owners and editors of Bengali dailies that catered to readers in East Bengal migrated from Kolkata to Dhaka (Shoesmith & Mahmud, 2013, p. 16).

The artificially forged bond between the east and west segments of Pakistani state did not bode well for either part. Stark differences between the two provinces came to the fore in the early 1950s over the issue of national language. The Pakistani government ordained Urdu as the sole national language, resulting in extensive protests among the Bangla-speaking majority of East Pakistan. A movement sparked demanding Bangla as official language of East Pakistan. The press of post-partition East Pakistan, however small in number, strongly supported the movement. The Language Movement turned into a Bengali nationalist movements as the economic issue became crucial. Under Pakistan rule (1947-1971) the economy of Bangladesh was further peripheralized. East Pakistan became the periphery within a periphery of the world-system. Economic decline was accompanied with an inequitable distribution of ethnic political power. Despite constituting a numerical majority, Bengalis—the people of the eastern province—were excluded from the power structure dominated by the West Pakistanis, particularly the ethnic Punjabis. Throughout the 1960s, notes Ali Riaz, “the disparity
between the two wings of the country grew at an alarming rate owing to the transfer of resources from the east, large-scale appropriation of surpluses by the west, and meager developmental expenditure in the east” (Riaz, 2005, p. 28).

The severe economic disparity and obvious political marginalization formed grave discontent among the Bengalis. At the same time the economic and social policies of the Pakistani state brought changes in the class structure of East Pakistan. Alongside various classes of peasants and landless laborers, an urban-based class of “comprador bourgeoisie” as well as “working class and lumpen proletariat” had emerged (Riaz, 2005, p. 28). But the most noteworthy advancement was, as Riaz notes, the development of “an array of intermediate classes” which comprised of traders, salaried professionals, experts, academic intellectuals, and students coming from different strata of the society. Riaz makes the critical observation that the intermediate classes were not representing the political interest of the vast population of farmers and laborers but rather were looking for a greater share in the surplus expropriated by the state from the poor peasantry and the massive external aid infused to perpetuate the capitalist system. The leaders of the intermediate classes and the intelligentsia, under the banner of the Awami League party, vigorously called out for Bengali nationalism, primarily to rally the ordinary people around a movement for political autonomy against the military-bureaucratic oligarchy and the elite political leadership of Pakistan (Riaz, 2005, p. 29).

Print media joined the rally with their partisan journalism, contributing to intellectual and ideological discourses with high morale, aimed at separating East Pakistan from its western counterpart, often by defying colonial-styled press censorship imposed by the West Pakistani government. The daily Ittefaq (1953) and the daily Sangbad (1949) especially played crucial roles opposing the military rule and contributing to the secessionist movement. Under the energetic leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the region’s main political party Awami League was able to earn massive support in both the east and the west parts of Pakistan and won a landslide victory in the 1970 general election. The Awami League won 167 out of 169 seats allotted to East Pakistan, and thus a majority of the 300 seats in the whole parliament (Pakistan National Assembly). This gave the Awami League the constitutional right to

---

31 The Ittefaq was first published as a weekly mouthpiece of the Awami League. Along with daily Sangbad, daily Azad, and Pakistan (Bangladesh) Observer, the Ittefaq became the most dominant newspapers in later decades heralding the trend of partisan journalism. (Mahmud, 2013, p. 40)
form a government without requiring forming a coalition with any other party. But the Pakistan military junta refused to transfer power to the majority leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his party, instead imprisoned him, and deployed a genocidal military force against the Bengalis in March 1971, prompting the War of Liberation (see, Bass, 2014).

During the “War of Liberation” (as the Government of Bangladesh terms it), the East Pakistan fronts of the Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan transformed into radical religious militias, i.e. the Razakars, Al-Badr and Al-Shams. They collaborated with the Pakistani Army in its operations against Bengali nationalists and pro-liberation intellectuals, and engaged in mass murder, mass deportation and mass rape. They were particularly interested in eliminating the intellectuals and academics, especially those who contributed to shape the ideological basis of pro-Bengali nationalism. During the nine-month war the Pakistani army of occupation also burned down the office of the pro-liberation newspapers, and killed many of their journalists (Mahmud, 2013, p. 40).

Joining the spirit of print media, the east part of Radio Pakistan (which assumed the name Bangladesh Betar) turned into Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (the radio center of independent Bengal). It was the only form of media that reached the most remote areas of the country prior to and during the war. The radio enthused the freedom fighters and supportive masses by broadcasting patriotic wartime songs and propaganda campaigns, and news programs including anecdotes, live transmissions, information and commentaries as the war unfolded (Khan, 2008, p. 107). It raised the morale of the population with the hope of liberation from Pakistani oppression, thus serving a crucial role in Bangladesh's struggle for independence. In the aftermath of the war, most radio facilities were destroyed. It took years for Bangladesh Betar to fully regain its capacity.

Bangladesh Television (BTV) was launched in 1964, in East Pakistan as a station of the Pakistan Television Corporation, a pilot project in the private sector, located in Dhaka city. The medium was not so well developed by the time of the war, and it was under strict control of the military junta. Upon Bangladesh’s independence in 1971, in view of its importance as a vehicle for helping reconstruction of the war-torn country, the Awami League government nationalized television in 1972 and changed the status of BTV from an autonomous television corporation into a state-administered broadcaster under the control of Ministry of Information, “thus fundamentally altering its direction and operation” (Shoesmith, Mahmud, & Reza, 2013, pp. 237-238).
2.3. The Post-liberation Media Politics

Born out of the first successful secessionist movement since the Second World War in a land ravaged by the war and impoverished by lack of resources, the Bangladeshi state began its journey with high ideals—the ideals of egalitarianism, of secularism, and of democracy. The emergency of the state brought to power of the social classes who had been politically marginalized within the Pakistani polity and kindled hope for an ethnic group subjected to economic marginalization for almost a quarter of century; but it also sounded warning bells for the institutions of the world capitalist system and the United States. [Ali Riaz, Unfolding State: The Transformation of Bangladesh (2005), p. 2.; my emphasis]

While the newly independent Bangladesh installed a parliamentary democratic government, widespread corruption and natural disasters devastated the country’s economy, rendering a hostile environment for the print media. Faced with growing political turmoil and a famine, in less than two years of enactment of the national constitution that guarantees freedom of press, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country’s founding father and independence leader introduced repressive laws of press censorship [e.g. Printing Presses and Publications Ordinance (Registration and Declaration) Ordinance 1973] to seize or suspend 198 newspapers. In 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman introduced a one-party presidential system (fourth amendment of the constitution), all other political parties were outlawed with the formation of Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BaKSAL) [Bangladesh Worker-Peasant's People's League].

Mujib went as far as to ban all newspapers except for four. In a tragic turn of events, Sheikh Mujib and most of his family members were assassinated in a military coup led by some junior army officers. Some argue that Mijub’s assassination was approved by the CIA as the United States wanted to stop Bangladesh from joining the Soviet communist power block (Nagarajan, 1982; Hitchens, 2001).

After Mujib’s death, the final act of transformation of the Bangladeshi state began when the interests of the new rich class, the bureaucracy, and the military converged.

---


33 BakSAL was a political front comprising Bangladesh Awami League, Communist Party of Bangladesh, National Awami Party (Mozaffar) and Jatiyo League (dissolved after Mujib’s death).

34 Later, Mujib’s surviving daughter Sheikh Hasina became the leader of the Awami League, currently serving as the Prime Minister for the third term.
and a counter coalition began to emerge in 1975 (Riaz, 2005, p. 30). The industry eventually transformed with the transformation of the state as it became an integral part of capitalist expansion, accompanied by repeated legal repression imposed by various civilian governments and what Ali Riaz calls “the military-bureaucratic oligarchy” (Riaz, 1989, 1993a).

Apparently, the rise of military regimes was not a sudden response to the failure of Sheikh Mujib’s political regime but was an integral part of capitalist development around the region. After the fall of Sheikh Mujib’s regime, the Zia-ur Rahman government adopted the World Bank’s Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP). The policies pursued by the military regimes, in Riaz’s words, “consolidated the power and authority of the military-bureaucratic oligarchy as the central institution within the state and bred a class of ‘lumpen capitalists’” (Riaz, 1993a). This was precisely the circumstance which eventually facilitated the growth of private ownership models for many newspapers and magazines. Rahman and Alam (2013) informs that steps taken by Zia’s government facilitated the way for private ownership of print media, such as dailies, weeklies, and monthlies. Zia also initiated color transmission of the state-broadcaster Bangladesh Television (BTV) and allowed entrance of Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) into the country. Zia also adopted labor migration policy enabling to export large a number of unskilled and semi-skilled laborers to Middle Eastern countries. A noteworthy result of this, Rahman and Alam (2013, p. 296) points out, the expatriate semi-skilled laborers not only brought back foreign currency but also new cultural products like the burkha (hijab) and television.

A decade later, military dictator Ershad took further measures for privatization but kept the media under state control through military directives. An application of such military directives was to fully utilize the state-broadcaster as a military public-relation apparatus. British researchers David Page and William Crawley (2001, p. 57-58) note in this regard:

During the military regimes of General Zia and General Ershad, the two leaders skillfully used the media, particularly television to project their own personalities and role the army in national life, whether in digging canals or rescuing the victims of perennial floods. This reinforced the process of centralization and politicization of media which had begun earlier. (Cited from Shoesmith, Mahmud, & Reza, 2013, p. 238)
2.4. Democratization of Politics, Neoliberalization of Economy

The 1990s was when the global push towards multi-party democracy trickled down to most postcolonial states in the Global South. The move towards democratization was also compounded with the post-cold war wave of market liberalization, throughout South Asian, East Asian and many of the African nation-states. Bangladesh, as a member of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1960s and 70s, took part in advocating for the New International Economic Order (NIEO), and became one of the prospective candidates for the new geography of global production and flexible accumulation\(^{35}\), alongside the IBSA Group (India-Brazil-South Africa) and early Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs), such as Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. If global events in the 1980s made the Global South pregnant with structural adjustment procedures, the 1990s would be marked as the decade when Bangladesh was born as a neoliberal state, yet carrying postcolonial desires of media control inherited during the colonial era.

The eighties and nineties were also the period when the size of the middle-class in South Asia began to inflate in parallel to the growth of mass production and distribution of consumer goods. India became an aggressive exporter of “made in India” products. Combining the dual explosion of consumers and consumer products, this created a need for newer and bigger advertising platforms. The private mass media and advertisers saw a golden opportunity to circumvent government adverts, and the newsprint quota, which used to be an effective tool for media control, became null.

With an impulsive response from the masses, the country moved away from dictatorship towards a more democratic form of political rule in early 1990s, and

\(^{35}\) As David Harvey (1990, pp. 141-172) explains in his influential work *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Conditions of Cultural Change*, Flexible accumulation is the stage of global economic production that came into being after the decline of American model of Fordism that was characterized by standardized mass scale production with assembly-line technologies. The flexible accumulation, on the other hand, turned the production of commodities more flexible with use of innovative technologies, specialized production and jobs, adaptable inter-firm relations, new labor structures (outsourcing, temps), and flexible consumption patterns: ie. product innovation, niche marketing, fast fashion turnover. It was also a response to financial crises including slow growth, breach of Bretton Woods system of monetary management, rise of oil price by OPEC, inflation, and it enabled the production orders to the newly industrialized and less developing countries in the Global South resulting into high competition among them.
embraced economic globalization. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), founded by former President Zia, later led by his widow Khaleda Zia, was at the forefront of proposing economic liberalization for the country. Since its inception, BNP has taken on a “Bangladeshi identity”, while showing sympathy for the Islamist political party Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami whose predecessor (Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan) brutally opposed the independence of Bangladesh and break-up of Pakistan throughout the liberation movement. In contrast, Bangladesh Awami League party, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s daughter Sheikh Hasina, upholds a Bengali identity with a secular portrait of Bangladeshi history and politics. The move towards political democratization was primarily centered around the politics of identity selling by these two parties which resulted in a series of political conflicts on the following decades.

In 1991, the first caretaker government (led by President Shahabuddin Ahmed) removed the Special Power Act (1974) which was initiated by President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to control and suppress the press, particularly newspapers. With the elimination of this legal obstacle and the onset of free market economics including privatization and liberalization, Bangladesh witnessed a “quantum leap” in the media sector (see Table 1). Just within the 1990s the state allowed foreign TV broadcasting, permitted private TV ownership, and began telecasting private productions on state owned television stations. After being elected as the first Prime Minister in the democratic era, Khaleda Zia permitted private ventures in telecommunications, banking, private universities, and real estate, he also allowed access to foreign satellite channels in 1992, although with some restrictions. Subsequently, the Sheikh Hasina government (1996-2001) paved the way for further expansion of private media by permitting private satellite television.

Both the Khaleda Zia government and the Sheikh Hasina government played a significant role in expanding and implement the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRAIPR); all of which preceded

---

36 The term economic globalization refers to the combination of multiple macroeconomic processes that “constitutes integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, direct foreign investment (by corporate and multinationals), short-term capital flows, international flows of workers and humanity generally, and flows of technology” (Bhagwati, 2007, p. xi and p. 3)
the WTO. Within a decade of democratization, the government of Bangladesh would become a prime mobilizer of neoliberal rules, turning Bangladesh into “the most liberal FDI regime in South Asia” and allowing full foreign equity with an unrestricted exit policy. All of these events prepared the ground for the expansion of private TV channels in collaboration with transnational investment in the media, advertising and telecommunication sectors. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that Bangladesh experienced a sharp transition from the monopoly of state-ownership towards a new era of multi-party owned private ownership of the media in this decade, and this trend was not uncommon in South Asian and Latin America. However, as Chapter 4 elaborates, the ownership of private television in Bangladesh is heavily politicized and protected from foreign ownership by the government through informal mechanisms, which shows that the “economic globalization” has not completely substituted or overridden the power of nation-state vis-à-vis media industries, but rather has enabled the government to perform its role to integrate them with global capitalism. Strategically speaking, the government liberalized communication industries while keeping their activities on the tight leash of colonial media regulatory policies. In Nigeria, while telecommunication was on fast track to full deregulation, “the state continues to maintain a stranglehold on broadcasting despite liberalization” (Aginam, 2010).

Privatization and deregulation, in the case of Bangladeshi media, thus does not mean that the government is losing control, but rather is operationalizing its control differently. Media scholar Gitiara Nasreen points out during the interview that this is a special characteristic, “Government may appear to deregulate the media industry and give it to private hands, but deregulation has a different meaning in Bangladesh. It means power to do whatever the government wants without appearing that the government is doing it.” This requires the assimilation of fluid political power, which was inherited by mercantile overlords from the colonial era in the postcolonial phase.

37 The first objective of Bangladesh’s trade policy objectives as per Import Policy Order 2003-2006 has been to: “keep pace with globalization and the gradual development of a free market economy under the WTO rule.” (see WTO Secretariat Report, 2010, p. 24. my emphasis).

38 Abiding with the WTO and World Bank multilateral free trade agreements, Bangladesh promotes itself as a nirvana of foreign investment that “offers the most liberal FDI regime in South Asia, allowing 100% foreign equity with unrestricted exit policy, easy remittance of royalty, and repatriation of profits and incomes.” (Arab News, 2016, March 26, my emphasis).

39 Interview with Gitiara Nasreen, Professor, University of Dhaka, October 30, 2013, Dhaka.
The private ownership of media garnered political power and editorial prestige with commercial elites, and allow them to cement relationships with primary (the political parties) and other secondary power constructs (such as other businesses). The liberalization was not a strategy for empowering ordinary people but rather served as an opportunity to enrich political hegemony and the accumulation of wealth. Investing in politics became a lucrative business for commercial elites, and using political power to expand businesses became a productive economic practice for political leaders in power. The separation between the mercantile economy and political capital became blurry and was, for all intent and purpose, invisible. Such integration is often masked by cultural flavors of patriotism that cast romanticized paternalistic debates over the founding figures of the nation, in a nationalism that civil society supplies an abundance of organic intellectuals. Television media began to operate within such a milieu.

2.5. Rise of Private Television in Bangladesh

The state owned and controlled BTV was the dominant medium of televisual news and entertainment for a prolonged twenty-eight years (1964-1992), but its monopoly ended with the advent of cable television and subsequently, private television. The era of cable television in Bangladesh was initiated in 1992 by the world’s two largest competing transnational television networks, CNN International (owned by Time Warner corporation) and STAR Television Network (owned by News Corp), in collaboration with the state broadcaster BTV. Among others were BBC, Zee TV Network, Indian state-broadcaster Door Darshan and Pakistan’s state-broadcaster Pakistan TV.

It would be interesting to ask why these Western transnational broadcasters never extended their investments to private television industry in Bangladesh as they did in India. Were a hundred million untapped audience members not a target lucrative enough for Rupert Murdoch or Ted Turner? Despite market liberalization, why did foreign owned media never take off in Bangladesh?

Private television in Bangladesh was born with cultural and economic motivation but expanded as a tool for enhancing the political influence of its owners. The rise of private television in Bangladesh was partly influenced by the successful liberalization of India’s broadcasting market. It was also due to the national protectionist approach of the government seeking to counter the “cultural hegemony” of Indian drama serials and
In this context, the government permitted private ownership of satellite television channels in 1997. It is important to note that while the geo-political and socio-economic proximity of India impacted the origin and transformation of the cultural industries in Bangladesh, Bangladesh has its own distinct political economic roots of a market-driven broadcasting system, which is influenced by Indian media behavior, but not dominated by India’s regional supremacy. This observation supports the global capitalism theory where the state, media and market are largely driven by the same neoliberal forces that power contemporary global communications. The global growth of television provides a crucial infrastructure for the foundation of regional broadcasting systems.
2.6. The Global Context of Growth of Television

The growth of television in Bangladesh, while highly politicized, is deeply stimulated by the neoliberal restructuring of global communication, especially telecommunications and broadcasting industries. A separate discussion is required to investigate the ways in which the expansion and availability of satellite technology became a defining factor for the growth of satellite television channels. What is important to note here is that the early growth of television in Bangladesh was not merely a domestic political and economic phenomenon but a global trend consistent with the global expansion of the satellite television industry, which took place in last three decades. The following figure shows that the growth of 24/7 news channels in Bangladesh took place at the same time that they were growing in various regions all over the world. (figure 2.3).

![Figure 2.3. Continental and Sub-continental Distribution of 24/7 Channels](image)

**Figure 2.3. Continental and Sub-continental Distribution of 24/7 Channels**

Source: Rai and Cottle, 2007

This phenomenon can be partly understood as a development of inter-governmental funded projects (Chalaby, 2005, p. 45), and at the same time antagonistic competition between states (Sakr, 2002), facilitated by a corporate-military-media-entertainment complex. For example, while Rupert Murdoch’s Newscorp BSkyB took over Europe’s Eutelsat in 1983, antagonistic relationships between Arab states have been the prime movers in the development of satellite television channels in the Middle East. Monroe Price (2009) argues that subsidies from governments facilitated the expansion of satellite television channels over diverse regions, ranging from Eastern Europe to the Middle East.
Some Western media scholars would like to believe that the world has arrived at an era of ‘post-national television’ (see, Havens, 2006), but this observation is untrue in the case of the Global South. Elihu Katz (2009) argues that old-fashioned television is dying as a result of innovations in, and the dissemination of individual media platforms. Audience fragmentation is his other frequently cited argument. It assumes that television is losing audience because of multiplatform media access. Defying Katz’s “end of television” hypothesis, many countries in the global South are facing ever-increasing numbers of satellite television channels, and audiences are turning more towards television, not less. Within two decades of economic liberalization, the Asian, Sub-Saharan African, and Latin American countries experienced a multilayered expansion of transnational, regional, and national television outlets and a commensurate increase of television viewers (Straubhaar, 2007). Despite the hyper-proliferation of social media and the supposed “Twitter Revolution”, old fashioned television remains the most significant “new media” of the last two decades for the dispossessed billions (Chakravartty & Roy, 2013, p. 350).

Importantly, the growth of regional and national television industries is no longer the preserve of Western based conglomerates, as an increasing number of non-Western media companies are expanding overseas, from NTV in Turkey, NDTV in India, and Phoenix TV in China (Rai & Cottle 2007). By the end of the millennium, China developed the world’s largest television system with more than a billion regular viewers (Zhao & Guo, 2005). The number of television channels in many developed countries would be dwarfed by the number of multilingual and multi-specialty satellite television channels in India alone. With more than 800 television channels, India has grown to become the third largest television market in the world (Table 2.2).

### Table 2.2. Number of Satellite TV Channels in India (2013-2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>In 2013</th>
<th>In 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permitted Private Satellite TV Channels</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News and Current Affairs Channels</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-News and Current Affairs Channels</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>494</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In 2017, the number of Permission Granted to Private Satellite TV Channels was 1097. The government cancelled permission of 216. Sources: a) India. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (2017a); b) India. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (2017b).

The growth of television in Pakistan is also significant. As of 2015, Pakistan has been able to boast of 85 private satellite television channels with valid licenses (Pakistan
Electronic Media Regulatory Authority, 2015, 2014). While the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) restricted the maximum number of satellite television channels that a person can hold to four channels, it did not decelerate the rate of media concentration in Pakistan but rather enabled it (Rasul & Proffitt, 2013).\(^4\) Cumulatively, television in South Asian countries, now reaches over 650 million viewers. Newspapers have more than 300 million readers, and the internet is accessed by 250 million users—\(^4\) with a highly asymmetrical pattern of access among the countries and as well as between urban and rural areas (Udupa & McDowell, 2017, p. 1). With the rise of television in all over the world, the growth of television in Bangladesh is neither miraculous, nor unexpected. Television in Bangladesh, while growing in parallel with international markets, is deeply anchored in a national basin. Similar to the Middle East, the competition between states in South Asia plays a crucial role in curbing the prominence of the state-media, enabling the private television market to expand and compete with television channels coming from neighboring countries. Television, as a growing industry, also serves the purpose of re-integrating the triangle of state, communication and transnational capital. The role of the state is to regulate the market and to approve television channels, but also to contain industry by providing necessary political supervision, and to impose restrictions and controlling mechanisms whenever necessary to protect national interests and political legitimacy.

While satellite media in South Asia has given rise to new and articulate voices, widespread privatization, transnationalization, and commercialization trends have begun to integrate television with the global culture of consumerism, turning television programs into sellable commodities. India has become a parade ground for the pan-regional and transnational television channels marching their way in to the local niche markets of South Asia. One example is NDTV. Powered by its regional supremacy, Indian transnational giant NDTV invested in the 24/7 news channel Independent. They did this in collaboration with BEXIMCO Group, a major Bangladeshi conglomerate.

\(^{40}\) Interestingly, unlike India or Bangladesh it was a dictator government in Pakistan that liberalized the industry in 2002. The animosity between two parties was so severe that they were uninterested and incapable of agreeing to any broadcasting privatization bill. Such “bold policy” was only possible for a military dictator like General Pervez Musharraf who needed a favorable welcome from a large section of the press. As a payoff, President Musharraf allowed the biggest newspaper groups in Pakistan (e.g. Independent Media Group, Waqt Media Group) to launch private television channels, violating PEMRA’s specific regulatory provision against cross-media ownership (Hassan, 2017; Rasul & McDowell, 2012). It was President Musharraf who established PEMRA.
2.7. The Launching of Market-orientation

The trend of market-orientation in media industries has become predominant with the onset of market-liberalization and political democratization. In Bangladesh print media was the first to become market-oriented. It is also deeply influenced by the type of media ownership.

The political partisanship of journalism was still visible in the old-era newspapers, such as Ittefaq which carried out the legacy of 1960s journalism. There was a brief transition period, from political partisanship of journalism to corporate-led journalism, in the early 1990s when Ajker Kagoj and Vorer Kagoj did reflect somewhat objectivity in journalism as it was trained in journalism schools, they were not fully corporatized yet. With the advent of market-oriented journalism, the old newspapers started to negotiate their old political biases with newly found bias towards market.41

In the case of print media, the concentration of ownership is dominated by commercial powers rather than by direct political leaders. For example, the journalism of the Daily Star newspaper was less market-leaning when it was owned by the journalists. It became a leader of market-oriented journalism following TRANSCOM’s acquisition. Notably, TRANSCOM Group is one of the oldest and largest import and wholesale distribution conglomerations in Bangladesh.42 However, indirect political influence is also extant as the owners tend to be businessman-cum-politicians.

In 1997, the government disbanded the state-controlled trust, closing all state-owned newspapers, ending decades of government ownership in the print media sector. Mahmud shows that the entrance of business conglomerations to print media since the 1990s may appear as the depoliticization of state-ownership, but it is actually a form of “corpo-politicization” (Mahmud, 2013, p. 44). As a result, most of the dominant newspapers both in Bangla and English languages are now owned by corporations, such as Daily Prothom Alo (The First Light) and Daily Star (TRANSCOM Group), Jugantor (Jamuna Group), Samakal (Ha-meem Group), Kaler Kontho (The Voice of Time) (Basundhara group), The Independent and Dainik Muktakantha (The Free Voice) (BEXIMCO group). TRANSCOM Group also owns the FM radio station ABC Radio.

41 Interview with Fahmidul Haq, Professor, University of Dhaka, 18 June 2014, Dhaka.
42 TRANSCOM’s business spans from beverage, pharmaceuticals, and food marke to media and electronics. It is also the local importer of international brands like KFC, Pepsi, Philips, Whirlpool.
As of late 2014, there were 358 daily newspapers and 82 weekly magazines in Bangladesh, of which 138 newspapers and 84 magazines were published in Dhaka alone (Bangladesh. Department of Film and Publications, 2014, Table 2.1).

Table 2.3. Media at a Glance, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total print media</td>
<td>1244</td>
<td>477 registered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily newspapers</td>
<td>826</td>
<td>353 registered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly papers</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>82 registered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV channels</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26 active, among which 3 state-owned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State radio centers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bangladesh Betar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State radio FM Transmitters</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Bangladesh Betar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private FM Radio</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12 active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Radio</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14 active</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The rise of advertising was also a crucial factor for the market-orientation of print media. The advent of private television channels forced print media to become more urban-biased and middle-class oriented in order to secure advertising revenue. The growth of the advertising industry demonstrated a direct relationship between the economic growth of the country and purchasing power. According to Banglapedia (the national encyclopedia), only nine advertising agencies dominate the sector:

There is no formal way of tracking of advertising agencies in the country. According to formal media sources, a total of 150 agencies are registered with Bangladesh Television, while the number exceeds 500 when both the formal and informal sectors are considered. However, more than 70% of the formal market share is held by the top nine advertising agencies of the country. These agencies, in descending order of market share, are Adcomm, Asiatic, Bitopi, Unitrend, Grey, Interspeed, Popular, Madona, and Matra. Other advertising agencies claim only about 13% of the market share, while the rest (17%) is accrued to in-house advertisement of business firms and enterprises. (Anwar, 2015)

Owing to escalating privatization and reinvestment of surplus by transnational corporations, some being local companies, the advertisement market has doubled in five years. With more than 150 advertising agencies, the media industry is thriving whereas many other industries are facing layoffs. Most ad agencies get 15 per cent commission
from the media. Through this process, a pact of mutual interest has developed between the media and ad agencies (Rahman, 2009, p.8-9). Growth in the cable and satellite television industry has in turn been driven by massive growth in the telecommunications sector. Giant cell phone operators, Grameen Phone, Bangla Link, Robi, Warid, and Citycell are increasingly investing on media advertising and branding. Chapter 5 shows that these companies have become a crucial driver of corporate branding in television.

2.8. The Broader Media Environment

Defying the global recession, the number of private television channels in Bangladesh has increased significantly. From a low of one in 1997 it grew to four in 2001, 19 in 2008, 27 in 2013 and 44 in 2014 (Rahman, 2014). The number includes 13 new television channels approved by the government in 2013 (Daily Star, 2013a, and see Figure 3.5 and 3.6). As of 2016, the BTRC has completed allocating frequency spectrum to 37 satellite televisions (Figure 2.4). Moreover, procedures of spectrum assignment to additional 7 institutions are in process (Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, 2016, p. 49).

The licensing of television channels in Bangladesh can be approximately divided into three batches or phases based on their year of approval and approving regimes. The first batch private television channels were licensed by first Awami League led regime (1996-2000), ie. *ATN Bangla* (1997), the very first Bangla private satellite channel; *Channel i* (1999), the first-ever digital Bangla television channel); and *Ekushey Television* aka *ETV* (2000), the first private terrestrial channel in Bangladesh. The second batch of television licenses were awarded by Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami coalition regime (2001-2006), to *NTV*, *RTV*, *Channel 1*, *Banglavision*, *Boishakhi*, *Channel S*, *CSB News*, *Jamuna TV*, *Diganta TV*, *Islamic TV*, and *Desh TV*. The latest and the third batch of television channels were licensed by the second Awami League regime, which include: *My TV*, *Bijoy TV*, *ATN News*, *Mohona TV*, *Somoy TV*, *Maasranga*, *Independent TV*, *Channel 9*, *GTV*, *71*, *SATV*, *Channel 24*, *Sangsad TV*, *Channel 16*, *Asian TV*, *Gaan Bangla TV*, *Dipto Banga TV*, *Green TV*, *Titas TV*, *Dhaka Bangla*, *News 24*, *Millennium TV*, *New Vision TV*, *Renaissance TV*, *Rangdhano TV*, *Cambrian TV*, *Jadu TV*, *Amar Gaan*, *Channel 21*, *Bangla TV*, and *Channel 52*. Table 2.4. provides a detailed list of all television channels, including private and state-owned television in Bangladesh, as of October 2017.
Table 2.4. Television in Bangladesh (1964-2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TV Channel (business name)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>NOC Date (^{43})</th>
<th>Launching Year</th>
<th>Approving Regime</th>
<th>Present status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BTV (Bangladesh Television) (State-owned)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>East Pakistan</td>
<td>On air(^{44})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TV Channel</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>NOC Date (^{43})/Launching Year</th>
<th>Approving Regime</th>
<th>Present status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>ATN Bangla</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>1997/1997</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>On air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Channel i</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>1999/1999</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>On air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>ETV (Ekushey Television)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2000/2000</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>On air(^{45})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Coalition Regime (2001-2006): 10 new private and 1 state-owned Satellite TV Channels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TV Channel (business name)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>NOC Date (^{43})/Launching Year</th>
<th>Approving Regime</th>
<th>Present status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>NTV (International Television Ltd)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>1999/2003</td>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>On air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>RTV (National Television Ltd)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2005/2005</td>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>On air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>BTV World (state owned)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2005/2005</td>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>On air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Channel 1 (One Entertainment Ltd)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2005/2006</td>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>Government shutdown in 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Banglavision (Shamol Bangla Media Ltd)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2005/2006</td>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>On air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Boishakhi (Boishakhi Media)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2005/2006</td>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>On air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Jamuna TV</td>
<td>News 24/7</td>
<td>2006/2014</td>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>On air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Diganta TV (Diganta Media Corporation Ltd)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2006/2007</td>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>Government shutdown in 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Islamic TV (Broadcast Islamic World)</td>
<td>Specialty (Religion)</td>
<td>2006/2007</td>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>Government shutdown in 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Desh TV</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2006/2008</td>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>On air</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{43}\) NOC Date refers to the date of approval of No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Ministry of Information. It is also known as the “license” for the television channels. See, Appendix B.

\(^{44}\) Only television with both terrestrial and satellite transmissions.

\(^{45}\) ETV started as the first privately owned terrestrial and satellite TV. The BNP-led government did shut it down in 2002. ETV re-opened as a Satellite TV since 2005. Discussion in next section.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TV Channel (business name)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>NOC Date</th>
<th>Launching Year</th>
<th>Approving Regime</th>
<th>Present status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My TV (DM International)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Bijoy TV</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>ATN News</td>
<td>24/7 News</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Mohona TV</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Somoy TV (Somoy Media Ltd)</td>
<td>24/7 News</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Maasranga (Maasranga Communications Ltd)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Independent TV</td>
<td>24/7 News</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Channel 9</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>GTV</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>71 (Ekattor Media Ltd)</td>
<td>24/7 News</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>SATV</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Channel 24</td>
<td>24/7 News</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Sangsad TV</td>
<td>Live</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Channel 16 (Insight Telecast Company Ltd)</td>
<td>Specialty (Music)</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Asian TV (Asian Telecast Ltd)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Gaan Bangla TV (Birds Eye Mass Media Com Ltd)</td>
<td>Specialty (Music)</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Dipto Banga TV (Kazi Media)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Green TV (Green Multimedia Ltd) *</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Titas TV (Millennium Media Ltd) *</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Dhaka Bangla Channel (DBC)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>News 24 (East-West Media Group)</td>
<td>24/7 News</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Millennium TV (Millennium Multimedia Pvt) *</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Channel (business name)</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>NOC Date</td>
<td>Launching Year</td>
<td>Approving Regime</td>
<td>Present status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Vision TV*</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renaissance TV (Barinda Media Ltd) *</td>
<td>Specialty (Children)</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangdhani TV *</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambrian TV (BSB Foundation) *</td>
<td>Specialty (Education)</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jadu TV (Jadu Media)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amar Gaan (Media Bangladesh Ltd) *</td>
<td>Specialty (Music)</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel 21 (Broadcast World Bangladesh Ltd) *</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangla TV</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>On air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel 52 *</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Processing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a) The government has revoked broadcasting spectrum of Focus Multimedia Ltd (aka CSB) and Channel One, and suspended Islamic Television Ltd., Diganta Media Ltd. B) Some of the TV channels (* marked) are awaiting clearance from intelligence agencies to receive spectrum, updated as of October 5, 2017. Sources: Field visit to Ministry of Information, TV2 Section, Bangladesh (Sept 2013-June 2014); The Daily Prothom Alo, November 26, 2013; The Daily Star, November 26, 2013, Dhaka Tribune, January 15, 2016; Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, 2016.

As the table shows, there are three state-owned and managed terrestrial and satellite television channels. This includes BTV (terrestrial), BTV World (satellite), and Sangshad TV (The Parliament TV) (Terrestrial). The Prime Minister’s Office of the present Awami League-led government, launched a developmental television project, HDTV (Human Development TV) in 2016, which is currently being hosted by Bangladesh Television (Bangladesh. Access to Information, 2012; Dhaka Tribune, 2016, May 5). HDTV exemplifies an international collaboration between the Prime Minister’s Office, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

According to Nielsen Media and Demographic Survey (ACNielsen, 2011) Bangladeshi access to television in urban areas increased from 69 per cent to 91 per cent in ten years. In rural areas, where 73 per cent of Bangladesh’s population live, the reach of television has increased even more dramatically from 24 per cent to 67 per cent. By 2013 access to television surpassed 79 per cent nationally (see Figure 2.5).
Figure 2.4. Increase of Private TV Channels in Bangladesh, 1997-2014

Figure 2.5. Growth of Access to Television Media, 1995-2013
While the popularity of radio and cinema has declined, television has consistently ranked as the most popular medium in contemporary Bangladesh (see Figure 2.6). Sales of television sets are increasing at around 10 per cent a year, both in rural and urban areas in Bangladesh (Rahman & Alam, 2013, p. 301). Consequently, television news has become the most popular genre in Bangladesh, viewed by 72.4 per cent of the total adult population. Despite the growth of cable television, BTV is still the only terrestrial television channel that the majority of Bangladeshis can watch. It can currently reach 93 percent of homes in Bangladesh. About 92 per cent of the programs on BTV are produced by BTV itself. With a view to reach Bangladeshi diaspora, BTV launched its satellite version - BTV World in 2004 (Chapter 3).

Despite the integration of capital in all areas of economic productivity, Bangladesh is comparatively conservative in terms of opening its cultural sector for foreign investment or mutual trade. “Bangladesh has cultural exchange programs with 39 countries, but no policy for television program exchanges,” says Ranjit Kumar Biswas, the Secretary of Ministry of Cultural Affairs.
2.8.1. Radio Broadcasting: The Decline and the New Height

In this era of media abundance, the once highly popular media, radio, has been losing listeners (ACNielsen, 2013). However, very recently, the medium claimed to be reinventing itself with technological innovations (Genilo, Bhowmick, & Shoesmith, 2013, p. 57). The benefit of such reinvention is perhaps mostly limited to the technology-privileged urban listeners, especially the listeners with cell phone and Internet radio access. State-owned radio channels remain the most accessible medium for the poorest demographic of the population, especially in remote rural areas, where the influence of radio is still as audible as it was in the past.

In post-authoritarian Bangladesh, the government was initially hesitant to approve private ownership of radio, but market-liberalization influenced the loosening up of government restrictions. Established in 2006, Radio Today and Radio Foorty (Radio Fun), and later Radio Amar (My Radio) in 2007 and ABC Radio in 2009 have broadened the market of FM radio in Bangladesh; and for the first time offered state radio competition for urban listeners. Subsequently, online radio began streaming in 2009. By 2016, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) had licensed a total of 28 private organizations with FM radio spectrum (Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, 2016, p. 50-51). Currently Bangladesh has one state-owned radio service with 12 regional stations. The government permitted 32 community radio stations in past decade of which 17 stations are currently active, and 15 more radio stations are expected to be operational soon (Chapter 6). Transnational radio such as BBC Bangla (UK, since 1941), VOA aka Voice of America (USA, since 1954), NHK (Japan, since 1944) broadcast Bangla versions aiming to reach Bangla speaking listeners worldwide. BBC Bangla played a significant role during the liberation war and is still considered to be a credible source of information for many.

Other than print and electronic media, the film industry (dubbed as Dhallywood) has historically been a significant marker of cultural politics in Bangladesh. It has a rich history of creating cultural narratives on post-partition and post-liberation identity-building (Raju, 2000), and was subjected to censorship across pre-liberation and post-liberation governments. The political and cultural impact of the film industry in nation-building and representation of class, gender, identity are important issues. However, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation.
2.8.2. Cyberspace and Changing Media Platforms

Although Bangladesh has a relatively low rate of Internet access compared to other countries in South Asia (International Telecommunication Union, 2017a), the rise and increase of online news platforms signals a relatively new era of communication media. With an increase of Internet access and the growth of various cyber communities, print media is gradually expanding and shifting towards online journalism. While web-only news sites have been mushrooming, the existing dominant corporate print and television media outlets are being forced to create regularly updated web sites. At present, there are more than 500 news sites and web portals in Bangladesh. Haq (2014a) outlines four categories of online news practices: online versions of mainstream print media, news media with corporate investment, independent and small-scale news media, and citizen journalism using blog sites and social media. The growth of telecommunication and Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Bangladesh has resulted in an increasing convergence of media, telecommunication, and cyberspace.

With a growing number of Internet users and cell phone subscribers, Bangladesh offers new possibilities of new media audience engagement. Current trends show that most of the Internet users access the Internet through mobile phones, while the rest use broadband Internet from Internet Service Providers (ISP), Public Switched Telephone Networks (PSTN), and private Wi-Fi providers (WiMax). These trends contribute to the transformation of media distribution from a single-platform to multiple-platform based mediation. Increase of access to the Internet is multiplying the circulation of media content through streaming services such as You Tube video, mp3 playing websites, online radio, etc. Although the circulation is mostly limited to the middle class and lower income media consumers, it also reaches offline consumers through interpersonal networks and offline media platforms (such as downloading TV drama from YouTube to DVD disks and selling them in street at a very cheap price). Cheap cellphone handsets are enabling mobile radio and enhancing radio listenership. About 85.7 per cent listeners access radio through their cell phone (ACNielsen, 2013).
2.8.3. Social media and political participation

With 22 million active Facebook users Dhaka has been ranked second among the cities with the highest number of active Facebook users in April 2017 (BDNews24, 2017, April 14). Online newspapers and blog sites are allowing diaspora audiences to engage in local debates. With the growth of Internet access, a range of multi-platform media development initiatives including rural digital information centers, use of cell phones for women empowerment, efforts at localizing global media messages, as well as movements to bolster civic engagement through blogging and social media have become visible.

Public engagement in Bangladesh, like elsewhere in South and East Asia, has a tendency to resist state authoritarianism through creative and unpredictable demonstrations. The Shahbag Movement (February 2013 in Dhaka) is an example in this case where several thousand protesters, with a significant presence of youth generation, gathered to demand the execution of accused war-criminals. Unlike the ‘Arab Spring’, the protesters demanded transparency from the judicial authorities rather than challenging the legitimacy of the political regime. Interestingly, this political protest was sparked and actively organized by a secularist blogger/activist network. This shows that the movements using new media has begun to influence politics in Bangladesh.

Indeed, the Internet has extended opportunities for the cyber community through blogs in Bangla language (notably, Somewhereinblog, Sachalayatan, Istishon, and Mukto-mona). There are plenty of examples that bloggers are the most active community proactively responding to socio-economic and political issues (Haq, 2013). In times of crises, such as during the BDR mutiny in 2009, blogging served as a proxy source of information. Thus, online communities develop a form of alternative citizen journalism through blog sites and social networks that is hard for commercial or political powers to control or censor. The Shahbag Movement provides an example of how social media has presented an unprecedented ability to draw the attention of the media beyond national borders. The Shahbag Movement was initiated by bloggers and online activists in early 2013. Unlike the Arab uprising, this movement — claimed to be the “Tahrir Square” of Bangladesh, does not challenge the autocracy of the government but demands capital punishment for the accused and convicted war-criminals.
Challenging powerful entities in Bangladesh can be dangerous, even for bloggers. Independent bloggers, especially those covering the trials of former political leaders accused of war crimes during the 1971 Liberation War, have been the targets of constant physical attacks since the Shahbag Movement (see, Reporters without Borders, 2014). In 2015, four progressive bloggers were hacked to death within six months in the capital. Radical Islamist groups claimed responsibility for the killings, alleging “writings against Islam.” Such incidents signal an increase of tension between extremist political Islam and political secularism leadings towards a confrontational new media culture. Intriguingly, a new Islamist group named *Hefajat-e-Islam* has surfaced demanding stricter control of new media and punishment of the so-called atheist bloggers for defaming Islam. Although the moderate Awami League regime is against implementing Islamist Blasphemy law in Bangladesh, the government has gone as far as to shutdown blogsites, arrest bloggers, and even to restrict You Tube.

While these actions signify an inter-temporal transformation of power from political secularism to political Islam, they also renew historical tension between the colonial and postcolonial legacies of media control and the thrust of warranting freedom of expression. While these events indicate that new media serves as a crucial mediating platform for contending forms of digital deliberation, it also signals that new media in Bangladesh has transformed into a site of asymmetrical participation and conflicting views, full of temporal, social and cultural contradictions and political hatred with far reaching implications for democracy. The root of these contradictions does not necessarily lie in the rise and the use of new media, but in the long history of colonial divide and the conflicting convergence of popular nationalism with religion-based politics, as well as in the recent phenomena of globalization of Islamist powers in South and South-East Asia and its secularist-modernist resistance.

Considering these facts, the government is more inclined to control cyberspace by imposing laws. Internet users have criticized the *2012 Online Media Policy* (draft) as repressive of online citizen journalism (Haq, 2013). Besides, the government has initiated surveillance programs targeting Facebook, and other social networking sites, looking for blasphemous and subversive posts. In sum, new media is a troubled candidate for media democratization due to its dual role of commodification and surveillance. It is further trouble by the cultural politics of hatred and intolerance.
2.8.4. The Issues and Debates of Digital Divides

Although the future potential of Internet blogging and social networking for civic engagement cannot be overlooked, it is important to keep in mind that online political debates mostly reflect the voice of the urban, educated, and male and relatively youthful demographic who are privileged with Internet access and computer literacy (Rahman, 2012a). Besides, the public service role of blog sites is marginal at best because less than one percent of Bangladesh’s Internet users blog (ACNielsen, 2015). The urban-centric digital divide thus plays an active role in re-segregating the lower classes by limiting their participation in public discourses. As of 2014, 37.6 per cent of the population in Bangladesh do not have access to electricity (The World Bank, 2017a). However, Bangladesh is also among the fastest growers in access to electricity in the world (The World Bank, 2017b, p. 20).

There are conflicting data in terms of number of Internet users. According to World Bank’s 2016 report (World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividends, p. 8), Bangladesh has the fifth largest offline population in the world, with about 148 million still not connected to the Internet. Going by their figures, only 12-15 million Bangladeshis are connected to the Internet, which is less than 10 per cent of the total population (at estimated 165 million of total population). According to International Telecommunication Union (2017a, p. 142), this data is 18.2 per cent (percentage of individuals using the Internet), with only 3.8 fixed-broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, and 17.8 active mobile-broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants (in 2016). (Table 2.5)

Table 2.5. Telecommunication and ICT Growth in Bangladesh (2012-2016): According to International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Internet subscribers</th>
<th>Mobile-cellular Subscription (in millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of Individuals Using Internet</td>
<td>Fixed Broadband Subscriptions (in millions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>18.25</td>
<td>6.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>14.40</td>
<td>4.892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>13.90</td>
<td>3.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td>1.525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>0.600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) reports that the country's total active Internet subscriptions surpassed 62 million by the end of 2016, of which 58 million were from mobile internet operators (Table 2.6).

Table 2.6. Telecommunication and ICT Growth in Bangladesh (2012-2017): According to Bangladesh Government (BTRC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Internet subscription (in millions)</th>
<th>Mobile Internet Subscription (in millions)</th>
<th>Mobile Phone Access (in millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017 (Aug)</td>
<td>77.14</td>
<td>71.88</td>
<td>139.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 (Aug)</td>
<td>62.24</td>
<td>58.37</td>
<td>117.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 (Oct)</td>
<td>54.66</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>131.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 (July)</td>
<td>39.35</td>
<td>37.84</td>
<td>116.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 (June)</td>
<td>35.63</td>
<td>33.90</td>
<td>105.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 (July)</td>
<td>29.41</td>
<td>27.78</td>
<td>94.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The tables 2.5 and 2.6 above indicate that there is huge discrepancy between the data from government (BTRC) source and international sources agencies in terms of number of internet users, although the numbers of mobile subscription seem consistent. It is almost shocking how greatly the government (BTRC) data contrasts with the baseline survey. According to ACNeilsen (2015), about 82 per cent people (out of 10672 respondents) were not even aware of Internet. In rural areas this number is greater than 85 percent. As per the survey, the Internet is most known to upper-class urban young residents (about 35 per cent) and least known to lower income rural middle-older age people (greater than 92 per cent). Indeed, the hype of digital revolution in Bangladesh is greatly exaggerated, at least from the perspectives of age, class, and urban-rural divides. There are certainly further divides in term of gender, literacy, and ethnicity.

Many Bangladeshi families still cannot afford a television and an hour’s worth of Internet access in an internet café in Bangladesh costs the equivalent of 70 per cent of the average daily income. This puts the web well beyond the means of most citizens, especially in rural areas where nearly three quarters of the population live (ACNielsen, 2013). As long as 3G bandwidth remains expensive and beyond the reach of ordinary people, the digitalization of broadcasting will only further enrich those who can pay for it. This means, on the one hand, that the nature of digital inclusion brings new hope for new media to reach a broader public and enhance the possibility for interactive media. However, on the other hand, it also increases digital exclusion, further marginalizing those already on the periphery of society.
In line with the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Declaration and Plan of Action, the present Awami League government is actively promoting a variety of “pro-poor” public service initiatives e-enabled public service initiatives (e.g. Union Information and Service Centers, Multipurpose Community Telecenters) under the ‘Digital Bangladesh’ project along with the ‘Access to Information’ (A2i) program. There is little indication of how these initiatives would make fixed-broadband more affordable for the poorest peasants and working class people, and how this in turn will improve their quality of life. It appears that “Digital Bangladesh” is a discursive construct to promote the interests of private capital in the information sector. One critic has suggested that “Digital Bangladesh as the Bangladeshi version of information society may be seen as a move toward transforming Bangladesh into a neoliberal capitalist society” (Bhuiyan, 2013, p. 197).

While these events indicate an expansion of multi-platform communicative space and public participation, such initiatives also faces the challenges of widening class inequity accompanied by broadening rural-urban disparities that delimit the prospects of democratic participation in political processes and community activities. Several cross-country studies from Bangladesh, Botswana and Zimbabwe also suggest that historically, telecommunications rollout has had significant impact on increasing inequality and income disparity, as it has benefited the wealthy more than the poor (Forestiera, Graceb, & Kenny, 2002).

Indeed, the Union Information and Service Centers (UICS) in Bangladesh have performed well in improving rural people’s livelihood at large; however, the most recent evidence suggests that the rural telecenters did not work much for the very poor but rather mostly benefited the emerging middle class (see, Rahman & Bhuiyan, 2014). Very soon, Bangladesh will surpass the bandwidth speed and access limits but unless the socioeconomic capacity of rural populations improves, the cost of bandwidth will create new forms of digital exclusion for the public in the upcoming era of digital broadcasting, including all types of state-administered and public broadcasting.

46 With an aim to strengthening participatory local governance through e-enabled services, A2i reaches its target audience through multiplatform initiatives that include establishing 4516 Union Information and Service Centers (UISC) (one-stop service outlets for villagers) and developing Multipurpose Community Telecenters (MCTs) across the rural Bangladesh, creating USCI blogging platform, providing e-government services, developing digital educational contents etc. (A2i. 2010).
A form of alternative media intervention comes from outside the country. Over the past decade, European donor agencies and media development organizations have recognized the potential offered by multiplatform strategies to deliver public services to broad and targeted audiences not only at home but also in developing regions (for a detailed list, see Appendix E). Many donors have invested heavily in media development in Bangladesh over the past decade. A rough guesstimate obtained through this research suggests a total media spend of just under $20 million between 2006 and 2011 (see BBC Media Action, 2012, p. 12).

One notable initiative comes from British soft power giant BBC Media Action. With funding from the British government (Department for International Development, DFID) BBC Media Action uses television (such as drama series “Ujan Ganger Naiya” that addresses maternal and newborn health issues), an interactive English learning website (*BBC Janala*), as well as mobile, social media, and newspaper platforms, to educate and to promote public dialogue in Bangladesh (BBC Media Action, 2012). While the multiplatform media initiatives have gained considerable visibility and popularity in here and elsewhere, their strategies to reach target groups and the impacts of these strategies upon development are not yet reliably understood and often remain un-scrutinized.

### 2.9. Chapter Conclusion

Drawing from a range sources this chapter has delineated the historical context of the development of media in Bangladesh. The chapter shows that from the very beginning, the media in Bangladesh was deeply intertwined with the political and social transformations in the greater South Asian region. Print media was established by British journalists, and it played by the rules of the colonial rulers at the beginning. With the proliferation of anti-colonial nationalist movement print media became a medium of resistance, however, it was done at the expense of marginalizing the contributions of women, lower castes, and poor peasant fragments of the nation. It shows that both during colonial and postcolonial eras, the mass media alienated the bottom layers of publics among class, gender, and ethnic hierarchies. It was mostly an urban medium produced by the privileged and for the privileged, and it reflected the socio-economic inequalities embedded in the society of that time. In the postcolonial era, print media resumed its partisan role and it was instrumental in shaping the political and cultural
identities of the nation as it faced repressive measures from successive governments. This partisanship was accompanied by class restructuration. While the political factors of colonial rule and postcolonial events shaped the basis of the media industry, class struggle and cultural politics guided the ownership and interest of the media. Driven by the interest of the intermediary classes, media played a crucial role to advance the discourse of Bengali nationalism.

In the post-independence era, Bangladesh gradually transformed into an authoritarian-capitalist state with democratic aspirations. Media lost its political mission, and became highly market-oriented in less than three decades. Under these circumstances, and with the democratization of politics and the subsequent economic liberalization, private television channels launched their journey in Bangladesh. The global expansion of television and regional competition for television channels were crucial for the expansion of television at the domestic level. The multidimensional growth and transformation of media in recent decades indicate that broadcast media, especially television, occupies a major and significant space in the cultural politics of the nation-state, not only as a popular medium but also as a powerful institution. As a medium, television faces tremendous competition from other media such as print, radio, and emerging online media. With the digital divide marking the limit of multiplatform media and internet access, television remains the most powerful and most accessed medium in Bangladesh.
Chapter 3. A Political Economy of State-broadcasting

“BTV ties your hands and legs but expects you to swim in the ocean. This system will never change, and no one can change it.”

“As a government employee, now we have more job security than the journalists working in the private television channels. If BTV ever becomes autonomous, like the public universities did, we will lose whatever job security we do have and be still governed by whoever is in power…”

State-administered broadcasters are important markers of political culture and it reveals a lot about the political power and authority of a nation-state. This chapter goes beyond the propaganda critique of state-broadcasting and locates state-broadcasting in Bangladesh with broader historical, geopolitical, and political economic contexts. The chapter begins with a terse account of the origins of state-administered broadcasting in South Asia and their ongoing transformation towards public service media organizations. This helps to situate state-administered broadcasting in Bangladesh into the larger context of struggle for public media in South Asia. Drawing specific attention to the organization and structure of Bangladesh Television (BTV), the chapter delves deeper into the political and economic issues of state broadcasting. Locating four problematic areas relating to journalism including political instrumentalization, commercialization, struggle for autonomy, and contradictory policy responses, the chapter makes the point that these are the results of colonial legacy, postcolonial transformation, as well as a derivative of the neoliberal market-orientation of communications in the Global South. The later sections explain how the forthcoming digital switchover may impact the transformation of broadcasting, notwithstanding persistent digital divides.

---


48 Interview with Diner Sultana, Producer, News, Bangladesh Television, December 30, 2013, Dhaka.

49 Interview with Gopal Chandra Deb, Chief News Editor, Bangladesh Television, December 30, 2013.
3.1. State-broadcasting in South Asia

The origin of state-broadcasting of countries in Asia and Africa is complicated by the legacy of colonial heritage, the postcolonial quest for nation building, and the contested crosscurrents between democratization and neoliberal globalization (Eko, 2003; Banerjee & Seneviratne, 2006). This chapter emphasizes that in order to understand why state broadcasters in South Asia did not emerge as full-fledged “public service broadcasters”, as in many European countries, we have to see the historic circumstances in which the state broadcasters in many postcolonial nation-states came into being. Public radio broadcasting, for example, was first introduced in Africa and India by the colonial powers primarily “to further their own imperialist interests and policies” (Alhassan, 2005). Nigerian media scholar Arthur-Martins Aginam provides insight on the consequences of this, worth quoting at length:

... even though the British made some effort, particularly in the waning years of colonial rule, to bequeath a truly public service system to her colonies... Such efforts were, however, wishful, as the newly independent states in no time turned the semiautonomous broadcasting corporations into government agencies, which left them vulnerable to official manipulation... While some of these broadcasting institutions retained their original designation as corporations, they were no more than official mouthpiece of whichever regime was in power. (Aginam, 2005, p, 125-126; my emphasis)

Indeed, the practice of using media for the interests of the ruling party was not intrinsic to postcolonial regimes and their political systems, but was rather inherited during imperial/colonial era that the autocratic governments in the newly independent nation-states began to rejuvenate for the same purposes originally valued by the former colonial ruler: to serve the ruling power. Although the colonial state resisted the seductions of the market and extended the use of radio to include educational and community building aims, some postcolonial states could not resist the influence of marketization in the long run. With the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs, liberalization of the airwaves and the rise of private media in postcolonial Africa and elsewhere, the quest for media democratization has ironically been replaced by new communication policy regimes that valorize the market (Alhassan, 2005). The similar chain of events took place in the countries in South Asia at the postcolonial stage.
As Chapter 2 shows, Bangladesh fits into the larger colonial and postcolonial history of the Indian sub-continent where public broadcasting was born in the colonial era, but later expanded and solidified as a hegemonic “nationalist project” with elements of linguistic and cultural diversity. The partition in 1947 and the subsequent development of the nations have a distinct class dimension that shaped the hegemonic form of nationalism. The politics of identity, class struggle, and the struggle of ethnic and religious minorities were profoundly intertwined in shaping the hegemonic identity of nationalism. The state-broadcasters *All India Radio* and *Radio Pakistan* projected this hegemonic form. Albeit used and manipulated as the “official mouthpiece” of the government, in both postcolonial Africa and India, the public broadcasting system could not survive and expand without the full support and control of the government. In the post-partition era *All India Radio* and *Radio Pakistan* played a vital role in shaping and rebuilding national identities and reinterpreting colonial and pre-colonial histories (Page & Crawley, 2001, p. 26). In the aftermath of the 1971 liberation war in East Pakistan both Indian and Pakistani governments began to take television seriously as they realized its importance in historicizing the war within their own interpretations (Hassan, 2017, p. 80). At the same time, the governments were interested in delivering programs related to education, health, family planning, agriculture and other development issues (Agrawal & Raghaviah, 2006).

However, owing to liberalization, privatization, and the globalization of satellite broadcasting, the prospects of public broadcasters have gradually shifted from pursuing a public agenda to capitalizing and materializing the public good (Thomas, 2010). Within this plurality, following the postcolonial tradition, the political biases of media have been highly normalized by the political regimes. This impacted the transformation of the state broadcasters in South Asia to a varied degree. Over the decades, extensive efforts have been made to make India’s state broadcasting services, *Doordarshan* and *All India Radio* (aka Akashvani), look like a Public Service Broadcaster in Western model, but it did not work as expected. In the 1990s the Indian government granted autonomy to *AIR* and *Doordarshan* to Prasar Bharati by passing the *Prashar Bharati Act 1990* and establishing an autonomous body to govern these broadcasters. With the support of the Indian government, Prasar Bharati with its 31 television channels has emerged as one of the largest terrestrial broadcasting networks in the world (Parthasarathi & Chotani, 2015, p. 66), while the government continues to exercise financial, administrative, and
editorial controls (Jain, 2015, p. 149). At present, Prasar Bharati’s television arm, *Doordarshan* (DD), primarily broadcasts in terrestrial analogue mode and covers about 92 percent of the population and 82 percent of the country’s territory (Parthasarathi and Chotani, 2015, p. 66). *Akashvani* has 415 radio stations across the country, offering programming in 23 languages and 146 dialects (All India Radio, 2016a, 2016b).

Pakistan took a different route and kept the inherited public corporation but operated these channels within a national framework, and later opened new radio stations under this hybrid approach. Within a few decades, the state-owned *Pakistan Television (PTV)* and *Pakistan Broadcast Corporation (PBC)* became a mega-media operator that monopolized the airwaves till 2002, after which the government liberalized the media market. But *PTV* and *PBC* still reach the biggest audience terrestrially. *PTV* broadcasts two national channels, three regional channels, and one international channel, *PTV Global*. *PBC* operates 64 stations that broadcast across the country in 22 local and 11 foreign languages. *PBC* also owns 22 FM-based community-oriented radio stations, and operates nine commercial FM stations (Yusuf, 2013). Despite the terrestrial power and variety of stations, these broadcasters have failed to cater to the culturally and ethnically diverse population of Pakistan (Rasul & McDowell, 2012, p. 5).

Among the smaller states of South Asia, Nepal and Bhutan followed another path altogether. Nepal has become a pioneer in South Asian community radio. After a decade-long assessment, the Japan Overseas Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Radio Nepal are currently formulating policy and legal provisions to transform Radio Nepal into an independent public service media (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2016). Bhutan’s monarch did not permit any television channel until 1999. With the adoption of multi-party democracy Bhutan’s ruling party pledged to turn its state-administered, and only, television media to a public broadcaster through forming draft legislation, which has yet to be enacted by the parliament (Katwal, 2017, February 11). Although Bhutan has never been formally colonized, the country’s broadcasting prospect was overshadowed by the political sensitivity of its monarch that was established during the colonial era. Bangladesh’s Southeast neighbor, Myanmar, which was a province of British India until 1935, has been investing heavily to strengthen its state broadcaster, *MRTV*, as it struggles to maintain a presence in some ethnically diverse states. There is a proposal to transform *MRTV* into an autonomous media gaining momentum in recent years, while a new law will allow community radio to emerge in Myanmar as well (Dragomir, 2016).
This gamut of institutional transformations across a variety of media infrastructures indicates that, first, all state-broadcasters have trouble representing the interest of ethnic minorities, yet they claim to be public media for all. Second, the political resilience of state broadcasters in this region is high and that they are not likely to disappear soon. Third, with neoliberal deregulation and privatization state broadcasters are being forced to adjust to new regulatory environments, creating new opportunities for media reforms and as well new kinds of political, economic, as well as technological challenges. Where does the Bangladeshi state-broadcaster stand in such cross-currents of multilayered transformations?

3.2. Organization and Structure of State-broadcasting

*Bangladesh Television* (BTV), which is the focal case of this chapter, launched in 1964 in East Pakistan as a channel of the Pakistan Television Corporation. After Bangladeshi independence in 1971, the Awami League government nationalized all industries including its inherited broadcasters and changed the status of BTV from a public corporation into a state broadcaster by putting it under the control of the Ministry of Information. This is what changed the direction and operations of BTV for good, because since then, as Shoesmith et al (2013, p. 238) point out, BTV turned into the mouthpiece of the state, extinguishing its chance to become an autonomous broadcaster again. Notably, BTV was the only television service until 1992 when the Television Receive Only Dish (TVRO) was legalized, allowing transmission of foreign television. However, the Indian state-broadcaster *Doordarshan* was already accessible to many through rooftop antennas.

State broadcasting in Bangladesh consists of two major platforms, radio and television, which operate as two offices under the Ministry of Information. There are also three state-owned and state-managed terrestrial and satellite television channels; *Bangladesh Television* (BTV), which is terrestrial, *BTV World*, a satellite channel, and *Sangshad TV* [The Parliament Television], the terrestrial Parliament channel. BTV claims a potential coverage of 95 per cent of the territory and is reaching 95 percent of the total population (Table 3.1). BTV also boasts that 92 per cent contents are produced by its own. Employing more than 1568 permanent 1667 temporary staff, BTV is the largest media organization in the country.
Table 3.1. **Bangladesh Television (BTV) at a Glance (2016)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scopes</th>
<th>Specifics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadcasting centers</td>
<td>1 Centre (Dhaka), 1 Sub Centers (Chittagong), 14 Relay Stations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential coverage</td>
<td>Terrestrial (BTV): 95% of the territory, 95% of the population Satellite (BTV World): Asiasat 3S-5, C-BAND transponder, covering Japan in the far-east New Zealand and Australia in the South Cyprus &amp; Egypt in the West and Russia in the North.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmission</td>
<td>Terrestrial: 18 hours per day, Satellite: 24 hours per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Self-produced: 92%, Outsourced: 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total manpower</td>
<td>Permanent: 1568, Temporary: 1667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsroom personnel</td>
<td>Over 100 (including Guest Artists)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major affiliations</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) (Administrative Council) European Broadcasting Union (EBU), Public Media Alliance (PMA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bangladesh Television, 2016a, 2016b.

The institutional authority of state broadcasters in Bangladesh is protected by legal provisions. While BTV claims that it is “accountable to the mass people of Bangladesh,” its administrative and fiscal management is controlled by the government. According to the *Terrestrial Television Broadcast Facilities Act, 2009*, only BTV has the right to broadcast terrestrially. As per the *National Broadcasting Authority Ordinance (1988)*, the *Bangladesh Television Authority Act (2001)*, and the *Bangladesh Betar Authority Act (2001)* the topmost executives of BTV and Bangladesh Betar (Director General) are appointed by the Prime Minister. The Director General of BTV is an important post for the government as he/she is in charge of operations and all BTV activities in favor of the government. While it is a periodic post, “the Director General of BTV holds more power than a Secretary of a ministry of the government.”

### 3.3. Transition from State-broadcasting to State Media

#### 3.3.1. From Mono-platform to Multiplatform Mediation

By the turn of the new millennium, the world’s media ecologies were rapidly evolving into a complex site of struggle with multidirectional impacts on public broadcasting, even in the peripheries of economic production. Rapid economic growth in South Asia laid the groundwork for a remarkable expansion of digital media consumption in India and Pakistan (Watts, 2014, p. 293).

---

50 Interview with Gazi Shariful Islam, Assistant Chief, Ministry of Information, 17 June 2014, Dhaka.
As a result of such technological developments and changing media consumption habits, BTV is now reorganizing to be a multiplatform media institution, adapting to the booming digital media landscape. Facing fierce competition from private television channels and online media platforms, BTV has turned global with its satellite channel, online streaming, and IPTV services. In the past decade, Bangladesh Betar reinvented itself with Internet radio streaming services, broadcasting AM and FM stations live through its online portal, apps, as well as a dial-in listening service for the Bangladeshi diaspora. Such metamorphosis, however, is not exclusive to Bangladesh. It is a global, as well as a regional trend. For instance, the Indian broadcaster Prasar Bharati is enhancing viewer/listener experience on multiple platforms such as DTH (Direct to Home) services, webcasting, podcasting, SMS, and mobile.

3.3.2. From Analog to Digital Broadcasting

It is noticeable that despite the rapid digital transformation the standard of broadcasting in Bangladesh remains analog. Bangladesh missed its initial target for completing the digital switchover in 2016. In fact, the switchover process is yet to begin (Table 3.2). India has taken the lead in South Asia, completing its digital switchover in 2015, whereas Pakistan appears to be the least prepared country for this transition (Baig & Cheema, 2015). With a view to accelerating the pace of public broadcasters’ digitization, the governments of India and Bangladesh have agreed to allow BTV to join Prasar Bharati’s DTH platform (Daily Prothom Alo, 2015, June 7). Although the economic and technological potential of the digital switchover cannot be overlooked, it is worth asking what benefit it will bring the general public in a country with high income disparity and persisting digital divides? The question is impossible to answer in the limited scope of this dissertation, but it is a legitimate concern.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>DSO date</th>
<th>TV Standard</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>DVB-T2</td>
<td>Not started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>DVB-T2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>DVB-T</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>DVB-T2, ISBD-T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>DVB-T2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>No information</td>
<td>No information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>DVB-T2, ISBD-T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: International Telecommunication Union, 2017e, updated as of October 31, 2017
3.3.3. Implication for Digital Switchover

There is no doubt that very soon Bangladesh will overcome its bandwidth supply shortage, but unless the socioeconomic capacity of rural populations improves, the cost and distribution of bandwidth will create new forms of digital exclusion for those with lower incomes in the coming era of digital broadcasting. The digitization of terrestrial broadcasting, similar to the problems faced by Prasar Bharati in India, may not bring benefits for multiple publics because a vast portion of the population are living below the poverty line and will not be able to afford a Set Top-Box (STB) to access digital terrestrial television. The researchers of Mapping Digital Media in India project argue that the policy formations that favored the digital switchover in India were not driven by a public interest rationale. They wrote, “Policymakers have ignored the fact that few citizens have the requisite mobile handsets and broadband connections; this suggests the wider digitization of the state broadcaster will benefit only certain sections of society” (Open Society Foundations, 2012, p. 119). In the same vein, Parthasarathi and Chotani (2015, p. 63) argue that the marginal sections of society, for whom Doordarshan is the sole affordable TV outlet, will be the most challenged by this mandatory transition. The same concern applies to Bangladesh. This reflects the broader tendency to prioritize private entities at the expense of the public, a neoliberal trait that South Asian governments are willing to carry forward, leaving their postcolonial obligations behind.

In Bangladesh, top private television channels will be the primary beneficiaries of digitalization as they will have more precise access to the middle-class urban and suburban populations who have disposable income and surplus time to consume pay-per-view content. This brings a déjà vu of colonial radio expansion in the sub-continent when the vast poor rural inhabitants were hardly able to afford any radio set, and the prospect of a non-profit public media was systematically replaced by the British Raj to give way to commercial media that could yield British Raj to further exposed the urban populace to imperial propaganda (Chapter 2). At present, there is no policy direction yet on how the digital spectrum will be allocated and who will benefit from it, or whether the STBs will be subsidized for those cannot afford it. In sum, the transition from state-broadcasting to state media and the envisioned benefits for the public remain quite uncertain in Bangladesh. Obviously, the digital divide issue is a major challenge for public broadcasting, but it is a low priority compared to other hurdles BTV has faced for decades.
3.4. Critical Issues of State-broadcasting

3.4.1. Political Polarization and Struggle for Autonomy

*BTB* claims to be a public information service, but at the same time it serves the political purposes as the incumbent government, because of its structural bias towards ruling parties. As a corollary of divisive party politics, the administration of *BTB* is polarized along party lines (Khan, 2008, p.102). Golam Rahman (2012b) discusses how the political culture has disabled several areas of *BTB*, impeding its true capacity to serve the public, a problem manifest in: a lack of credibility, a lack of reporting capacity, a lack of criticism of the government, a lack of rural participation, and greediness for profit. The true identity of *BTB* is yet to be settled. There is a vast difference of perception between the way *BTB* defines itself as a public service broadcaster and the way it behaves as a government-broadcaster on behalf successive ruling parties.

Since the restoration of democracy in 1990 due to a mass uprising against the autocratic ruler, HM Ershad, each successive government has pledged to give autonomy to *Betar* and *BTB*. With the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991 the issue of ‘public broadcasting autonomy’ gained momentum that has persisted. The two major political parties (Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party) continued to promise autonomy for *BTB* and *Bangladesh Betar* during election campaigns, but when they are in power both parties have failed to demonstrate this commitment in practice. Contrary to their promises, each has continued to use these media for their self-interested political gains. Both parties therefore demonstrate a similar political attitude regarding the question of keeping the state-broadcaster under state control.

Responding to popular demand, in 1996 the Awami League government constituted a Radio-TV Autonomy Commission (aka Asafuddowlah Commission). However, instead of forming a National Broadcasting Commission as recommended, the Awami League government formed two separate authorities under the *2001 Bangladesh Betar Authority Act*, and the *2001 Bangladesh Television Authority Act*. The government retained the commanding heights of political control, given that under these draft laws (approved by the cabinet) the government can recruit and terminate executive managers, including the chairperson of both *BTB* and *Betar* – and can do so without giving any reason. Demand for the autonomy of public broadcasting has thus given rise
to grave despair for civil society activists in Bangladesh. BTV lacks credibility among the audience due to its structural and on-air bias in favor of ruling parties, and this is normalized among its staff:

As BTV is owned by the government, the government always has a latent and direct influence in production of news. We do not see it as wrong. We accept that it is our job to cover the developmental works of the government as the main news. This is the norm and the this is mindset of the people work here. We cannot differentiate between developmental news and political coverage of the government. To us, development news is political news and political news is developmental news.51

Indeed, the sheer journalistic efforts of BTV, including its news gathering, production, and treatment procedures, manifest a comprehensive and systematic publicity effort focused on the activities of the government, and BTV hardly pretends to camouflage this. Although BTV claims that 78 percent of total programming is about public interest issues, a close examination of the ‘Daily News Assignment Schedule’ 52 of BTV News reveals that the majority of news (nearly 52 percent) was pre-determined on the basis of political proximity to the government (e.g. covering activities of ministers, secretariats, bureaucrats, ruling party parliament members, party presidiums, and even BTV high-officials themselves). In most cases the presence of (a) political figure(s) or the reference or request of (b) politically important person(s) has tended to be the key impetus behind the production of news. Occasionally, ruling party figures even go as far as to pressure the newsroom over the composition of the news script, which indeed makes it difficult for journalists to maintain an ethical standard.

Earlier, during the military regimes, General Ziaur Rahman and General H M Ershad skillfully used the media, particularly television, to project their own personalities and the role of the army in national life. In fact, for much of the 1980s, Bangladesh seemed a mirror image of Pakistan, the state from which it had broken away (Page & Crawley, 2001, p. 57-58). Three decades have passed, yet the daily assignment schedules—which show evidence of direct gatekeeping in the pre-production, selection

51 Interview with Ashif Rahman, Senior Producer, News (Prime Minister Beat), Bangladesh Television, 30 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
52 The Daily News Assignment Schedules were collected from the BTV News section during the field visit in December 2013. Given that it was right before the national parliament election (January 5, 2014), it was assumed that government will try to get maximum coverage of their political activities to create a supportive environment for the election.
and treatment of news—are enough to induce another round of déjà vu recalling the centralized politicization of colonial era media. It also confirms the political instrumentalization of public media that has been normalized and naturalized in the newsroom through daily routine practices over the course of decades. Democratization of the political system, in this case, did not change the colonial and autocratic political culture that views public media as a venue for propaganda, but rather granted the political legitimacy to do this more systematically, routinely, and efficiently.

Abdullah Al Mamun a Producer of News at BTV provides evidence:

It is not the lack of policy provisions, but the political culture that is crucial for the independence of television journalism. The political connection of my TV channel is restricting my ability to produce news that has public interest. We often receive requests from influential political leaders from the government party in power to cover their political events that have no newsworthiness (to private television channels). We are forced to cover such events otherwise we may face punitive measures, such as transferring a reporter to an unpopular area.

Mamun also provides a list on some of BTV’s unwritten customs:

• Give no coverage of the opposition political parties, except for their corruptions
• Air no news that may embarrass the government or its activities
• Cover no negative news that makes the government look bad (such as incompetence of police, extra-judicial execution by RAB)53

Consequently, there is no sign of investigative reporting at BTV, except on rare occasions when it comes to ‘exposing’ wrongdoing of the opposition party. In Mamun’s word, “There is no investigative reporting at BTV, except for only in rare occasions, if it has connection to opposition political party, anything that can show maleficence of the opposition political party.”54 High doses of selective political news, no matter how important they are, result in an absence of genuine political pluralism and reinforce political polarization. Politicized news also escalates the conflict cycle between two rival political parties as they vie for stricter manipulation of the state media.

53 RAB or Rapid Action Battalion is an anti-crime and anti-terrorism unit of the Bangladesh Police.
54 Interview with Abdullah Al Mamun, Producer, News, Bangladesh Television, 30 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
3.4.2. Structural Hierarchy and Division of Labor

Figure 3.1. Newsroom Hierarchy in *Bangladesh Television (BTV)*
BTV’s organizational hierarchy is an example of such institutional conditioning of public broadcasting. BTV’s six layers of permanent employees and flexible contractual appointments (Table 3.3, and Figure 3.1), along with strikingly unequal job security and welfare provisions symbolize the hierarchical, highly exploitative, and almost feudal labor structure in the state media administration system.

“BTV is neither a government office, nor a media house. It wants to be both but fails to be any,” says Diner Sultana, a journalist at BTV. She explains that the staff that are known as “reporters” at BTV, are located at the bottom of the hierarchy of power and recognition. This is primarily due to two different process of hiring. People who are hired through Public Service Commission (PSC), through public recruitment process, are known as “producers”; they find themselves in superior positions as permanent government employees. The PSC hired employees enjoy a varied degree of a range of state provided benefits. They think of “reporters” as their subordinates as if it is a government office. As a result of such discriminatory hiring process, a total of over 100 people are working in the BTV newsroom on either a permanent or a contractual basis. The contractual appointees, such as reporters (known as ‘Guest Producers’)—who do most of the field reporting—are not entitled to a pension or gratuity or other employment benefits. Producers barely go in the field to cover any event, it is left for the reporters. They engage in field reporting only if there are any special interests with powerful people. Diner Sultana explains:

You can see the division of hierarchy even simply glancing at this newsroom. Do you see any desk for a reporter? All producers have their desk assigned and fixed, none for the reporters. A junior producer at BTV gets a desk, but a senior reporter doesn’t. This logistics discrimination might result in inferior quality of news work by the reporters.

BTV is the only television channel in Bangladesh that appoints members of its contractual staff through nepotism or relative-based hiring instead of based on the professional skillset of a person. This creates an extra pressure on the existing work force. We are forced to accept newcomers with no skills or experience and must work extra hard to compensate the missing input from the new comers. Some of the new hires eventually learn how to sort things but they do not face any significant pressure from the management to learn faster. In other channels, your salary increment depends on what you already know and how fast you can learn. There is no such requirements or conditions in BTV.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{55} Interview with Diner Sultana, Producer, News, Bangladesh Television, 30 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
Producing news round the clock requires an effective teamwork. To get its work done, a successful newsroom requires a horizontal mode of production where any asymmetries of power relations need to be absent or functionally invisible. As a government office, BTV is so deeply obsessed with a vertical mode of production that exercising the power relation doesn’t only impede the work of news production, displaying and reproducing such power has become its end goal. The power of BTV as a government office, manifests its biggest weakness as a media organization. Newsroom chains of command should exist, but requiring the staff to worship the chain or the command as a precondition for survival makes the production of news a secondary gain or worse, irrelevant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director General</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Director General (News)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief News Editor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Editor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Producer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producer – Grade 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producer – Grade 2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractual Reporter</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenters / Guest Artists (Bangla)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenters / Guest Artists (Bangla)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interview with Abdullah Al Mamun, Producer, News; and Gopal Chandra Deb, Chief News Editor, Bangladesh Television, Dhaka, accurate as of December 30, 2013.

There is a distinctly gendered division of labor in the media production assembly line at BTV, which is repeated in the private television industry (Chapter 4, and Chapter 5). The social organization of journalism as an occupation reflects a persistent patriarchal hierarchy. BTV, being a state broadcaster, simply renews this tradition, as the assembly line of news production is largely male dominated (see, Table 3.3). Although the number of female news presenters is higher, they possess little or no official decision-making power over the process of news production. However, as a government organization, BTV provides extended and paid maternity leaves as well as in-house childcare support to its permanent female employees.
3.4.3. Commercialization of State-broadcasting

It is nothing new to observe that state media are becoming increasingly reliant on advertising. Aiming to compete with private television channels for revenue, BTV uses its superior access to audiences as a leverage to charge the highest rates for advertising (up to 90,000 BDT= 1160 USD per minute) during the news. Until the 1990s, BTV was heavily reliant on importing foreign programs to fill its transmission hours (Riaz, 1993). While the growth of domestic production houses and the increasing popularity of local artists have enabled BTV to reduce its dependency on foreign programs, the reliance on advertising remains vital.

BTV is the only organization which has a fixed rate for advertisement, and it is non-negotiable and beyond bargain. Despite high rate for advertisement we consistently get advertisements from high profile advertisers. We also get requests for corporate sponsorship but we turn them down. BTV is not a commercial entity and it will never imitate the corporate brand trend of the private television channels.56

Interestingly, BTV is at present perhaps the only station in the country that does not allow any corporate branding, an exclusive practice of branding titles, time slots and screen space of news and other television programs to highly paying advertisers. BTV is convinced that such branding serves as a distraction to the reach the audience.57 It is crucial to understand why BTV is reluctant to earn revenue from corporate branding but so enthusiastic to keep its top ad-receiving position intact. Corporate branding takes away a television channel’s symbolic uniqueness and renders the television platform into a homogenous marketplace where a new symbolic dominance of market rationalization can be constructed. BTV has no need to secure corporate branding at the expense of its own symbolic superiority as the only public television network in the country, as it has already gained a profitable and superior position by charging the highest rate of advertising for news – and still attracting the lion’s share of all advertisements. Yet, the government forces all private television channels to broadcast a part of BTV news. Of course, the private channels are uncomfortable with this idea because recasting BTV news bars them from showing any corporate branding (Screenshot 3.1).

---

56 Interview with Director General of News, Bangladesh Television, 30 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
57 Interview with Gopal Chandra Deb (Chief News Editor) and Abdullah Al Mamun (Producer, News), Bangladesh Television, 30 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
Screenshot 3.1. Private TV Channels Must air BTV News At least Once per Day
[Aired on October 9, 2017 2:43 PM, Dhaka time. Retrieved from Streema Player]
Note: Unlike any private television, BTV displays sign language during news broadcast for the hearing-impaired audience.

Such exclusive commercial power on the part of a state-broadcaster yields a hybrid logic of market-state-media that cannot simply be understood in terms of the public versus private dichotomy in the context of a single nation-state. Rather, it should be analyzed and situated against the backdrop of global trends towards greater market-orientation of journalism that have emerged as a principal dimension of journalistic culture and practice (Hanitzsch, 2007; McChesney, 2004). BTV, although fully funded by public sources, profits from its self-subordination to the market under the rigid supervision of the government. This epitomizes a reinforced ideological contradiction facing public media in the neoliberal era. This does not signal the power of state broadcaster being weakened by global market forces, but rather attests to how a peripheral state itself works as a mobilizer and patron to integrate public entities into the global culture of consumerism (Sklair, 2001). BTV thus renews Jakubowicz’s (2007) critique of public service broadcasters, performing as “a pawn on an ideological chessboard,” leaning towards market fundamentalism. Any simplistic analysis of state-broadcaster as nothing but a propaganda machine would simply miss this crucial point.
It is ironic that despite its dependency on advertising, BTV has become a losing investment for the government, which is causing it to become more reliant on advertising. About a decade ago (2003-04) BTV was making an annual profit of 520 million Taka, whereas in 2014 it was submerged in losses of nearly 300 million Taka (equivalent to 3.87 million USD). Media columnists suggest that BTV could survive the competition with private television channels if it just kept the news and one talk show under its own control and maintained a good standard and neutrality for the remaining programs (Sharifuzzaman, 2014, November 11).

3.4.4. Urban-centric News Broadcasting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.4.</th>
<th>BTV Daily News Bulletins: Hour, Duration, and Broadcast type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hour</td>
<td>Duration (approx. min)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 AM Live</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 AM</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 PM</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 PM</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 PM</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 PM</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 PM</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 PM</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 PM (prime time)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 PM (prime time)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.30 PM</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 AM</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interview with Abdullah Al Mamun, Producer, News, Bangladesh Television, 30 Dec 2013, Dhaka.

BTV is the most powerful media outlet in the country with the broadest terrestrial reach, and the highest number of regional head offices and district correspondents. Yet, as the table above shows, only 10 minutes out of 170 minutes of live broadcast time, in other words, a meager 6% of the total live airtime, is allocated for dedicated coverage of rural areas (Desh Jonopod) (see, Table 3.4). It is true that BTV reaches the farthest part of the rural Bangladesh—a potential lucrative market for advertisers of consumer goods—that the cable television channels are still struggling to penetrate, but this does not guarantee that BTV would have the mandate to speak on behalf of the entire population. Notwithstanding its attention to folk culture, BTV’s bigger mission appears to be to take the urban to rural, not the other way around. The key impetus behind this is the hegemonic nationalism driven by urban intermediary classes, which remains unchanged regardless whichever political party is in power.
3.4.5. Efforts for Public Service

Taking into consideration the political conditions, one must acknowledge BTV’s and Bangladesh Betar’s efforts to function as public service providers. These state broadcasters have been particularly recognized for their developmental role by some researchers, notably in public health, family planning, agriculture, and on climate change issues (Hasan & Baten, 2005; Islam & Hasan, 2000; Rahman, 2010). BTV’s decades long contribution to delivering agricultural information to rural farmers through its popular magazine show, Mathi O Manush (Soil and Men), is particularly commendable. Bangladesh Betar offers a variety of agro-programs that no commercial radio would.

Both urban and rural television viewers give BTV due credit for its splendid past when it outshined all other forms of entertainment through its ultra-popular drama serials and magazine shows (such as Ittadi, see Figure 3.2), especially those that air on weekends. A columnist of the Dhaka Tribune writes with nostalgia, “The Friday neighbors would again arrive during the night after the news in Bangla at 8 0’clock. Such social engagements have profoundly influenced us. We may not have realized how BTV
had helped us bond with our neighbors and families” (Islam, 2015). Islam is referring here to the decade between 1990 and 1999, a crucial period when the country embraced democratic political rule and when the first batch of private television channels began to outperform BTV in terms of popularity. Indeed, BTV has a unique past that no other TV channel matches here. Before the dawn of corporate talent shows, BTV opened its doors for hundreds of young talented Bangladeshis with its program ‘Notun Kuri’ (a national cultural talent hunt show). BTV has always been sincere about telecasting educational programs for children, such as ‘Meena’ and ‘Sisimpur’, award winning drama series that highlight gender inequalities, maternal health issues, and efforts to raise public awareness regarding child marriage. Despite a plethora of television channels, BTV is still the only channel that has a mandate to broadcast programs for religious minorities and aboriginal populations.58 And BTV is perhaps the closest television channel to Bengali cultural roots as it pays consistent attention to local folk cultural events and indigenous festivities.

Figure 3.2. Poster of a Popular Magazine Show in BTV: Ittadi
A poster of Ittadi, a highly popular, long running, and critically acclaimed television magazine show of BTV, presented by Hanif Sanket, well known for its satirical depiction of social problems and highlighting human-interest stories from rural and suburban locations of the country. However, the program is not free of commodification. BTV makes an exception to allow Ittadi to

---

58 Interview with Abdullah Al Mamun (Producer, News), BTV, 30 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
be sponsored by Keya Cosmetics, as visible in the bottom of the poster, a domestic company who offer cosmetic goods at relatively cheaper price affordable to low income consumers comparing to transnational brands such as Unilever. Image Source: Ittadi Social Media page.

Despite the hierarchical and feudal newsroom culture, BTV strives to provide benefits for its permanent employees (e.g. paid maternity-leave and in-house childcare station, pension). One cannot simply dismiss the cultural value of BTV’s programming in the context of Bangladeshi folk culture, despite its politicized news broadcasting, which does not entirely fit within the “authoritative” “propaganda” narrative of state-broadcasting. There is a clear disjuncture between the political instrumentalization of BTV news and its drama-and musical programs that gave birth to the early generation of talented artists who later migrated to private media industry for higher income.

3.4.6. Chapter Conclusion

Due to variations in their complex histories, it is difficult to categorize state broadcasters in South Asia as public service media. However, it would be naïve to deny their public service roles, although it is fair and potentially beneficial to be critical of state broadcasting per se, especially in this region where state broadcasters have characteristics of both state control and public service. The key findings of this chapter suggest several core problems with the existing structures and processes of state broadcasting in Bangladesh, especially, those that impede its ability to function as an effective public service media operator. The biggest challenge is BTV’s lack of autonomy from state control as a public organization. Worse, BTV is reluctant to gain that needed autonomy from the state out of fear of losing job security if BTV becomes independent (Rahman, 2014). In contrast, some disagree with this fear and argue that “autonomy will not lead to lose job security but will increase it.”59 Bolstered by its superiority in terrestrial reach, BTV is deeply submerged in the culture of political subservience. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to rescue BTV from political instrumentalization. This requires a complete overhaul of BTV as a public corporation. Mamun notes with optimism, “it is not impossible for BTV to produce quality programs and objective news while serving as government media. The government must be willing to let it compete with the private media organizations to make it a media of all people.”60 It is clear that BTV is not a

59 Interview with Director General of News, BTV, 30 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
60 Interview with Abdullah Al Mamun, Producer, News, BTV, 30 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
basket case or great failure as a public broadcaster, as some might think and argue. Critics who want to see state broadcasting dead and gone are either unaware of the degrees to which such has sometimes fulfilled an important range of public roles.

The advertising dependency of a state-broadcaster remains a paradox. In China for example, *China Central Television* (CCTV) receives increasingly high levels of advertising revenue offsetting financial reliance on the state, but still remains the most tightly controlled television station in the country (Zhao, 2004, p. 183). Indian state-broadcaster *Doordarshan* began to accept indigenous and transnational advertising in the mid-1980s posing a sharp contrast against its stated ideological objectives (Pashupati, Sun, & McDowell, 2003). Surrounded by this reality *BTV* (and to some extent *Bangladesh Betar*) is trapped between the colonial mold of bureaucratic organization and neoliberal seduction of market-orientation. Whether granting autonomy will make the state broadcasters within neoliberal market structures more democratic remains an unsolvable question. In order to serve the multiple layers of publics, *BTV* must be able to take a critical stance towards the government, whoever is in power, and address social anomalies and state-level aberrations, while dedicating more attention to rural populations and ethnic and religious minorities.

The increasing commercialization of television programs replaces the public value of broadcasting in exchange for market value, which cripples its role for the publics it sets out to serve. Instead of depending more on advertising, *BTV* and *Bangladesh Betar* can achieve and maintain financial stability by downsizing their monolithic structure and curtailing further expansion, and by eliminating corruption in purchasing processes by enabling greater transparency. Policymakers could help by levying a television sales tax. However, I doubt if the Western model of subscription fees or higher tax funding will work in Bangladesh given the increasing class inequality. In the eventual digital switchover, the government must consider the affordability of any service for rural inhabitants. Stakeholders should agree on a policy to subsidize public access to digital channels at private TV owners’ cost, not the other way around. A potential integrated broadcasting policy would address the challenge and opportunities of new media and technological switchovers, including IP TV, mobile TV, and post-digital switchover audio and video broadcasting (Reza, 2012b).
Chapter 4. Ownership Structure and Politics of Licensing Private Television Channels

“I approved those channels from my executive power. The Ministry of Information can exercise any discretion of the authority.”

- Hasanul Haq Inu, MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Information 61

“The permission or license of television channels straight comes from the Prime Minister. Her discretion is the most crucial factor here.”

Fakhrul Islam, Investigative Reporter, Daily Prothom Alo 62

4.1. Meet the Politico-Commercial Nexus

Since the democratization of political rule in the 1990s, one of the most noticeable trends in Bangladesh’s mediascape is the growth of private media ownership with increasing concentration of political and corporate interests. This development is deeply integrated with a two-fold structural transformation within Bangladesh. The first transformation is that of the state itself. In the 1980s Bangladesh changed into an “administrative state” dominated by a nascent bourgeoisie, bureaucrats, and the military from an “intermediate state” dominated by the leaders of the intermediate classes (Riaz, 2005, p. 3), as well as from an authoritarian state to a neoliberal-democratic state in the 1990s. The second and more contemporary phase of transformation pertains to how the media industry, along with other industries, is being controlled and by whom. A process which has yet to fully unfold. It is important to explore in a greater detail where these two trends converge and how.

According to Shoesmith and Genilo (2013), the media industry in Bangladesh is going through an expansionary and dynamic transformations, in which market forces are replacing the state’s control over media (also, see Mahmud, 2013). They write, “In many respects, the clash between state apparatuses and the market is the product of a developing struggle between the forces of nationalism and those of globalization, common to much of the developing world in the early twenty-first century” (Shoesmith &

61 Interview taken 24 December 2013, Dhaka
62 Interview taken, 27 and 28 Nov 2013, Dhaka.
While there is some validity in their claim, it is inadequate to explain the growing integrated nature between market forces and state control in the era of neoliberalism. They posit privatization and deregulation as the winning market forces, while the government is contextualized as a repressive authority who is on the verge of losing its domination over the market entities. Going beyond such a myopic dichotomy, I argue that the government is not a losing entity in this equation, but it is rather a prime mobilizer of the market forces and a leading investor in the informational economy.

As noted in the previous chapter, the WTO and Free Trade Agreements were an important catalyst for the expansion of the communications industries. It is also true that the WTO policies ultimately transformed the fundamental architecture of the media and telecommunications industry from a state-monopoly to a multi-owner industry. But this does not mean that the state has no other way to retain or to re-establish its stronghold. In a Marxist view, one way a capitalist state can assert its power is by reorganizing social classes and production relations, because capital’s expansionary nature does not necessarily weaken the state’s governing power; while national barriers are “constantly overcome,” so are new ones “constantly posited.” (Panitch & Gindin, 2012, p. 2). The post-liberation authoritarian governments of Bangladesh played a crucial role in endorsing a strong local comprador class (Rahman & Alam, 2013, pp. 291-294) to deal with the post-cold war transformations of global economic systems and policies. The sudden growth of media in post-authoritarian Bangladesh is a belated outcome of this.

Owing to the augmentation of the comprador class there has been a marked shift in ownership of television channels from the government to private-political-commercial hands. Since the Bangladeshi government permitted the operation of private satellite television channels a decade ago, systematic involvement of political and commercial elites has become apparent. Thus, the rise of a private television industry in Bangladesh may signify independence from the government only on paper, while being dominated in practice by the politico-business nexus (Andaleeb, Rahman, Rajeb, Akter, & Gulshan, 2012, p. 76). In his research Khan (2013) identifies a similar pattern, borrowing a cold-war era term “crony capitalism”, in which the political lobbying, privileges, favors, and kinships among and with the top party leaders are very important considerations for the direct and indirect political and economic gains. While I see value in the critical use of “crony capitalism” theory, I also see this notion as nearly flattened category that eliminate the asymmetries of power, the contestation, as well as collaboration of power
among the cronies within and across the different political parties and their affiliates. I find the notion of *politico-commercial nexus* as a safer alternative to explain the role of the state in reorganizing social classes and production relations with a combination of multiple and dynamic players who are often competing as well as collaborating with each other with a common interest of capital accumulation. The government here, no matter which party is ruling it, serves periodically as an essential intermediary between different players in the nexus. In this study, I employ the phrase politico-commercial nexus to contextualize the ownership of television in the broader spectrum of political economy. The *politico-commercial nexus refers to a complex relationship of mutually interdependent interests and interlocking networks between high level political leaders, media owners, advertisers, and top tier industrial conglomerates.*63 This definition is useful to explain the growing informal and fluid nature of political leadership and its internal meshing that transcends the past rigid ideological divisions among the dominant political parties. The phrase ‘politico-commercial’ is also valuable to contextualize the economic realization of the politics. One manifestation of the politico-commercial nexus is relevant here – the intricate alliance between some political leaders within and among the major political parties and the owners of television channels, as visible among the directors and members of the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO).

4.2. The Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO)

ATCO is the umbrella organization of the private television channel owners of Bangladesh. It started in 2012 with a mission to negotiate the government’s initiative to draft a national broadcast policy to regulate the industry in the best interests of the television channel owners. Pramathes Shil, a senior reporter at *NTV* has been covering ATCO news since its inception. In his experience:

All owners are united in the question of maintaining uninterrupted business, not only the business of television channels but also extra-media business that they have, often with interlocking network regardless political party affiliation. The television owners come from rival political parties, yet they cooperate with each other knowing that they might need support from opponent political party.64

63 I used the concept also in Andaleeb and Rahman (2014); and in Rahman, Reza, and Haq (2017)
64 Interview with Pramathes Shil, Senior Correspondent, *NTV*, October 21, 2017 (by telephone)
Among the owners of television channels, there is an internal politics of leadership (such as President, Vice-President, and Secretary positions). The job of ATCO’s leaders is to lead and to promote the interests of the owners of all television channels, and to negotiate the terms with the governmental authorities (i.e. Ministries). Since its formation, Mosaddeq Ali Falu—the Managing Director of a top BNP supported television channel, NTV—chaired ATCO for five years (figure 4.1), although his political party has been out of power since 2007. In his role as the President of ATCO since 2012, Mosaddeq Ali Falu has had to display flexibility with his political opponents, the ruling Awami League. He even instructed the reporters at NTV to highlight the presence of the owners of television channels that are licensed by the Awami League, during ATCO meetings, pledging his allegiance to the Awami League-led government and showing willingness to maintain a good relationship. The key message was, “I am promoting you, despite my political difference.” It did not work quite as he expected. The Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was not impressed for long.

With the growth of Awami League licensed television channels in 2013, the Prime Minister wanted a change in the leadership of ATCO. In 2017, ATCO elected a new leader, Salman F. Rahman, the owner and Chairman of Independent Television. Further to this, the top executives of Ekattor TV and Desh TV were elected Senior Vice President and Vice President of ATCO respectively (The Independent, 2017, May 22). Not surprisingly, all these channels have a close political connection with the ruling party Awami League. As mentioned earlier, Salman F Rahman is the owner of a mega conglomerate BEXIMCO Group, and an adviser of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Desh TV was given license by the previous BNP-led regime. Later the shares of the channel were sold to Saber Hossain Chowdhuri, who is an Awami-League Member of Parliament and a wealthy businessman (Khan, 2013, p. 101). Although the new ATCO committee has a fresh leadership line-up from pro-Awami League block of television channel owners, the list of its directors includes high profile owners and top management from pro-BNP television channels too (e.g. NTV, RTV, ETV, Boishakhi, Bangla Vision).

---

65 Interview with Pramathes Shil, Senior Correspondent, NTV, October 21, 2017 (by telephone)
ATCO directors thus bring an interlaying synergy of political power that goes beyond the populist binary of Awami League vs BNP, secular vs Islamism or pro-liberation vs anti-liberation formations of political party alliances. They also demonstrate a rapid unity across the board when it comes to the issue of the shared political and economic interests of the television channel owners. Let me draw two examples to support this claim:

First, since 2012, ATCO is convincing the government to remove an important provision from the draft policy that suggests restricting any political party, party members, or politically affiliated organization from becoming an owner of a television channel.\(^\text{67}\) Section 5 of the *Private Television Channel Establishment and Operation Policy 2012 (Draft)* proposed that no political party or its members or any organization with political goals or affiliations can be the owner of a television channel. ATCO leader Mosaddeq Ali Falu opposed it, and recommended removing it. This has profound implications for the future of television ownership and for the democratization of media ownership in general (Chapter 6).

Second, in 2016, ATCO led a collective campaign under a platform called “Media Unity” demanding banning local advertisements on foreign television channels (mostly Indian and Pakistani channels). Their argument was that local television channels are facing financial losses as local companies are leaning more towards cheaper foreign television channels, which can be downloaded illegally. Within less than two months, the Ministry responded by stipulating a policy subsection of *Bangladesh Cable Television Network Act 2006* to put a restriction on airing locally-produced advertisements on foreign television channels listed in Figure 4.1. The Ministry also directed cable operators to stop airing foreign television channels who receives ads of Bangladeshi companies.\(^\text{68}\) The government thus protects the shared interest of the *politicocommercial nexus*, by interpreting the policy criteria as convenient for the nexus. Such a practice can be replicated in the future whenever needed.

\(^{67}\) The Section 5 of the *Private Television Channel Establishment and Operation Policy 2012 (Draft)* proposed that no political party or its member or any organization with political goal or affiliation can be the owner of a TV channel. ATCO leader Mosaddeq Ali Falu opposed it. See Chapter 6.

Figure 4.1. Indian and Pakistani TV Channels Banned from Receiving Local Adverts Produced in Bangladesh
Source: Dhaka Tribune, January 2, 2017

The significance of these actions is multifaceted. It shows that the unity of television owners across different political affiliations can influence the state’s policy outcome. It also points to an “exception to neoliberalism” where deregulation cannot outstrip the invisible power of the politico-commercial nexus which is territorially sovereign in nature.

Shoesmith, Mahmud and Reza (2013) provide a succinct overview of the political history of television in Bangladesh by listing the political and business connections of 21 television channels that were licensed between 1997 and 2011. While their discussion provides a useful entry point to understand the political affiliation of individual channels, it is inadequate to explain the interlaying of ownership interests in which the channels are interlocked in an interdependent network of advertisers, political patrons, and lobbying groups that have the flexibility to coexist and to expand across different regimes. To address the fluid nature of the political power of such a nexus, the following sections reassess the historical pattern of television licensing, the architecture that enables political concentrations of ownership, and the burgeoning conglomeration of media industries in Bangladesh, within which television journalism is produced, distributed, and consumed.
4.3. A Beginner’s Guide to Getting a TV License in Bangladesh

Since the government of Bangladesh permitted the operation of private satellite television channels a decade ago, the systematic involvement of political and commercial elites of the country has become visible. This becomes apparent in the processes and pattern of licensing television ownership. In fact, licensing television channels has become a power play for every political regime, as reflected in the increased rate of approval for new television channels before each national election (see Figure 2.4 and Table 2.1). Following this tradition, the political licensing of television channels has created a concentration of ownership in television that is based upon political affiliations. With few exceptions, the owners of television channels are connected to one of the main political parties – either the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) or the Awami League (AL).

In his research on television ownership in Bangladesh, Khan (2013) lays out the evidence that most of private television owners in Bangladesh are businessmen-cum-politicians and politicians-cum-businessmen. According to Khan’s investigation, the first thing and the last thing a ruling political party does within an election cycle, is to give television channel licenses to its cronies, often by violating existing rules and regulations. Khan also demonstrates that the entire licensing process of private television is enveloped by a strong and vivid system of crony relationship, in which only those who are very close to the chief of the ruling party or government (such as close business allies, relatives and friends of the top party leaders, and prominent professionals) are provided with private television licenses. This concern has been rolling on for a while. Critics worry that several television owners not only use their political affiliations to get permission for new television channels but also exploit the channels to legitimize political manipulation and to increase their personal or company assets (Rahman & Alam, 2013, p. 301). My previous work shows that powerful owners of top tier TV channels (e.g. ATN Bangla and NTV) use their channel as a drawing room for “business-lobbying-corruption-powerhouses” (see, Rahman, 2009, p. 1).

During my fieldwork I could not find any one-stop publicly accessible document that describes the licensing process, so I decided to create one. Documenting the process of licensing a private television helps us to understand the points of intervention
of where, within the television industry, the market and the state converge. By looking at the hierarchy of the licensing process, one can obtain a bird’s-eye-view of the important power-factors involved in the process. A triangulation of various sources and methods, such as primary interviews, policy documents and drafts, and secondary sources such as government documents and news articles, indicates that the television licensing process can be divided approximately into two stages, a) preparatory stage and b) processing stage. The preparatory stage is largely invisible and insulated from public scrutiny, whereas the processing stage leaves document trails and can be traced with qualitative research.

4.3.1. Preparatory Stage: Qualify the Nexus

This study suggests that the ownership of television requires political conditioning. To become an owner of a television channel one must become a part of the \textit{político-comercial nexus} first. The alliance between the political party in power and the future owner of a television channel has to be formed \textit{before} a channel gets approval, otherwise there is no point applying for a “No Objection Certificate” aka the “license”.\footnote{The No Objection Certificate (NOC) is usually a one-page document that permits a company to operate a television channel in Bangladesh and describes the terms and conditions of broadcasting (in Bangla). This document is known as “the license” in Bangladesh. Only the Ministry of Information can provide the No Objection Certificate. This document is not available to the public. The Ministry of Information has graciously provided me with two copies of the NOC documents (NOC for Entertainment Program and NOC for News and Current Affairs) as samples (see Appendix B).} This becomes clear in the statement of a key interviewee, Tushar Abdulla, the Director of \textit{Somoy TV}, who is also a shareholder of the channel:

Every television channel in Bangladesh so far, whether owned by a businessman or a political leader, had to prove its loyalty to the government in power, otherwise they would not have a license from the Ministry of Information in the first place. This means that the government always plays a crucial role to facilitate the investment in this sector. While the government has the power to provide licensing (No Objection Certificate), it is also allowed to turn this industry into a self-dependent business.\footnote{Interview with Tushar Abdullah, Director, \textit{Somoy Television}, 17 June 2014, Dhaka}

A simple analysis of owners of television channels licensed by Awami League-led regime (see Table 4.2) would attest to this statement. Figure 4.2 illustrates how it works.
In order to make a successful bid for a television license, first and foremost, you have to become a part of the existing *politico-commercial nexus* either through your business networks or have a strong political background, though it is better if you have both. It begins with a formal precondition to have a trade license from the Ministry of Commerce and to register a company with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies & Firms (RJSC) as "Private Limited". This is because the Ministry of Information doesn't give license to individuals but only to companies. This also requires having a business 'Plan' outlining the unique name of the company and the television channel, identifying the chair (usually the owner), board of the directors, or shareholders of the company (minimum 2 and maximum 50 for private companies, and a minimum of 7 and no maximum if it is a public company), share prices, capital and so on.\(^{71}\) This applies to private television channels too. This part is visible, and all information and documentation are accessible to the public, if requested.

In addition, you will also have to ensure that you bear a minimum networking capacity to penetrate the advertising market which is very scarce and already facing

---

fierce competition from existing players, with only a few able to accrue profit from the industry. If you are an owner of a large industrial conglomerate or a wholesale distributor of transnational corporation products you will not have to worry about this, because your company itself is a large supplier of adverts, and the horizontal integration of media will reduce your marketing cost.

Once you decide to apply for a television channel, your immediate job is to deploy an extensively lobby for licensing with all possible political and business connections so as to convince the top leadership of the ruling party that it is to their benefit to reward you with a television channel for your past services or potential future services. You will require at least a full Minister (or someone very close to the Prime Minister) on your side as a referee\(^{72}\) who will also give you future political protection if your channel gets in the crossfire of political turmoil. Subsequently, you need to make sure that there is no resistance against your application from the Ministry of Information, and specifically from the Prime Minister’s Office. Otherwise, there is no point applying; your application will never go beyond the file/proposal step in the formal procedure, where 200 applications are already jammed (Atikuzzaman, 2013, December 13).

One of the crucial elements in the preparatory stage is to have the patience and stamina to keep the lobby group active until the file gets the Prime Minister’s consent, which will largely depend on the political stability of the country as well as on the prospect of any upcoming election. If all these conditions are favourable, and if there is enough momentum at the Ministry of information to collate the applications in a manageable bundle, the visible steps of the formal licensing procedure will kick in (Figure 4.3).

\(^{72}\) Sometimes, an application may contain the name and signature of one or more influential political leaders as “referees”, however, such document is inaccessible for a researcher within a short time.
Figure 4.3. The Licensing Process of a Private Television in Bangladesh

Note: BTRC requires following documentation to assign frequency to an owner: a) Letter of application b) BTRC Application Form for License of Radio Communication Apparatus (See Appendix C), c) Copy of License from Ministry of Information (No Objection Certificate), d) Copy of Brochure (General Specification) of requested radio equipment, e) Copy of Trade License, f) For limited Company: Copy of Memorandum of Association and Article of Association, g) For public owner: Copy of Proprietorship Certificate.

Sources: Interview with Md. Akhtaruzzaman Talukder, Senior Assistant Secretary, TV-2, Ministry of Information, 2 January 2014, Dhaka; and Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (nd.) Website.
4.3.2. Licensing Stage: Go through the Process

The licensing stage is largely bureaucratic but essential. Once the lobby group(s) convinces the Minister of Information to let your application be processed, your application, along with the references for the No Objection Certificate (NOC) will go to the Secretary of Information who will check the language of your application and perform basic legal and background checks on the supporting trade related documents. The Secretary then will submit the file to the Minister of Information. The Minister will use his executive power to approve the license. There will be no rejection of the application because a rejection-worthy application would not make to this point.

During my fieldwork the Ministry of Information was updating the draft of the 2012 Private Television Channel Establishment and Operation Policy, which stated that no political party or its member or any organization with political goals or affiliations can be the owner of a television channel. At the same time, contrary to its own policy draft, the Ministry has approved 13 new television channels to owners with political affiliations (see Table 3.2). After several failed attempts, I had the opportunity to meet Hasanul Haq Inu, MP, Honorable Minister of Ministry of Information, and I asked him: “What were the considerations and eligibility criteria to approve or to disapprove the applicants?”

“I approved those channels from my executive power. The Ministry of Information can exercise any discretion of the authority,” answered the Minster. 73 Visibly frustrated with my question, the Minister reminded me that governmental authority in a developed country, such as the President of the United States of America, has executive powers to make decisions, and that these processes are not always codified in a particular policy. The Minister declined to reveal further information on this. While this is true in the case of the Presidents of United States of America, in the context of Bangladesh, the Minister must gain consent from the Prime Minster prior to issue an No Objection Certificate (NOC). “It took only three days for the Ministry of Information to approve the application for a television channel submitted by the Information Advisor of the Prime Minister,” explains senior journalist and policy expert Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul. 74

73 Interview taken 24 December 2013, Dhaka
74 Interview with Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Head of News, Boishakhi Television, and Member of National Broadcast Policy 2014 Committee, 8 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
Indeed, licensing serves as a crucial mechanism of political control, in which the government, especially the Prime Minister and the Minister of Information, so far has enjoyed absolute discretionary power to grant permission to their obedient and trusted business investors. There is no public hearing, no committee meeting, and no opportunity for the general public to participate in the licensing process whatsoever.

In my research, multiple interviews have confirmed that indeed, the approval of the Prime Minister (Sheikh Hasina) is the most decisive factor for television licensing and it supersedes any existing media regulatory policies in Bangladesh. Policy is there to legitimize her approval, when needed. A senior policy researcher notes, “the Prime Minister’s word is the policy.”75 A senior journalist of the leading newspaper in Bangladesh, who has been investigating political ownership of television, comes to a similar conclusion, “The permission or license of television channels comes straight from the Prime Minister. Her discretion is the most crucial factor here.”76

Once the networking conditions are met, the political references are vetted and ranked, and the party loyalty of the prospective owner is verified by the top ranks of the party, it does not take long for the Ministry of Information to grant the NOC letter. Bureaucracy is there to authorize, not to hinder the process of licensing. What is astonishingly common between both BNP and Awami League-led regimes is how fast the licensing gets done once the lobbying reaches its highest echelon, i.e. the approval of the Prime Minister. The next section gives more specific examples and evidence of the licensing practices of each regime.

4.4. TV Licensing by BNP Regimes

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), leading four-party coalition government (2001-2006) holds significant influence over the ownership of most of the second batch of television channels. It started with giving a license to Mosaddaq Ali Falu, a Member of Parliament and adviser to the former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

75 Interview with S M Shameem Reza, Associate Professor, University of Dhaka, 19 June 2014, Dhaka. Original emphasis.
Screenshot 4.1. Coverage of Owner in NTV
Screenshot of Mosaddaq Ali Falu, the owner of NTV, Member of Parliament, and the political adviser of the former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, desperately doing public serving work - this is the main element of news. See, Rahman, 2009; Rahman, 2007a.

*The Daily Star* described NTV as “the jewel in the crown of the BNP linked TV empire” (The Daily Star, 16 March 2007). According to *The Daily Star*:

*Eighteen days* is all it took for Falu to push through NTV's license at the Ministry of Information, without any necessary meetings, inquiries or interviews by the ministry to check whether NTV met the criteria outlined in the government's private television channel guidelines. The channel was also allocated a frequency within a week by Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC). [my emphasis]

Within a few years of commencing, NTV established itself as a role model for how an owners' political and business networks can influence the selection, treatment and production of news in most of the television channels in Bangladesh (Rahman, 2009). In fact, Falu's NTV showed the way for others on how to exert political influence and acquire TV licenses and then flex his political muscles to gain advertising. Subsequently, the entire satellite television industry, with a few exceptions, became owned by the friends and family of top BNP leaders. “*Channel 1, Bangla Vision and Boishakhi*, all of which have links with the BNP, received their licenses on the very same day: January 31, 2005” (Khan, 2007). Like NTV, these television channels were also allocated their broadcasting frequency from BTRC within a week (The Daily Star, 16 March 2007).
Between 2001 and 2007, the BNP government granted licenses to a dozen satellite TV channels, but also revoked the license of an influential television channel, *ETV*, which was granted license during the first Awami League regime (1996-2001). While some commentators (e.g. Shoesmith, Mahmud, & Reza, 2013) regard the growth of BNP-led television channels as a result of neoliberal competition, it is better to frame as collusion than competition. The BNP government indeed continued the legacy of the despotic Zia regime by expanding the frontiers of capitalist expansion. But that did not happen through a smooth implementation of supposed free market neoliberal policy measures. It happened by forging alliances with cronies of the BNP-Jamaat regime.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TV Channel</th>
<th>Owners/backed by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1   NTV (2003)</td>
<td>Mosaddeq Ali Falu, Member of Parliament, and the political adviser of the former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia; detained for corruption in 2007, later became the leader of ATCO until 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3   Channel One (2005)</td>
<td>Gaisuddin Al Mamun, leading BNP figure and close associate of the former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia’s son Tareq Zia. Jailed for corruption in 2007. The channel was closed down by the gov’t in 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5   Banglavision (2005)</td>
<td>Abdul Haq, businessman, backed by BNP leader and former Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7   Islamic TV (2006)</td>
<td>Sayeed Iskander, brother of former Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia. Iskander died in 2012. The channel was closed in 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8   CSB (2007)</td>
<td>Fazul Quader Chowdhury, BNP-linked businessman and son of senior BNP figure Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury who was executed in 2015 for committing war crime in 1971. The channel was rescinded in 2007.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Shoesmith, Mahmud, & Reza, 2013, pp. 243-244, Khan, 2013, updated with current information

The happy hour of some BNP-Jamaat-friendly television channels was short lived as soon as the World Bank-backed caretaker government seized power. In 2007, the interim caretaker government’s anti-corruption campaign resulted in the arrest of numerous high-profile figures associated with the previous BNP government, including the owners and/or majority shareholders of the mainstream television channels, including: *NTV, RTV, Channel One, Bokshakhi and Bangla Vision* (Table 4.1). Although apparently legitimate, the arrest of many leading media figures caused a great deal of instability in the Bangladeshi media sector. Some channels remained defunct for several years, and hundreds of staffs abandoned those channels when their owners were jailed.
4.5. TV Licensing by Awami League regimes

The first Awami League-led regime (1996-2001) inaugurated the era of private television in Bangladesh by licensing ATN Bangla, Channel i, and Ekushey TV. Khan (2013, p. 82-83) exposed that ATN Bangla Chairman Mahfuzur Rahman (Screenshot 4.2), who is primarily a garments business tycoon, got the license for ATN Bangla because of his “strong political lobbying” with then ruling party Awami League. Along with ATN Bangla, Mahfuzur Rahman also managed to garner a license for a 24/7 news channel from the second Awami League-led regime in 2009. On top of the two television channels, he owns a mini-media conglomerate, the ATN Group of Companies.

Screenshot 4.2. ATN Bangla Owner’s Solo Musical Program
Mahfuzur Rahman’s solo musical program during Eid-ul-Adha 2017. While this is nothing new for him, many audience continue to receive react with satire and ridicule [Saikatism, 2017, May 5]

It is fair to say that the first batch of television channels were indeed popular regardless of the supposed political affiliation of their owners, as these channels liberated viewers from the monopoly of the state-broadcaster BTV. However, Awami

---

77 As a former Chattra League activist (student wing of the Awami League part), it was easy for him to approach to the then water minister Abdur Razzaque, “My elder brother Razzque Bhai strongly told the then Information Minister to give me permission of the satellite television as he knows me very well from my university days,” said Mahfuzur Rahman in an interview to Khan (2013, p. 83).
League learned from the BNP-led regime (2001-2006) that having television channels at the party’s disposal and being able to use them for political coverage as well as for extra-media purposes gave BNP and its allied parties a competitive advantage that Awami League could not afford to discount. In order to match the number of television licenses approved by the previous regime, the second Awami League-led government (2009-2013) licensed 12 television channels. The government gave the permission to, 71/Ekattor TV, Mohona Television, Channel 9, Somoy TV, GTV, Independent Television, Maasranga Television, ATN News, My TV and Bijoy TV, in 2009, and to Channel 24, SA TV, Asian TV, Dipto Bangla and Gaan Bangla in 2010 (Dhaka Tribune, Nov 27, 2013).

### Table 4.2. Patterns of TV License Ownership by AL-led Government (second batch 2009-2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TV Channel</th>
<th>Owned/backed by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 71/Ekattor Television (2009)</td>
<td>Mozammel Huqee Babu (a pro-Awami League journalist and son-in-law of Mr. Asaduzzaman, sitting MP of ruling party Awami League)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Channel 9 (2009)</td>
<td>Syeda Mahbuba Akhter, spouse of retired Brigadier Geenral Syed Shafayetul Islam, who is younger brother of Syed Ashraful Islam, Minister of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives (LGRD) and former General Secretary of ruling party Awami League (AL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Independent Television (2009)</td>
<td>Salman F. Rahman, Vice-Chairman of Bangladesh Export Import Company Limited (aka BEXIMCO Group) and adviser of the ruling party Awami League Chair Sheikh Hasina. Also owns an English daily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Somoy TV (2009)</td>
<td>Ahmed Zubair-Mursheedul Islam, brother of Qamrul Islam, Member of Parliament and State Minister of Law, Justice &amp; Parliamentary Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 My TV (2009)</td>
<td>Nasir Uddin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Maasranga (2009)</td>
<td>Anjan Chowdhury, Director of Square Group, a leading business conglomerate in Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Mohona TV (2009)</td>
<td>Kamal Ahmed Mojumder, Lawmaker and Member of Parliament of AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 GTV (2009)</td>
<td>Gazi Golam Ashriar, head of Gazi Group Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Bijoy TV (2009)</td>
<td>Chittagong City Mayor A.B.M. Mohiuddin Chowdhury, AL Party Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Channel 24 (2010)</td>
<td>Times Media Ltd (AK Azad, pro-Awami League businessman and Chairman of Hamim Group. He is also the President of The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) whose main task is to advance the interest of the private sector in the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 S.A Channel (2010)</td>
<td>S.A. Group of Industries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Shoesmith, Mahmud, & Reza, 2013, pp. 243-244; Amin (nd.); BDNews24, 2013, November 25.

Table 4.2 shows some of the channel owners and their political references as it appears in various news media outlets. The table exemplifies the *politico-commercial nexus*: the interlocking media owners, business conglomerates (e.g. BEXIMCO Group, Square Group), commercial associations (FBCCI), and of course, top order political leaders including Ministers, City Mayor, and Members of Parliament from Awami League.
party. Some of the owners eventually replaced the top leadership of the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO), re-stabilizing the inner politics of the nexus.

Table 4.3. Patterns of TV License Ownership by Awami League-led Government (third batch 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TV Channel</th>
<th>Owned/backed by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Channel 21 (2013)</td>
<td>Acquaintance of Minister of Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Amar Gaan (2013)</td>
<td>Media Bangladesh Limited’s Chairman Tarun Dey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Jadu TV (2013)</td>
<td>Anisul Haq, former President of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Cambrian TV (2013)</td>
<td>Chairman of BSB Foundation MK Bashar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Rangdhanu TV (2013)</td>
<td>Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, Lawmaker and Member of Parliament of ruling party Awami League recommended this TV channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Renaissance TV (2013)</td>
<td>Shahriar Alam, Lawmaker and Member of Parliament of ruling party Awami League named as the Chairman of this TV channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 New Vision TV (2013)</td>
<td>Member of Parliament of the ruling party Sukumar Ranjan recommended for this channel. Shah Alamgir, the Director General of Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) is on the list as the chief executive officer of the channel. He is also a member of the National Broadcast Policy committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Millennium TV (2013)</td>
<td>Backed by Mumtaj Begum, a parliament member from reserved seats for women, once an extremely popular folk singer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 News 24 (2013)</td>
<td>Sayem Sobhan, son of Bashundhara Group’s owner Ahmed Akbar Sobhan, is the Managing Director of East-West Media Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Dhaka Bangla (2013)</td>
<td>Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, information adviser to the Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Green TV (2013)</td>
<td>Green Multimedia Ltd, Chairman, Awami League leader Gazi Golam Dastagir, an MP of Narayanganj; got reference from Forests and Environment Minister of the ruling party Hasan Mahmud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Titas TV (2013)</td>
<td>Millennium Media Ltd, recommended by former State Minister for Liberation War Affairs AB Tajul Islam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


What is more interesting is that just before the end of their second tenure in 2013, the Awami League-led alliance government licensed another 13 television channels amidst political turmoil (Table 4.3). At that moment the media industry was already going through a revenue crunch, with a shortfall of investment, and migration of journalists from one television channel to another—making the whole industry more volatile and unstable (Atikuzzaman, 2013, December 13). This time, the industry got a bit more variety of ownership with proposals for specialty television channels on education, music, and children’s programming. However, the political affiliations that came with the proposals, remained strictly within the inner-circle of top leadership of Awami League party, including Ministers, Members of Parliament, close affiliates of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Information), along with Federation of Bangladesh
Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) members. Former ATCO General Secretary Shykh Seraj offers a candid comment on this:

Among the new television channel owners, some are politicians, interested in imposing their own political agenda onto the unskilled staff, and some are business owners, who want to use their television channel as a weapon to legalize their black money and to hide their wrongdoings.78

Indeed, the “Shadow Economy” (Buehn & Schneider, 2009; Dreher & Schneider, 2006) is a defining factor of Bangladeshi capital. ‘Black money’ is particularly associated with the growth of the informal economy, which is neither taxed nor monitored by any form of government, and can therefore be easily invested in the media sector with the help of political allies in the state. Anu Muhammad offers a relevant perspective:

Media institutions linked with big business houses have also been flourishing. The lumpen rich have become the strong support base of the international financial institutions. Import liberalization and unfavorable policies towards domestic industries have badly affected domestic market-oriented industries. Shopping malls have found a more favorable policy atmosphere than mills. This "mill to mall" phenomenon has failed to create enough jobs. Lack of employment opportunities and continuous migration of job-seeking people to the urban areas has triggered growth of the informal sector that is unstable and uncertain. (Links, 2010)

The “mill to mall” phenomenon also explains the growth of advertisements, middle class consumerism, and the increase of television viewers, especially in urban areas. The members of the politico-commercial nexus benefit enormously from the circulation of capital from informal economy as it comes back to the television channels as advertisements. However, the informal sector is also complemented and sometimes even challenged by the growth of conglomerate ownership that brings more sophisticated investment from horizontal and vertical integrations between industrial conglomerates and the media sector. These mixed capitalist constitutions of television indicate a variegated interplay of the formal and informal economy in which the latter carries more weight for the business portfolio of the media organization than the former. This study predicts a strong connection between the formal and traceable economy of the television channels with the owner’s (or shareholder’s) untraceable earnings that contribute to the “undisclosed” or “black money” of the “underground economy.”

78 Interview with Shykh Seraj, Founder Director & Head of News, Impress Telefilm Limited and Channel i, 7 Dec 2013, Dhaka
Several observations from Indian contexts are relevant to the licensing practice in Bangladesh. Firstly, the discretionary nature of ‘adhoc’ licensing propelled the expansion of television channels. Secondly, the shift from a state-monopoly to a deregulated and corporatized media system was enabled not by a coherent, deliberate, and systematic policy decision but by a series of small, incremental and mostly unplanned shifts in policy frameworks (Chakravartty & Roy, 2013, p. 353). Also, the television industry in Bangladesh, as in India, operates within extra-economic logics Chakravartty and Roy (2013, p. 355). These include “non-market social relations and networks such as those constituted around political power, caste and kinship networks, and regional identity” that go beyond market-based criteria of efficiency and profit maximization. Although caste difference has little or no visible significance for television ownership in Bangladesh, religious identity is a factor, with the industry dominated by Muslim ownership. Political power and family networks are even more important dimensions that characterize ownership in Bangladesh. Some television channels are licensed to the family relatives of the top leaders of the ruling party. The documents (Memorandum of Association and Article of Association) that I obtained from the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies & Firms (RJSC) show that in most cases the board of directors are from the same family and the same address. This includes channels licensed by both BNP (e.g. NTV, RTV) and Awami League (e.g. Maasranga, Somoy TV). Interestingly, I found evidence that the owner of Maasranga, Anjan Chowdhury, was in the board of the “Directors” of NTV (Bangladesh. Registrar of Joint Stock Companies & Firms, 2010). This indicates that the synergy of television ownership goes beyond the historical tenet of political rivalry.

Chakravartty and Roy (2013) present a nuanced critique of “political parallelism”, a widely used term by Hallin and Mancini (2004) that refers to “the proximity between press and formal political party systems in terms of ideological persuasion, organizational affiliation, and the loyalties of audiences” (p. 351). They offer two counter-concepts, “political dualism” and “political regionalism”, which means that the political pursuit for democratic purposes exists both “within as well as outside [a] formal political system” that varies within and across different subnational units of the state (i.e. the provincial regions of India) due to a variegated degree of political segmentation and political engagement with multiple publics (p. 356-357). To give an example of political dualism, they focus on the partisan characteristic of regional private television channels. Indeed, some of the cable news channels in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal
inherit partisan culture from the pre-existing print media resulting in direct ownership of television by political party members or their supporters with explicitly stated ideological missions. For instance, Kirali TV is controlled by Communist Party of India (Marxist), whereas the Congress Party controls Jai Hind TV (Chakravartty & Roy, 2013, p. 361).

The notion of political dualism is only partly relevant to the political reality of Bangladeshi media. While television ownership correlates to political affiliation, this is evidence of a purposive and biased political partisanship rather than political dualism. In the context of Bangladesh, there is a subtle difference between politically partisan media and politically affiliated media. The latter does not entail the political integrity, ideological loyalty, and collective dedication of the former. If NTV or Maasranga were partisan media, their owners could not do business together because it would cause conflict of political interest among them. Partisan journalism however, is still visible in some print media in Bangladesh. The narrow political partisanship of television can be easily replaced, and the treatment of news can be readjusted with the change of the political party in power as well as with the transfer of ownership shares. Such fluidity allows television owners from different political ideologies to coexist and form alliances that protect their collective interests both within and across successive regimes.

A prominent leftist media scholar Salim Reza Newton puts this in the broader perspective of national politics and “clan-capitalism”:

Bangladesh has similarity with the clan-characteristics of Russian capitalism. Clan capitalism requires totalitarian control of the party and disciplining of a clan to accumulate capital in feudal style, a form of pre-capitalism. It engulfs the state mechanisms very quickly. The clan blurs the boundary between the head of the government, the government, and the state. Judiciary, public universities, military all become clan-ized. The current Awami League government is a clan-regime. It maintains market relations while runs the government in purely feudal style. Under this circumstance, licensing television channels means primarily the feudal distribution of clan assets. The party gives the license of television channels as a conditional lease. The lease can be terminated if the owner doesn’t continue to prove loyalty and usefulness. These channels are not partisan media. They do not have the political vision of the partisan media, but have feudal obedience and party loyalty that comes from its ownership. BNP would have done the same, but they do not have strict clan disciplining that Awami League has enforced in past ten years.79 (my emphasis)

---

79 Interview with Salim Reza Newton, University of Rajshahi, Oct 31, 2017 (by telephone).
4.6. Conglomerate Ownership of Television

Conglomerate ownership of television is a relatively new phenomenon in Bangladesh that has sprung between 2005 and 2015. It took more than three decades to prepare the ground through neoliberal deregulation and privatization before such conglomeration could take place. Table 4.4 shows that only a small number of corporations (such as BEXIMCO, Square Group, Basundhara Group, and Jamuna Group) occupy a large chunk of television and print media ownership.

Table 4.4. Conglomerate Ownership of Television in Bangladesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Owner/CEO</th>
<th>Conglomeration</th>
<th>Media Ownership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEXIMCO</td>
<td>Salman F Rahman</td>
<td>Aviation, Banking, Ceramics, Textile, Jute, Construction, Real Estate, Pharmaceuticals, Media</td>
<td><em>Independent Television, Muktakantha</em> (national Bangla daily), <em>The Independent</em> (national English daily)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(the new President of ATCO)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square Group</td>
<td>Anjan Chowdhury</td>
<td>Toiletries, Textile, Food and beverages, Media</td>
<td><em>Maasranga</em> (TV). Anjan Chowdhury is the Vice-President of Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamuna Group</td>
<td>Nurul Islam Babul</td>
<td>Textiles, Chemicals, Leather, Motor cycles, Consumer products, Media, and Advertisement</td>
<td><em>Jamuna TV</em> (24/7 news channel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATN Group of Companies</td>
<td>Mahfuzur Rahman</td>
<td>Garments, Media Electronics, Travel Agency, Call Centre,</td>
<td>Multi-Media Production Co., <em>ATN Bangla</em> (TV), <em>ATN News</em> (24/7 TV), <em>Asian Television News</em>, <em>ATN music</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The conglomerate owners (such as *Independent TV* and *Maasranga*) also get to define the collective interests of all television channel owners as they begin to infiltrate ATCO leadership, ending the old-style political hegemony of pro-BNP television channels and narrowing the distance between the interests of top political leadership and leading market investors. Chapter 5 shows that this conglomeration also plays a crucial role to legitimize the symbolic dominance of branding its own commodities with television programs.

This conglomeration indicates that Bangladesh is adopting global trends of vertical and horizontal integration of media, entertainment, and telecommunications corporations (Murdock & Golding, 2005). Dan Schiller explains that in the case of United States, with the support of regulators, investment banks, and cheer leader journalists, the conglomerates have broaden their asset bases: “Diversified giants like Time Warner, Sony, News Corporation, Disney, NBC-Universal, and Viacom tracked consumers across once-discreet media frontiers, sold them a range of services directly, and offered major advertisers access to an array of media with which to stage a sales effort” in which television networks work as a “tentacle” of large conglomerates (Schiller, 2007, p. 114). Similar to this, among the conglomerates in Bangladesh, the launch of *Independent TV* extends a tentacle of BEXIMCO to renew its attempt to crack the vernacular Bengali media market as it also publishes an English-daily newspaper, *The Independent* via its BEXIMCO Media subsidiary, also manages IT and internet service provider businesses. However, it is important to note that such conglomeration doesn’t enable foreign ownership.

With a combination of conglomerate and non-conglomerate television ownership Bangladesh shows elements of both non-consolidated industry formation and a growing trend of industry consolidation. The industry started with a non-consolidated pattern when licenses were allocated on an adhoc basis at the discretion of political parties. With the growth of systematic conglomeration in the media industry, television has become a new site of corporate financialization, in which the government remains the key enforcer of political power. Intriguingly, all the conglomerates mentioned in Table 4.4 (e.g. BEXIMCO, Square, Bashundhara, Jamuna groups) received license from the Awami League regime. This indicates that the Awami League, as a political party, has an elaborate alliance with the most influential media conglomerations in the country, a unique form of politico-commercial power that no other political parties can match.
4.7. Foreign Ownership of Television: Mission Impossible?

While neighboring India excels in facilitating Western media ownership, none of the media outlets in Bangladesh are owned by Rupert Murdoch or any of the top global media conglomerates. This remains a fascinating characteristic of media ownership in Bangladesh, with the nexus of political and commercial elites in Bangladesh controlling the licensing of television channels as well as its market. This control is strongly defined by national territory and cultural affinity. Foreign ownership of television in Bangladesh is not prohibited by any policy but by cultural conservatism. One example of foreign ownership is Desh TV, which is owned by a British citizen.\(^\text{80}\) Policy does allow a foreign citizen to own up to 49% of a television channel.\(^\text{81}\)

The case of Ekushey TV (aka ETV), founded by renowned British journalist Simon John Dring, is an interesting case, in which the Western foreign ownership of a television channel was problematized by the political crosscurrent of a nation-state in the Global South. Ekushey TV (aka ETV) was licensed by the center-left political party Awami League led government (1996-2001) near to the end of their term in 2000. It was the only channel in Bangladesh that got terrestrial status, reaching near the same number of audience members as the state-broadcaster BTV could. But very ironically, it faced a tragic experience when the government changed. In 2001, the center-right political party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was elected for the second time. In 2002, Simon John Dring was expelled, and his television channel was shut for three years by court order.

It is noteworthy that Simon Dring was hailed as a 'hero' journalist back in 1971 when he “alerted the world to the massacres of the Bangladeshi war of independence,” after which he was awarded honorary citizenship of Bangladesh (Lawson-Tancred, 2002). Under Dring’s ownership and management, ETV came to staff nearly 400 people, grew to become the biggest television network in the country attracting nearly 70 million viewers through its terrestrial and satellite transmissions, and easily outperformed the state-run Bangladesh Television in terms of programming quality and popularity. It was also financially profitable, growing at a rate of 30% per annum with an annual turnover of

\(^{80}\) Interview with Fakhrul Islam, Reporter, Daily Prothom Alo, 27-29 Nov 2013, Dhaka.
\(^{81}\) Interview with Abul Hasan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Information, Dec 3, 2014, Dhaka.
US$12 million. However, in August 2002, the BNP led government ordered ETV off the air after the Supreme Court ruled that it had fraudulently acquired its license to broadcast from the previous Awami League led government in a case that was brought by supporters of the BNP led government (Lawson-Tancred, 2002). It is important to note that after the 2001 election, the BNP was able to form the government in coalition with “Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami” – an Islamist political party whose top leaders allegedly collaborated in the massacres of the Bangladeshi war of independence. Later, the International Crimes Tribunal prosecuted (Bangladesh) prosecuted several of those leaders during Awami League regimes (2009-2013, and 2014-present).

This series of events shows that the control of foreign ownership of television in Bangladesh is subjected to the political conditioning of the political party in power, rather than by the cultural protectionism of the nation-state in general. It also confirms that neoliberalization has a profound political characteristic in Bangladesh, which impacts the media industry. Neoliberalism does mean deregulation of the media industry, but often occurs alongside intricate and often contradictory political control by local political elites with transnational connections.

**Screenshot 4.3. Jamuna TV showing advertisement of Jamuna Future Park**


Note: Noteworthy that Simon Dring did come back to Bangladesh in 2013 and was appointed for several years as Chief Broadcast Advisor for the design, development, launch, and management of a 24/7 news channel Jamuna TV, owned by Jamuna Group (Screenshot 4.3). This time he has the political protection from one of the largest industrial conglomerates in Bangladesh, in exchange for his expertise and reputation.
In summary, the historical trajectory indicates multiple ways government controls private TV channels: firstly, by selective approval of licensing to allies of Members of Parliament, the Ministers and the influential members of the governing party presidium and their commercial affiliates; and secondly, by setting examples of coercive suspension of “derailed” TV channels that were approved by rival political parties when previously in power. The next section summarizes the second path.

4.8. Shutting Down Television Channels

Fakhrul Islam, an Investigative Reporter of the Daily Prothom Alo who studies ownership of television, mentioned during my interview with him, “The Ministry of Information lacks coordination power when it comes to giving license to any television channel, but they coordinate well when the government needs to shut down a television channel.”

Table 4.5. List of Television Channels Shut Down by Governments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TV Channel</th>
<th>Licensed by</th>
<th>Shut down by</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Alleged reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 CSB (2006)</td>
<td>BNP-led coalition government</td>
<td>Military-backed caretaker govt</td>
<td>Sept 6, 2007</td>
<td>Violation of frequency permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Channel 1 (2005)</td>
<td>BNP-led coalition government</td>
<td>Awami League-led regime</td>
<td>April 27, 2010</td>
<td>Broadcasting propaganda against the government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Diganta TV (2006)</td>
<td>BNP-led coalition government</td>
<td>Awami League-led regime</td>
<td>May 6, 2013</td>
<td>Violation of ‘No Objection Certificates’, censorship act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Islamic TV (2006)</td>
<td>BNP-led coalition government</td>
<td>Awami League-led regime</td>
<td>May 6, 2013</td>
<td>Violation of ‘No Objection Certificates’, censorship act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Channel 16</td>
<td>Awami League-led regime</td>
<td>Awami League-led regime</td>
<td>December 2, 2014</td>
<td>Not being able to renew permission of the Ministry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The previous section shows that the closure of Ekushey TV by the BNP-led coalition government started an endless cycle of suspensions (Table 4.5). Indeed, the television station closures have created a great deal of trauma among many journalists who have suffered lay-offs on account of the political affiliation or technical mistakes of the owner. In April 2010, the AL-led coalition government shut down Channel 1, which

---

82 Interview with Fakhrul Islam, Reporter, the Daily Prothom Alo, 2 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
had been licensed during the BNP regime leaving thousands of media workers unemployed (Atikuzzaman, 2011).

The owner of Channel 1 Gaisuddin Al Mamun, purchased a DSNG live broadcast machine. After he got arrested by the military-backed caretaker government for corruption, this machine was locked at the airport on arrival and later it became available for auction. The new owner of Channel 1 bought the DSNG machine under his personal name and rented it to Channel 1 for on air use. This was a violation of transfer of broadcast machinery law. The Awami League government seized this opportunity to shut down the channel.83

Since the government can shut down any private television channel with a valid legal excuse, channels that are linked with preceding regimes are always under threat of shutdown. This leads to self-censorship as journalists remain uncritical of crucial policy measures taken by the state. While operating under a state of emergency (e.g. in 2007, declared by the caretaker government) journalists are faced with a series of written orders and verbal directives governing media coverage (Amanpour & Simon, 2008).84

In 2013, despite facing enormous criticism from members of society and liberal media commentators, the Awami League-led regime went ahead with plans to shut down Diganta TV and Islamic TV, ensuring that the opposition parties could not televise the ongoing political conflicts from their point of view.85 The government also tried to track and shut down pirate television channels, such as Filmy Bangla TV, SK TV, Channel 5, Channel 7, DM TV, Movie Bangla TV, Bangla Music TV, SB TV, Ctg TV, Ananda Bangla TV, CTN TV and Rang TV (BDNews24, 2015, August 8).

Aside from legal concerns, the repeated practice of suspending TV channels, driven by political rivalry and the desire for authoritarian control has imperiled journalistic autonomy and sustainability, and has made the industry more politically concentrated. The following section highlights some of the other visible impacts the concentration of politically affiliated ownership has had on the journalistic profession.

83 Interview with Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Head of News, Boishakhi Television, 8 Dec 2013
84 Note that the caretaker government also banned 10 foreign television channels in Bangladesh, as their operations were found to be contrary to clause 19 of the Cable TV Network Operation Act 2006. The channels were Channel V, Zoom, Ren TV, Fashion TV, AXN, Z Cafe, Music India, Cine Max, The Music and Trendz. (Reuters, 2007, April 25)
4.9. The Impact of Ownership on Television Production

4.9.1. Political Instrumentalization of News Broadcasting?

As discussed in Chapter 2, Bangladesh has inherited the colonial tendency to use repressive laws to keep the defiant media under tight control. The previous section demonstrated this tendency in regard to shutting down unwanted television channels that were critical of the ruling party. While neoliberal privatization enabled multiple ruling governments to use media for political and commercial purposes via their ownership, political divisiveness, bitter acrimony and vendettas between ruling and opposition parties, this has destabilized the media industry, going far as to paralyze the parliament, or worse, lead to riots on the street. However, the antagonism between the main parties - the AL and the BNP - reflects personal animosity between leaders rather than substantial ideological differences (BBC Media Action, 2012, p. 9). The question therefore arises, could the divisiveness of owners’ political affiliation result in the political instrumentalization of news broadcasting? Can political leaders use the television channel they license when needed?

Dan Hallin and Paolo Mancini define political instrumentalization as “the control of the media by outside actors – parties, politicians, social groups or movements, or economic actors seeking political influence – who use it to intervene in the world of politics” (2004, p. 37). Political instrumentalization is common in many developing countries in the world, but the analysis of it can be ahistorical. Media scholar Gitiara Nasreen urges others to place the instrumentalization of media in the historical context of party politics, noting how this may affect media practice:

State capitalism was attempted in Bangladesh, but did not fully work. However, its core power remained in the hands of party politicians. Party politics have always been a crucial determiner of media autonomy and media regulation in Bangladesh. Classical market force theory of demand and supply doesn’t work here. Party politics is the key that shaped the foundation of the media industry in Bangladesh. Television licensing is not the only way the state control broadcast media. To survive every television channel must constantly negotiate with the government’s permissions and directives, and spend continuous public relation force to sustain party support. 86

86 Interview with Gitiara Nasreen, Professor, University of Dhaka, October 30, 2013, Dhaka.
In a multi-party-political-system, how do the owners politically instrumentalize their television stations when their party is in power, and how do they survive when the ruling party changes? The answer to the second question is that they survive by sacrificing the depth of political news coverage. The case studies of news production in Channel i and Somoy TV shows that the channels do provide extensive coverage of political party events, but mostly full of short and loud sound bites from political figures rather than a critical and in-depth analysis of political trends. The Head of News of Channel i reveals that “most of the quotes by politicians are not qualified to be news, it is a result of a minister’s phone call to his favored journalists on a weekend morning.”

The quotes from politicians that we see every day in news programming are offered, not discovered. The politicians want their quotes to be delivered to the audience; a cheap publicity tactic that feeds the market need for television content to fill the space and time crucial for advertising. However, extensive political coverage cannot guarantee higher quality political communication. The News Editor of Channel-i notes:

Excessive political coverage has become rather a weakness for television journalism, not strength. Our channel is not immune to this malaise. I personally believe that anything that is kept hidden from us is worthy to be a news, but if it is given to us proactively then it becomes advertising or public relation, not news anymore. … Other than some exceptions, a sound bite of a politician alone doesn’t merit news. It requires more in-depth investigation, especially when there’s political turmoil going on. However, due to time constraints and technological and financial limitations most television journalists don’t feel obligated to go deeper to an issue. As a result, shallow quotes of politicians become a trendy news item, whereas in-depth report is what we need the most. It’s a tragedy that many newspapers, who have greater time and scope to go deeper into an issue, are also following this trend.

The arrival of 24/7 news channels in Bangladesh created an even larger vacuum of space and time to fill, resulting in higher competition for advertising. But it also changes the way political parties organize their activities and the very culture of politics itself. The activities of political parties have become more televisual-centric, and in return, the television news has become more dependent on political quotes rather than political analysis. The Director of Somoy News makes that clear in his statement:

87 Interview with Shykh Seraj, Director & Head of News, Channel-i, 7 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
88 Interview with Mir Masrur Zaman, News Editor, Channel-i, 9 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
Indeed, most of the political news in contemporary television journalism is dependent on quotes. Political parties are getting excessive coverage more than they deserve, and television channels are competing to do so. This is also deeply related to the change of political attitudes in the country. The major political parties do not organize mass assembly anymore but press coverage, which is mostly limited to Dhaka city. As a result, the bigger picture of political problems across the country, especially from village areas often go unnoticed or under-noticed. The lack of necessary manpower is also a factor here. 89

Soundbite journalism is thus contributing to decreased investigative reporting on the one hand, and on the other an increase in uncritical political news coverage that primarily serves to depoliticize the public awareness. Through the veil of conformist news discourse, one can easily see the political polarization of the television by contrasting the coverage of two parties.

In between December 7 and 14 of 2013, the Channel i primetime news (10.30 PM) aired 40 news items covering the activities and commentaries of the Awami League-led alliance government, whereas the opposition parties (primarily BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami) were featured in 31 news items. This period was crucial for the government, as it was preparing for the upcoming election bypassing the interim/caretaker government system holding the election while still ruling the country. However, the opposition parties demanded the elections to be held under a neutral caretaker government to minimize the risk of poll rigging, but the government rejected it. The result was massive political conflict between the two primary parties, which erupted in violent strikes and arson on the streets. Given that Channel i received its license during the AL-led regime, it was expected that the AL party would receive most of the airtime. Surely no surprise, it prioritized pro-AL voices. Was it an example of political instrumentalization then? I asked the head of Channel i news:

There is an anarchic movement going on in the country recently and the opposition party BNP is leading it. Although the BNP leader Khaleda Zia carries more news value in this case, we face informal pressure to give live coverage to the Prime Minister, while giving no or limited coverage to Khaleda Zia. It is because, the government’s sensitivity to political news increases in the last year of the regime as the opposition party becomes more active in the field with anarchic activities against the government. The government shows less tolerance to any balanced coverage of the political parties, and demands fewer coverage of the opposition political party. We’ll

89 Interview with Tushar Abdullah, Director, Somoy Television, 17 June 2014, Dhaka. My emphasis
have to adopt more self-censorship to this end. The degree of self-censorship of a TV channel could be dictated by its political association.\textsuperscript{90}

It is noteworthy that although Channel i received television license from AL-regime it started business during BNP-regime (1991-1996). In this case, Channel i exemplifies how a television channel in a post-authoritarian political culture survives by adapting to changing political circumstances. It shows that the indicators of political parallelism as Hallin and Mancini (2004) articulated, for instance – objectivity, press freedom, and political intervention – are contextual categories for understanding media control, and they cannot be universally applied.

4.9.2. Struggles for Journalistic Autonomy

Although television journalism in Bangladesh has become a well-paid profession for some higher-ranking journalists, even after two decades of struggle, employment for the bottom liners remains highly unstable and lowly paid, making them susceptible to political and economic influences (Rahman, 2012a, p. 87). Facing little job security, unequal pay, and exploitative hierarchies of authority, media workers in both electronic and print media continuously struggle to survive. While the media industry reflects a staggering degree of political and commercial amenability, media outlets enjoy relative autonomy to engage in intense competition to acquire market share and influence. The impact political ownership has on unskilled workers is made starkly clear in Shykh Seraj’s statement.

To be blunt, Bangladesh does not have a market or audience for 26 television channels but only for 4 to 5 channels. There is no feasibility test to operate a channel. There is no market survey whether there is enough revenue to share or to survive. But most of all, we do not have the skilled manpower to run a TV channel, be it journalists, be it cameraman or video editors, program producers or script writer, artists or actors and actresses, we do not have the skilled numbers to match an industry of 26 television channels. All it takes to get a TV channel is a political approval. Unskilled journalists become easily obedient to their political owners.\textsuperscript{91}

While the television industry expanded in Bangladesh primarily because of the political contest between two parties, another factor was market revolution. In the case

\textsuperscript{90} Interview with Shykh Seraj, Director & Head of News, Channel-i, 7 Dec 2013, Dhaka.

\textsuperscript{91} Interview with Shykh Seraj, Director & Head of News, Channel-i, 7 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
of corporate ownership, Citi Group-owned Somoy TV, exemplifies how the ownership of a television channel by powerful business enterprises gives owners immunity from political investigation and a simultaneous ability to investigate others. “Citi Group is our owner. We don’t even think about investigating any misconduct of our owner. There is nothing to censor,” said the News Editor of Somoy Television without any hesitation.92

But how does the political alignment of ownership impact mid-level journalists and new comers? When I met Sarwar Sumon, a Staff Reporter of ETV, he was in the process of leaving his three-year career at the station. I asked why was he leaving ETV to join to a different station. He explained that he was leaving the job for three reasons.

The number one reason, said Sumon, was a lack of autonomy or what he calls “journalistic freedom.” At ETV, he was forced to comply with the ideological bias of the TV channel. For example, he was explicitly asked to give superfluous treatment to news with low value, such as adding voice overs, vox-pop, ranking the order of the news higher than where it should be – both in the case of selection and treatment. Ownership was a factor too – there were specific instructions from the gatekeepers to cover news of people who are friends of the owner, as Sumon was often asked to bump up the priority of news which favored the owner’s inner circle. The second reason Sumon mentioned involved technical limitations. ETV had been using old newsroom technologies, which cost journalists extraneous labor to edit and que up reports. But the most crucially, his salary was low. ETV, as Sumon explained, paid one of the lowest salary rates in the market. Although Sumon was reluctant to disclose the salary range, it was obvious that the other channel he was about to join was offering a higher salary.93

4.9.3. Wage as a Means of Control

Notably, the wage-labor relationship is one of the most effective tools for controlling insubordination in the newsroom. In Bangladesh, it operates under the radar of public scrutiny. Making things worse, there is no wage board for electronic media. An important variable that impacts journalistic integrity is the rewards of the occupation. The TV channels in Bangladesh are engaged in discreet competition to hire star journalists

92 Interview with Zakaria Mukta, News Editor, Somoy Television, 30 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
93 Interview with Sarwar Sumon, Staff Reporter, ETV (Foreign bit), 25 Nov 2013, Dhaka.
from other channels. In return, as Suman’s statement attests, the journalists also compete to get the best paying positions offered by the highest bidder. As a causality of this practice, a journalist with a “common sense” that challenges the dominant economic and political discourses waits a long time to get a better salary, or in the worst case, gets fired.

Despite the increase of ownership concentration and conglomerate investment in the television industry, exploitation of labor in media production remain pervasive. The so called invisible hand of the market turns a blind eye to such exploitation. A senior journalist of *Channel i* Jannatul Bakea Keka shares her frustration:

The market of television, with its enormous growth, has become highly unstable. We’ve very little job security, which often leads journalists to team up and migrate to another television channel with higher salary. This trend continues to define the quality of senior-junior relationships and their depth in the newsroom and beyond the newsroom.\(^{94}\)

Keka also highlights the lack of any professional recruitment and promotion policy:

There is no institutional wage board or formal salary structure for the industry let alone for *Channel i*. There is even no Human Resource department to keep records of its employees. Of course, you will earn more if you are a good journalist, but how far you can go it all depends on your personal networking with higher officials.

Getting a job in television media is merely the beginning of an uphill battle of survival and an endless struggle of personal lobbying for most of the journalists in the television industry who do not have political relatives or commercial backup. As for female journalists, as the next section elaborates, the television industry is a man-made jungle where they rediscover the wheel of patriarchy and the resulting gendered division of labor. New television journalists, along with female workers, most of whom are less skilled and less confident in their profession, have less job security, and have less experience in handling pressure from the upper echelons of newsroom hierarchy. They also are ideal subjects for re-socializing any ideas, especially to market-oriented ideologies that fit well with the increasingly competitive profit motives of TV channel owner(s) and advertisers. It is because, in most cases, the young journalists do not have the power to speak up against the Marketing & Sales department’s news “request/order.”

\(^{94}\) Interview with Jannatul Bakea Keka, Special Correspondent, *Channel-i*, 3 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
4.9.4. Gendered Division of Labor

The social organization of journalism in Bangladesh reflects a persistent patriarchal hierarchy. TV channels simply renew this tradition, as the assembly line of news production is largely male dominated (Ferdous, 2007b). There is a gendered division of labor in the participation of newsgathering and processing. While the number of female television workers has increased over the last decade, with few notable exceptions (e.g. Munni Saha, Kishwar Laila) male journalists occupy the key policymaking and editorial positions in the newsroom and marketing department. There is a direct impact of such gendered division of labor on news production. In a female journalist’s words: “There is an apparent participation of women in the newsroom, but it broadly reflects patriarchal practices; women are treated by their glamour, beauty, and face value, but very little by their merit, intelligence, and hard work.”

Table 4.6. Gender Roles in Channel-i Newsroom (2013-2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News Editor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days News Editor/ Assistant News Editor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment Editor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Assignment Editor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsroom Editor (National Desk)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsroom Editor (Central Desk)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Editor</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameraman</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interview with Mir Masrur Zaman, News Editor, Channel-i, 9 Dec 2013, Dhaka.

Channel i, while being one of the oldest private television channels in Bangladesh, reflects an archetypal lack of females in the top echelons of the news production assembly line. When I inquired about this, the News Editor of Channel i pointed his finger towards the greater problem of the traditional society:

Assuming a lead position by a female staff doesn’t guarantee that the division of labor will be balanced. A senior female staff, despite occupying a decision-making position, may follow the patriarchal attitude prevalent in

---

95 Interview with Jannatul Bakea Keka, Special Correspondent, Channel-i, 3 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
a newsroom. For example, a female Chief Reporter may hesitate to give a crucial political assignment to a female reporter and may think that it is a tough guy job. It’s hard to overcome hundred years of patriarchal thinking embedded deeply in our mindset and thinking.\footnote{Interview with Mir Masrur Zaman, News Editor, \textit{Channel-i}, 9 Dec 2013, Dhaka.}

While there is cogency in his argument, another female journalist, who requested to remain anonymous, refuted Zaman’s point of view, arguing that this is how the male dominated news producers think alike and want the newsroom to stay like this forever.

Compared with \textit{Channel i}, the new generation of 24/7 news channels acknowledge the need to have a female workforce covering the same types of assignments as male journalists. "We won’t make any money if we keep our female journalists reserved for beauty contests, such as, in news presenters position. Our reporters regardless male or female are capable of both producing a report on the field and presenting it in the studio during primetime" claims the Director of \textit{Somoy TV}.\footnote{Interview with Tushar Abdullah, Director, \textit{Somoy Television}, 17 June 2014, Dhaka} Indeed, \textit{Somoy TV} hired more than 40 reporters in 2013 alone who are capable of performing both field assignments and newscasting, resulting in a high number of female journalist the station (see Table 4.7).

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Gender Roles in Somoy Television (2014)}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Position} & \textbf{Male} & \textbf{Female} & \textbf{Total} \\
\hline
News Editor & 4 & 5 & 9 \\
Reporting & 60 & 50 & 110 \\
Desk (including news casters) & 45 & 55 & 100 \\
\hline
Total & 109 & 110 & 219 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\footnotetext{Source: Interview with Tushar Abdullah, Director, Somoy Television, 17 June 2014, Dhaka}

However, hiring female journalists for reporting jobs doesn’t guarantee that they will be paid a salary equitable to their male competitors. Rather, it pits the strength of female employees against the requirement of multitasking as they also have to take care of domestic chores such as caregiving or cooking after a day of strenuous fieldwork coupled with stressful post-production editing and presentation tasks. Perhaps only a strong in-house wage-labor policy, complemented by a national labor policy, can help to improve the working conditions of female journalists by restricting any gender bias in assigning roles as well as sufficiently compensating for laborious multitasking.

\footnotetext{96 Interview with Mir Masrur Zaman, News Editor, Channel-i, 9 Dec 2013, Dhaka.}
\footnotetext{97 Interview with Tushar Abdullah, Director, Somoy Television, 17 June 2014, Dhaka}
4.9.5. The Collateral Damage of Political Ownership of Television

Historically, journalism in Bangladesh is not only a challenging profession but also a risky one (Rahman, 2007b; Khan, 2008). Journalists are often vulnerable to political threats, criminal harassment and police/military torture. In between 1992–2007, 12 journalists were killed. While the AL-led alliance government pledged the investigation and trial of assassination of all journalists, since they assumed power in 2008, seven more journalists have been killed, 222 injured and some 98 assaulted (Atikuzzaman, 2011). On February 11, 2012, television journalist couple Sagar Sarowar and Meherun Runi were found brutally stabbed to death in their home in Dhaka. Even five years later, police have failed to probe the murder, with the investigation still in progress. This is an extreme example where the motive of murder is yet unknown, but there are many cases where the state remained reluctant to bring the alleged criminals – often politicians - to justice (Rahman, 2012a, p. 87-88).

In sum, the journalistic occupation in Bangladesh comes with a fear of risks which make journalists, especially television reporters, more cautious and conforming. It also limits their enthusiasm for serious crime reporting as there is no guarantee of protection from the state, or station owner, if any politicians of the ruling party were found involved in the case. Thus, a salient feature of television journalism in Bangladesh is a sphere of fear which undermines democracy. The transition to a democratic political system increased the number of media outlets and journalists, but the politics of repression remains dominant. While “freedom of the press” is afforded by Bangladesh’s Constitution in Article 39(1) it is undermined by Article 39(2), which allows “reasonable restrictions” for security, decency, morality, defamation and other criteria. Over recent decades, the nation has also adopted laws that inhibit press freedom, some of which mandate prison time for violations. Journalists’ work (including female journalists), is also impeded by harassment from the government and military officials, as well as others with political goals. The violence and resulting self-censorship are encouraged by the lack of effective investigations by law enforcement. Not surprisingly, the RSF places Bangladesh as 146th out of 180 countries in its 2014 World Press Freedom Index, two positions lower than the previous year (Reporters without Borders, 2014). Journalists in Bangladesh, including television journalists operate within perilous environments. Compared to print journalists, television journalists are more vulnerable to the collateral damage of political ownership of television due the fear of suspension.
4.10. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter paid attention to the structures of political concentration of ownership and conglomerate media ownership and the impact of ownership on journalistic production, institutional autonomy, division of labor, and uncertainty of the occupation. The chapter addressed how the neoliberal globalization interact with the political ownership of television industry, and then how such interaction creates a ripple effect on the journalistic agency and struggles that are embedded in the preexisting social hierarchy and political culture. It showed that in the era of neoliberalism the postcolonial transformation enabled the government to integrate the media entities with the market forces, while keeping the control of television ownership with a strict political conditioning. Under this circumstance, a *politicocommercial nexus* has emerged that dominates the ownership of television channels. The nexus is built upon a relationship of mutually interdependent interests and interlocking networks between prominent political leaders, media owners, advertisers, and top tier industrial conglomerates. The chapter presented the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) as a case of such nexus, and contended the television channel owners display resounding unity when it comes to the issue of the shared economic interests. ATCO displays an interlaying synergy that transcends historical political divisions among its members.

The chapter showed the process of television licensing is pre-filtered with political conditioning. The licenses are approved on an adhoc basis, and at the discretion of the ruling Prime Minister and the Minister of Information. This applies to almost all private television channels licensed so far since 1997. The television ownership in Bangladesh, as in India, thus operates within an extra-economic logic, in which political power and kinships are crucial factors for survival of the channels. The chapter also showed that a simultaneous trend of non-consolidated nature of the television industry and consolidated formation of conglomeration characterize the broader structural constraints of the media system. As a result of these characteristics, television journalism is politically instrumentalized. In addition, an unstructured wage mechanism serves to keep the journalists conformist to newsroom hierarchy and obedient to owners’ political attitudes. Supplementing the findings of this chapter, the next chapter delves deeper into the economic aspect of television journalism, bridging the macro aspect of market-orientation and its impact on the micro aspect of news production.
Chapter 5. Market-orientation of Television Journalism

Anis Rahman: Does corporate branding influence the news? Does the Sales & Marketing send requests to cover corporate branded events to the newsroom?

Ebne Hasan Khan: It is not a request, it is an order. The newsroom must comply.  

5.1. Market-orientation as a Global Trend

Over the past few decades the “market-orientation of journalism” has emerged as one of the principal dimensions of journalistic culture and practice (Hanitzsch, 2007). While the notion of the “market-orientation of journalism” originated in the west its contextual worth in the media analysis in Bangladesh needs to be critically examined. Chapter 1 provides a theoretical context of “market-orientation of journalism.” This chapter delves into the practice of market-orientated journalism and its impact on news production. To define it again briefly, market-orientation refers to the practice of commodifying media content, in order to accumulate greater revenue. The most generic form of commodification is advertising and sponsorship, as well as the exercise of branding programs. In this view, news is a sellable commodity and its primary rationale is market competition rather than public service. James Curran notes that “market-oriented journalism stresses action rather than process, visualization rather than abstraction, and is stereotypical rather than reflecting human complexity” (Curran, 2000, p. 128). Critics feel that such journalism downplays serious content in favor of frivolous, entertaining information and that it fails to live up to social obligations of disseminating public affairs information essential to democratization (as cited in Beam, 1998).

In the context of Bangladesh, Salim Reza Newton (2003) first used the term market-oriented journalism [bazar-mukhi sangbadikota] in a critical political economy analysis of print media. Following this, Haider (2007), and I (Rahman, 2007a, 2009) advanced the critical analyses of news production arguing that the discourse produced by the majority of TV channels in Bangladesh is highly market-oriented. Fahmidul Haq

98 Interview with Ebne Hasan Khan, Director, Sales & Marketing, Channel-i, 9 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
(2011) argues that the rise of market-orientated television journalism is a result of post-cold war economic globalization as well as its internal expansion:

Market-oriented journalism here refers to a trend of journalism whose primary job is to serve the interest of free market capitalism, industrialization, and especially of the import-based economy. It became prevalent with the progress of global capitalist markets into a peripheral capitalist country like Bangladesh, along with its internal expansion. This form of economic globalization encouraged more inward flow of global trading than on internal industrialization, and it is more interested in import-oriented businesses than export-oriented industries.99

5.1.1. Advertising as a de facto Licensing Authority?

In his book Media and Power (2002) James Curran provided a historical account of how advertisers acquired strategic control over the nineteenth century British press shaping its growth and trajectory. “Market forces succeed,” writes Curran, “where legal repression had failed in establishing the press as an instrument of social control, with lasting consequences for the development of modern British society” (Curran, 2002, p. 81). Owing to this power of the market, “advertisers acquired a de facto licensing power, because without their support, newspapers ceased to be economically viable” (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 29). Bangladesh has come a long way since British journalist James August Hickey introduced media advertising in East India. In the 19th-20th century press partisan journalism was more influential than advertisers’ interests (Chapter 2). However, with the growth of industrialization and urbanization in Bangladesh, advertising emerged as an influential factor to shape news production since the 1980s and 1990s.

By the turn of the millennium, access to advertising networks practically has become a pre-condition for any owner to license a television channel. Analogous to what James Curran said about early British press, if the first license to launch a TV channel comes from the government, the second license to run a TV channel comes from local and multinational advertisers, which opens TV texts, especially the news, up to the process of commodification. Advertisers, then turn into a controller of television. The Director of Somoy Television, who has been a journalist for two decades, notes:

News is a commodity. Despite the growth of television channels advertisers didn’t increase their budget. Therefore, more and more competition to grab

99 Interview with Fahmidul Haq, Professor, University of Dhaka, 18 June 2014, Dhaka.
a share of the market, leading to airing a higher ratio of advertising in television channels per hour and per day. As a result, advertisers control us more than the government does.\textsuperscript{100}

The older TV channels who have higher penetrations in the advertising market, are especially vulnerable to market interference: “The state interferes occasionally, but the market does it constantly,” notes Jannatul Bakea Keka, Special Correspondent of Channel-i.\textsuperscript{101} Advertising, as the most visible form of market force, succeed what the rulers of the country failed to do for centuries, to colonize space and time in the news.

\begin{table}[!h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
News Hour & Approx. Total Duration (Minutes) & Duration of Content/News & Duration of Branded Sting & # of Breaks for Commercials \\
\hline
News at 7 AM & 22 & 19.30 & 2.30 & One \\
News at 9 AM & 20 & 17.30 & 2.30 & One \\
News at 2 PM & 25 & 21.30 & 3.30 & One \\
News at 5 PM & 10 & 10 & - & - \\
News at 5.15 PM & 10 & 8 & 2 & - \\
News at 7 PM & 30 & 24.30 & 5.30 & Two \\
News at 9 PM & 15 & 11 & 4 & Two \\
News at 10.30 PM & 35 & 31.30 & 2.30 & Three \\
News at 12.30 AM & 22 & 18 & 4 & One \\
\hline
\textbf{Total} & \textbf{189} & \textbf{162.30} & \textbf{26.30} & \textbf{Eleven} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Time Distribution of News in Channel i: Content vs Advertising}
\end{table}

As of 2013, as table 5.1 indicates, Channel i breaks at least eleven times throughout the nine news slots on any given day, each break lasting anywhere between one minute to three minutes, with a maximum of three breaks during primetime news at 10.30 PM. In addition to the advertising breaks, there are branded stings – which means short tune or music to fill out the transition space and time in between each segment of news, creating further space to place audio and/or visual adverts.

This is advertisement on top of advertisements, primarily known as “corporate branding,” which refers to an exclusive practice of branding titles, time slots and screen space of news and other television programs to highly paying advertisers or sponsors (Rahman, 2009, 2016; Haq, 2011). For example, in addition to eleven advertisement breaks, Channel i managed to squeeze out 29 minutes and 30 seconds from 189

\textsuperscript{100} Interview with Tushar Abdullah, Director, Somoy Television, 17 June 2014, Dhaka.
\textsuperscript{101} Interview with Jannatul Bakea Keka, Special Correspondent, Channel-i, 27 Nov 2013, Dhaka.
minutes of news programming for Branded Stings playing a signature tune and showing the logo and name of a brander. On top of nine news hours, there are six hourly bulletins all branded as “Homeland Life Insurance Lead News” (Screenshot 5.3). This is merely the peak of the iceberg. Other than advertisements during news and bulletins, there are innumerable branded programs, talk shows, and media-advertiser joint programs, campaigns and events. According to the Director of Sales & Marketing at Channel i, this is how the total media advertising industry in Bangladesh, developed into approximately 26000 crore Taka (nearly USD$3.17 billion), and television gets the highest share.\textsuperscript{102}

5.1.2. Integration of Television to Translocal Flow of Capital

It is important to note that the transnational investment of the advertisement-network in Bangladesh does not operate in a vacuum, it is largely shared with Indian and Pakistani media systems. For example, Unilever and Colgate-Palmolive are major suppliers of advertisements in India as well as in Bangladesh, at the same time they supply advertisements to the regional media owned by top tire global media companies such as Time-Warner (Imagine TV) and News Corporation (Star TV) often through mergers and acquisitions with local media (for example Imagine TV was owned by NDTV). While there is no direct media investment from Time-Warner, NDTV has a contract with Bangladeshi conglomerate BEXIMCO-owned Independent TV. BEXIMCO is a major advertiser itself. The Reliance Group and TATA groups in India, are few of the transnational conglomerates advertise in all countries in South Asia and beyond. Bangladesh, is thus integrated with a network that returns surplus generated from advertising sales but also benefits from local conglomerates such as Grameen Phone and Robi, which again, is owned by multinational companies.

\textsuperscript{102} Ebne Hasan Khan, Director, Sales & Marketing, Channel-i, 9 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
Similar to the ‘3-tier media system’ described by Robert McChesney (1998), these translocal ties bear multiple significances: First: they show how neoliberal globalization embedded local media systems within transnational capital. Second: transnational to local is a nonlinear structure that is submerged in an intricate web of dual and tripartite relationships that simply cannot be explained by a ‘center to periphery model’ of power such as the World System theory composes. And Third: regional superpowers such as India accelerate the pace of integration and accumulation of transnational capital, and feed the surpluses back to the global capitalist system.

However, this flow of capital that emerges from advertising and corporate branding is highly asymmetrical and it reflects the core inequality of global capitalism. For instance, Unilever can come in Bangladesh, advertise, and earn revenue by selling products which are assembled locally using cheap labor, but a Bangladeshi business company (such as Walton) cannot earn significant revenue from by showing advertising in an Indian or Dutch market as Walton will not be able to afford the cost. However asymmetrical, advertisers have emerged as a prime driver of corporate-branding in the local television industry. The entrance of transnational and national financial capital (e.g. JP Morgan, Reliance, Tata, Birla) into television industry has consequential effects on the way the financial news is produced in television (Chakravarty & Roy, 2013, p. 355)
5.1.3. All Hail Corporate-Branding!

While ATN Bangla claims the credit for introducing corporate branding in news in 1997 (Rahman, 2007a, 2009), the very first branded television program in Bangladesh was actually not news but film, which continues to be an immensely popular form of television content (although not so popular as when they go to cinema halls). It was not an indigenous invention but borrowed from a neighbor with the world’s third largest film industry, India.

With nearly two decades of experience, Ebne Hasan Khan has witnessed a massive expansion of television as a selling industry and claims himself to be one of the very first television program marketing professionals. Khan explains that he got the idea of corporate branding from a local tea store in Calcutta while looking at a cinema poster that had a banner stating, “This film is brought to you by Shalimar Coconut Oil.” 103 Channel i was yet to be born. 104 Its parent company Impress Telefilm lobbied heavily with the BNP-led coalition government to convince the state broadcaster Bangladesh Television (BTV) to accept branding of its television content. While BTV did not allow Impress Telefilm to insert corporate branding in film or drama programs, the idea stayed with Impress Group. As soon as Impress Group got its own channel i.e. Channel i, Khan’s dream came true – the channel started branding films, such as, “Kokhono Megh Kokhono Bristi” “brought to you by Nestle”, “Bachelor” “brought to you by Eurocola”, “Shasti” “brought to you by HSBC Bank”, etc. See table (5.2), below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Brander/Brought to you by</th>
<th>Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kokhono Megh Kokhono Bristi</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Nestle</td>
<td>Impress Telefilm (first theatrical film)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Eurocola</td>
<td>Impress Telefilm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shasti</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>HSBC Bank</td>
<td>Impress Telefilm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2. Origin of Branded TV Programs in Channel-i (2003-2004)

Source: Interview with Ebne Hasan Khan, Director, Sales & Marketing, Channel-i, 9 Dec 2013, Dhaka.

103 Interview with Ebne Hasan Khan, Director, Sales & Marketing, Channel-i, 9 Dec 2013, Dhaka.

104 Impress Group began as a trading company in 1980s. Most of the senior staff of Impress Group came from state television Bangladesh Television and a newspaper Ajker Kagoj. They created Impress Telefilm in 1990s and supplied drama package to Bangladesh Television. In 1999, Impress Group got approval for its own television from Awami League-led regime, Channel i. Interview with Shykh Seraj, Director & Head of News, Impress Telefilm Limited/ Channel i, 7 Dec 2013.
Meanwhile, ATN Bangla begun to amuse the industry by demonstrating how to show advertisements within the news without even having to leave a shot of the news. Why not embed the name of the advertisers with the news slots? Who would stop such a practice? So, it began. During the primetime news, the “Welcome to ATN Bangla news” announcement became “Welcome to Citycell [a cellphone company] News Headlines”. The news segment allocated for sports became “Grameen Phone [another cellphone company] Sports News.” Economic news became, “AB Bank [Arab Bangladesh Bank] Economic News.” International news became “Mercantile Bank International News.” Even the break, when the channel tells you that it is taking a break from the news, became “Eastern Bank News Break,” and so on and on. In short order, almost every channel with access to premium advertising networks, became plastered with every possible combination of brands and newscasting sub-genre (Table 5.3).

There was no written house policy to how much branding can be allowed, and there is still none. Profit maximization is the default logic that governs how the programs will be sold. “Corporate branding is essential for survival, otherwise how would I run such a large TV channel with 500 staff?” – became a new mantra. “Very soon we will see newscasters’ coat pins carrying logos, female journalists wearing a logo or name woven to their sleeves,” predicts Shykh Seraj, the Director and Head of News of Channel-i.105

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description / Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News Branding</td>
<td>Headline&lt;br&gt;Break&lt;br&gt;Countdown&lt;br&gt;Segments/slots: e.g. Sports, Business, Economy, International, Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television Scroll Branding</td>
<td>News Scroll branding&lt;br&gt;Pick / off pick scroll branding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Category Branding</td>
<td>e.g. ROBI-Channel-i National Independence Day Celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other varieties</td>
<td>Doggy&lt;br&gt;Pop-up&lt;br&gt;L-shape&lt;br&gt;Time-spot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sales & Marketing Department, Channel-i, 9 Dec 2013, Dhaka

105 Interview with Shykh Seraj, Director & Head of News, Impress Telefilm Limited/ Channel i, 7 Dec 2013
Table 5.3 and the following screenshots exemplify a collection of corporate branded news as a mixed business strategy. What is special about corporate branding that it is more profitable than ordinary advertising (example Screenshots 5.2, 5.3, and 5.7). It can be more flexibly placed and more frequent displayed, and aired simultaneously with pre-existing advertisements occupying the screen (examples Screenshot 5.4, 5.7).

**Screenshot 5.1. Example of News Category Branding: Standard Bank Prime News in ATN News**

Note: Standard Bank sponsored the “news update”. This type of single company branding are the most expensive ones. [Aired on Aug 10, 2017, 10.33 AM, Retrieved from http://www.jagobd.com/]
Screenshot 5.2.  Example of News Slot Branding: Universal Food Presents Election Update in ATN News
Note: During election time, television channels take advantage of extra corporate branding. [Aired on Jan 5, 2014, 2.51 PM, Dhaka, accessed using a TV screen capturing device]

Screenshot 5.3.  Example of News Category Branding: Homeland Life Insurance Lead News in Channel i
Note: In addition to nine news hours, there are six hourly bulletins in Channel i – all branded as “Homeland Life Insurance Lead News”. [Aired on Jan 5, 2014, 1:20 AM, Dhaka. Accessed using a TV screen capturing device]
Screenshot 5.4.  L-shape Advertising in Somoy News
Note: An L-shape advertising of “National Foam” appears for five seconds occupying nearly half of the screen, resulting into a smaller space for the news. [Aired on Jan 5, 2014, 3.02 PM, Dhaka. Accessed using a TV screen capturing device]

Screenshot 5.5.  Example of News Segment Branding: Mercantile Bank International News in ATN Bangla
As Table 5.4 shows, corporate branding has infiltrated not only television news or film shows, but all genres of television production including drama, talk shows, music shows, magazine shows, even educational programs.

Table 5.4. List of Sponsored Programs in Channel-i

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Branded Program</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talk show</td>
<td><em>Grameen Phone</em></td>
<td>Politics, Culture,</td>
<td>Daily 1 AM, 9.45 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Trtio Matra</em></td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Grameen Phone</em></td>
<td>News and current affairs</td>
<td>Daily 12 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Ajker Songbad</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Protidin</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>BBC Bangladesh Sanglap</em></td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Tue 3.05 PM, Mon 7.50 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Show</td>
<td><em>Fair &amp; Lovely</em></td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Daily 1.05 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Ebong Cinemar Gaan</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Walton</em></td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Weekly, Sun 2.40 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Ghore Gore Gaaner Utsob</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine Show</td>
<td><em>Incepta</em></td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Weekly, Mon, 4.40 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Apnar Shastho</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>BSB</em></td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Weekly, Mon, 11.05 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Uchchoshikka Deshe-bideshe</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film Show</td>
<td><em>Robi</em></td>
<td>Film</td>
<td>Weekly, Thurs 3.30 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Esoptaher Chobi</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>LUX</em></td>
<td>Film</td>
<td>Weekly, Wed, 3 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Megh Dupure</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Show</td>
<td><em>RC</em></td>
<td>Nature, tourism</td>
<td>Weekly, Mon, 6 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Travel On</em></td>
<td>adventure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Bangla Link</em></td>
<td>Nature, tourism</td>
<td>Weekly, Tue, 6 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Banglar Pothe</em></td>
<td>adventure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The name of the branding company/product is highlighted with bold and italic fonts. Source: Sales & Marketing Department, Channel-i, 9 Dec 2013, Dhaka. For examples: see Screenshot 5.6

This infiltration of program sponsorship is profoundly related to the extension of corporate reach in Bangladesh ranging from local and regional to transnational and multinational strata. Most of the commercials in Bangladeshi media, both print and broadcasting, are from mobile phone companies, real estate, private universities, perfumery and toiletries industries, home appliance selling organisations, government and private banks, and beverages (Rahman, 2009, p. 8). Similar to Channel i, many television channels in Bangladesh are widely engaged in corporate branding contracts with the multinational advertisers like Unilever, transnational mobile phone giants with local ownership such as Grameen Phone and Robi, as well as local large and small business conglomerations, companies, export-import product suppliers and distributors.

The geographic locations of headquarters of Channel i program sponsors (Table 5.5) shows that, on the one side translocalized commodification of TV programs is providing symbolic legitimation of market elites, while placing control over the market in the hands of political elites on the other side. Such emphatic collaboration between market forces and political powers is symptomatic of the integration between local media power and global capitalism.
Table 5.5. Geography of Channel-i Program Sponsors: Local, Regional, and Transnational

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brander/Sponsor</th>
<th>Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grameen Phone</strong></td>
<td>Grameen Phone, the largest cellphone operator in Bangladesh, owned by Telenor, a Norwegian multinational telecom giant, with operations in Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BBC Sanglap</strong></td>
<td>BBC Media Action, an international development charity of the British Broadcasting Corporation, United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fair &amp; Lovely Lux</strong></td>
<td>Fair &amp; Lovely is a global fairness cream brand, Lux is soap brand, both are produced by Unilever, a British-Dutch multinational consumer goods company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Walton</strong></td>
<td>Walton Group. A national conglomerate, based in Dhaka, produces electronics, motor vehicles, and telecommunications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incepta</strong></td>
<td>Incepta Pharmaceuticals. A national company based in Dhaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BSB</strong></td>
<td>BSB Foundation, a Dhaka based study abroad consultancy farm, which also owns a local school and college named Cambrian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Robi</strong></td>
<td>The second largest cellphone operator in Bangladesh, owned by Robi-Axiata Ltd, a multinational venture of Malaysian company Axiata, Indian company Airtel, and NTT DOCOMO of Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RC</strong></td>
<td>RC Cola, aka Royal Crown Cola, a soft drink product by United States based Dr Pepper Snapple Group Inc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bangla Link</strong></td>
<td>Arguably the third largest cellphone operator in Bangladesh, jointly owned by Egyptian Global Telecom Holding and VimpelCom Ltd., a Dutch mobile network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Origin of the companies is highlighted in bold. Source: company websites, carefully cross-checked with secondary sources.

The marketization of news by corporate news branding is not “made in Bangladesh”. It is a global phenomenon that was first originated in the West and continues in different forms and formats – such as talent searches and star hunt, which frequently turn into advertiser-media joint ventures, like NTV-Close up, 1 singer talent hunt, LUX-Channel i superstar competition, or more recently FizzUP-Channel i Serakantho [Best Singer] (see Screenshot 5.6).

There are multiple sorts of cross-combination in this advertising, including multiple corporate-branding and screen advertising. For example, Screenshot 5.7 displays how severely commodification has taken over the television screen in Somoy News. The screen shows a Milk-Vita sponsored talk show, which is again largely surrounded by a L-shaped advertisement of Milk-Vita. If this is not enough for selling space and time, the stage of the show inside the program is branded with a Milk-Vita board. Then a rolling pop-up advertisement of Milk-Vita appears on the left-bottom corner of the screen. The projector behind the stage displays a dynamic graphics of Milk-Vita products. In addition to these, a small scroller branding appears to parade with a variety of brands (e.g. Partex).
Screenshot 5.6. Example of Media-Advertiser Joint-Venture: FizzUP-Channel i Serakantho [Best Singer]
Note: This screenshot is a four in one. Channel i teamed up with FizzUp [beverage] launching a year-long musical talent search competition. Joint venture is not enough, the program is presented by Sharif Kitchen Star. In addition, you got a rolling advertisement of a Tempered glass door, and a new scroll braded by Ifad Ata (flour) product. [Aired on Oct 9, 2017 11:08 AM, Dhaka time, Retrieved from http://www.jagobd.com/channeli]

Screenshot 5.7. Example of Pervasive Multiple Corporate Branding and Advertising in Somoy News
Note: The screen shows a Milk-Vita sponsored talk show, largely surrounded by a L-shaped advertisement of Milk-Vita. The stage of the show is branded with Milk-Vita banner. A rolling pop-up advertising of Milk-Vita appears on the left-bottom corner of the screen. The projector behind the stage displays a dynamic graphics of Milk-Vita product. In addition to these, a small scroller appears on with the different brands (e.g. Partex). [Aired on Oct 9, 2017, 9:28 AM, Dhaka time, Retrieved from http://www.somoynews.tv/pages/live]
5.2. Impact of Market-orientation on News Production

The submission and subjugation of television journalism to corporate branding in Bangladesh is exemplary to the world. 106

The marketing pressures from the advertisers and corporate branders have instigated an alarming drift towards corporate takeover of news-slots through cross-promotional ‘Corporate-branding’ and ‘advertiser-media-joint program partnership’, all of which inexorably shape the selection and production of news. The impact of market-oriented journalism, therefore, is multifold: first, turning each segment of news into a sellable commodity, e.g. increase of advertising and corporate-branding; second, surrendering its ideological interest to the interests of the advertisers, e.g. promoting the interests of the private sector; and third, producing news in favor of and directly about advertisers, compromising the channel’s ability to pursue any kind of investigative reporting against the symbiotic nexus of the advertisers, media owners, and political leaders with businesses. The proliferation of a commercialized media brings aspiration for rating companies like ‘Nielson Bangladesh’ that “more and more people are exposed to wider options”. But wider option to what? Answers Graham Murdock, “Globalization of consumerism serves as a moral ideology for neoliberalization.” 107 Neoliberal television treats audience as consumer commodity, not as citizen. As Dallas Symthe (1980) argued, audience is the key commodity that commercial television produces and sells them to advertisers. Commodification of news through corporate branding reinforces the ideological worth of audience commodification as it serves as a structural amnesia that makes us to forget the labor value of audience in the process of watching television.

Jannatul Bakea Keka notes, “The most obvious impact of advertising on news is that advertising takes away time and space for news. The rundown of news becomes uncertain after the first break. Low priority news often gets discarded from the bottom of the rundown to accommodate ads.” 108 In my previous research with the leading television of BNP-lead regime, NTV, I found out that among 1653 reporting assignments of the channel, 68 per cent were biased towards the political and a market-driven agenda (i.e. economic event and business activities and interests of the political and

106 Interview with Fahmidul Haq, Professor, University of Dhaka, 18 June 2014, Dhaka.
107 2010 Dallas Smythe Memorial Lecture, SFU School of Communication, Vancouver.
108 Interview with Jannatul Bakea Keka, Special Correspondent, Channel-i, 27 Nov 2013, Dhaka.
business elites); whereas only 16 per cent of assignments were related to the public good (i.e. non-profit and non-commercial activities and events) (Rahman, 2009).

This study identifies several impacts of market-orientation over broadcasting journalism in Bangladesh. These are: i) Depoliticization of public debate, ii) Market-orientation as self-censorship, iii) Legitimation of symbolic domination of advertiser, and iv) Silencing the voice of the counter-publics.

5.2.1. Depoliticization of Public Debates

Bangladesh has a similar history of wrestling with the perceived loss of control over cultural identity through deregulation of television that has been documented in many other Southeast Asian countries, particularly, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand where the emerging television industries impact the public sphere:

The many new television systems and cable systems that emerged because of privatization usually served as shopping malls, rather than public debate fora, and the tightening of control of media through ownership of fewer conglomerates often means less public accountability, fewer chances for people to participate in public discourse, and omission of vital news/information to protect parent corporations’ vested interest (Kitley, 2003, ‘Forward’ by John A. Lent).

There are examples, right next to Bangladesh, which demonstrate that opening the media sphere to the outside world and local corporate actors has had profound implications for public debate on television platforms in India. The proliferation of news channels rendered TV media to shift from a serious to more popular infotainment news agenda, driven by pressures to maximize profits (Thussu, 2007). A very similar process is now taking place in Bangladesh.¹⁰⁹ It is true that Bangladesh now has more platforms to broadcast news but a homogenous market-oriented media, no matter how vast in quantity, reproduces the dominant ideologies that serve the market and the politicians. The soundbite journalism, in which television journalists resort to proactive and reactive quotes from politicians depoliticizes political news. Excessive market-orientation indirectly encourages more news items but also reduces any scope for critical reporting due to their structural compliance with the advertisers and owners.

¹⁰⁹ Some content of this chapter appeared in my publication, Rahman, 2012a
Fahmidul Haq notes that market-orientation also involves control of national politics for the interest of the market as a whole. The market influences the politics through media and vice versa. It is possible when the political elites and the business elites do own media companies in collaboration or with support of each other. Television channels here are being born to gain currency from political power, and it is also beneficial for political goals of the business owners.\(^{110}\)

However, there is disagreement from media workers’ point of view. Zakaria Mukta, News Editor of Somoy Television believes that the influence of political parties on news production is often overstated by the public and media critics:

> It comes from our distrust in Bangladesh Television. Also, direct political affiliation with the ownership of a television makes the audience to assume this viewpoint. In practice, we have very little or no influence from the political parties to favor the news. We rather receive threats from both dominant parties for covering news that often goes against their interest. Political leaders get frequently angry at us for our critical coverage of their political actions and speeches.\(^{111}\)

Being a journalist himself for a long time, Somoy News Director Tushar Abdullah, while he sees market pressure as a powerful force, he doesn’t believe that the politicians and advertisers are the reason to why there is no investigative reporting in television. He thinks television as a medium itself is incapable to accommodate investigative reporting, “Television doesn’t have any time for investigative reporting. Reporting here is a time bound and footage based,” asserts Abdullah.\(^{112}\) Perhaps, this is precisely how market-orientation of television works. It blinds journalists from realizing from its analytical potential and indoctrinates with self-censorship to stay in favor of the market ideals.

The market-orientation of news production have not only resulted in an omission of investigative reporting but also has turned television into a complex commercial propaganda machine. The next section shows that TV channels do try to compensate the lack of investigative reporting with staging public debates via talk show programs. However, it also operates under the logic of politics and provides further avenue for commodification.

\(^{110}\) Interview with Fahmidul Haq, Professor, University of Dhaka, 18 June 2014, Dhaka.

\(^{111}\) Zakaria Mukta, News Editor, Somoy Television, 30 Dec 2013, Dhaka.

\(^{112}\) Interview with Tushar Abdullah, Director, Somoy Television, 17 June 2014, Dhaka.
5.2.2. Market-Orientation as Self-Censorship

One of the key findings of this study is that moving away from dictatorship towards a liberal democratic form of political rule does not necessarily constitute democratic media system in which journalists are able to represent the multitude of voices of the marginalized and oppressed groups of the society. The commercialization of media poses a similar, to some extent severer, threat to journalistic practices as that is sanctioned by the authoritarian regimes, thus destroying the spaces of the television-mediated public spheres. In Fahmidul Haq’s assessment, the market-orientation of television industry is replacing dictatorial control through dual vulnerabilities, one is fear of suspension, and another is fierce competition on a small market, all resulting in an “obligatory subjugation to politico-commercial nexus.”\textsuperscript{113} Without any pretense to hide this, Tushar Abdullah, the Director of Somoy News, states bluntly, “The pressure of the market causes constant struggle for us. It has already replaced the past dictatorial pressure on media. Market is now, in fact, more powerful than political pressure.”\textsuperscript{114}

There is a debate on whether corporate branding is an absolute necessity or a conscious choice of the owners and newsroom gatekeepers. The key justification in its favors that corporate branding and similar tools to commercialize television programs is an inevitable necessity for survival, “We may disagree to give space and time for corporate branding during news program, however, we cannot escape it. No amount of selling news is acceptable to us but we’re helpless. The profit from corporate branding helps directly to pay our salary.”\textsuperscript{115} Whereas for Tushar Abdullah, corporate branding is not an issue of survival as many channel owners would argue, “but a matter of house policy.” Tushar Abdullah, demotes the power of corporate branding over branding of his news, “Despite the domination of advertising Somoy Television does not sell news slots. It is not Walton or Chu Chu Diaper News, it is Somoy News,” notes Abdullah. He also claims that his channel is willing to sacrifice a prime-time advertiser due to conflict of interest, “We were recently covering report against ASIAN real estate, and decided to not take advertisement from them anymore.”\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{113} Interview with Fahmidul Haq, Professor, University of Dhaka, 18 June 2014, Dhaka.
\textsuperscript{114} Interview with Tushar Abdullah, Director, Somoy Television, 17 June 2014, Dhaka.
\textsuperscript{115} Interview with Mir Masrur Zaman, News Editor, Channel-i, 9 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
\textsuperscript{116} Interview with Tushar Abdullah, Director, Somoy Television, 17 June 2014, Dhaka.
Regardless whether corporate branding is a necessity or choice, it compromises the autonomy of television structurally to the core of its institutional value as it promotes creation of surplus value through excessive commodification on the one hand, while allows exploitation of entry-level news workers on the other. The salary that comes from commercializing news, serves as a silencing mechanism to make sure that there is no effective resistance from inside against the sales and marketing officials of the channel who constantly send instructions to cover events of corporate brander to newsroom. “It is not a request, it is an order,” argues Ebne Hasan Khan, “The newsroom must comply.”

Consequently, given that the media owners are now a stakeholder of broadcast policymaking (Chapter 6), they make it sure that there are no restrictive measures to limit advertising in television:

In the draft policy, the government suggested that we should not be allowed to air advertising more than 20 per cent of the total program. Our calculation is that even with 30 per cent advertising most of the channels would not be able to survive, within the existing market of advertising.

The interview of journalists from several channels attests that there are direct and indirect ways advertisers and corporate branders interferes with news production.

**Direct Interference of Advertisers**

**Control Through Finance**

For instance, a reporter at *ETV* mentions,

On various occasions advertisers put indirect and direct pressures on us. An example is that *ETV* once aired a corruption report on Pran-RFL company products. We thought RFL will not advertise at *ETV* anymore. But surprisingly, they increased frequency of their ads with more money. There was no more report against RFL. Another example is that *ETV* became aware of a loan-scandal of a major bank recently, but there was no news about it because the bank was a brander of a news slot of *ETV*.

Market-orientation in this case doesn’t only mean inventing news in favor of the market but it also means hiding news that may go against the market. In the long run such practice promotes consumerism as the highest democratic ideal rather than critical

---

117 Interview with Ebne Hasan Khan, Director, Sales & Marketing, *Channel-i*, 9 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
118 Interview with Shykh Seraj, Director & Head of News, *Channel-i*, 7 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
119 Interview with an anonymous Staff Reporter, *ETV*, 25 Nov 2013, Dhaka.
engagement through public debate. Market here effectively replaces state’s control, and even becomes a house policy. “Market control? There is nothing to control. It is the house policy”\textsuperscript{120}. A reporter who requested to keep him anonymous, made it clear altogether. The reporter informs, “we are continuously aware of illegal land grabbing of the Bashundhara Group, but you will not see any reporting against it, because it is the unwritten house policy.” Notably, Bashundhara Group is one of the largest industrial conglomerates of Bangladesh with multimillion dollar investment across an array of commercial and industrial enterprises, including real estate (Bashundhara), cement factories (Meghna Cement), paper mills, LP Gas bottling and distribution networks, still and engineering manufacturing factories and complexes, food and beverage industries, shipping and logistics, telecommunications and media networks (East West Media Group), and so on.

“Nobody dares to go against Bashundhara,” notes the reporter, “unless you have an equally or more powerful conglomerate to back you up.” He gives another example of self-censorship on a corporate issue: Robi, the second largest cellphone operator in Bangladesh, owned by Robi-Axiata Ltd, a multinational venture of Malaysian company Axiata (68.7 % share), Indian company Airtel (25 % share), and NTT DOCOMO of Japan (6.3 % share). He informs us that a few days ago Robi faced a strong labor unrest by its call center worker, the TV channel killed the news, which means the event was covered by a report but not aired. Although there was no contract of corporate branding with Robi at that time, it was a premium advertiser of Somoy Television at the time of interviewing\textsuperscript{121}.

**Control Through Ownership Share**

Similar concern was expressed in another case study, in Channel i. When I asked about how do the market impacts on news production, this was the answer of a senior female journalist:

I have been working for Channel i for ten years. In this long time, I’ve learned which event can be news and which one cannot, and which news will be aired, and which one will be rejected. For example, recently there was an unjust price hike of all medicines in Dhaka. As the reporter of Health Beat I knew that many poor people will be suffering for this price-hike. From

\textsuperscript{120} Interview with an anonymous Reporter, Somoy Television, 17 June 2014, Dhaka.

\textsuperscript{121} Interview with an anonymous Reporter, Somoy Television, 17 June 2014, Dhaka.
my experience, I knew that only a few pharmaceutical companies syndicated and orchestrated this price-hike. Yet, I was reluctant to make an investigative report on this event. I even didn’t try to pitch the idea to my superior as I knew that this news will never make it to the rundown, it’s simply because a significant portion of the share of Channel-i is owned by the company who also owns a major pharmaceutical company [Incepta] responsible for the increase of the medicine price.122

In sum, through advertising in various television channels, and by directly owning ownership share with Impress Group, Incepta Pharmaceuticals is assured that there will be no trouble from the channels that receive Incepta advertisement, at least not from Channel i. It is because the mechanism of self-censorship has been installed, and then constantly enforced by the prudent gatekeepers through routine meetings and monitoring. Chapter 3 (section 3.9.2) exemplified that owning a TV channel like Somoy News gives Citi Group an immunity from any kind of possible investigations against its business practices. It’s a direct privilege that several other conglomerate owners of television channels enjoy (see Table 3.4. Conglomerate ownership of television in Bangladesh). All these examples indicate that the ownership of television, advertisers, and the practice of self-censorship by journalists are interlocked in a mutual interest of financialization and commodification that were unseen in the authoritarian era.

**Indirect Ways of Interference: Through Newsroom Gatekeeping**

Another way market-forces interferes with news production is through newsroom gatekeeping. Shykh Seraj walked me through everyday gatekeeping in Channel i:

News is produced in a highly monitored and controlled environment. We frequently meet to make sure that formal and informal house rules are maintained. The News Editor and Deputy News Editor the news staff on daily basis. The Assignment Editor and Planning Editor meets the News Editor and Deputy News Editor on weekly basis and on special occasions, and the Heads of all sections, such as, News, Programs, and Marketing, meet monthly. I, as the Head of News, personally visit the newsroom and editing panels daily, almost in every couple of hours. Over a period of constant monitoring and mentoring a journalist grows a form of self-judgment of what can be aired and what not, even in our absence.123

This statement inadvertently proves the point of self-censorship mentioned previously by Jannatul Keka. Some journalists suggest that the influence of market is not

---

122 Interview with Jannatul Bakea Keka, Special Correspondent, Channel-i, 27 Nov 2013, Dhaka.
123 Interview with Shykh Seraj, Director & Head of News, Channel-i, 7 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
direct but rather indirect, which allows news producers to even resist corporate branding. “The impact of market on newsroom is inevitable. The market doesn’t only impact the selection of and treatment of news but also its format, presentation, and expression of news. However, the requests of advertisers make a little impact to weaken the power of the newsroom.” 124 Zakaria Mukta, News Editor of Somoy Television claims, “We did not take any advertising from Grameen Phone in last six months (June – Dec 2013). It is simply because Grameen Phone tried to dominate the rate of advertising by offering us a low rate, which we didn’t agree.” There is often a positive spin on self-censorship as maintaining the standard of news, which is similar to inhouse content regulation policy:

We do not have any written guideline or rules. But there are some unwritten house policies that we strictly follow. This is what means self-censorship to us. Such as, blurring pictures of dead or burnt bodies or any kind of graphic image, a trend which we have introduced first in this country, and later other channels have adopted it. We also avoid personal attack or insinuation. We follow no partisanship, show no strong opposition.125

This is where the ideal from of market-orientation of journalism pays off as it demands more efficiency and professionalism in journalism that the proponents of market-orientation such as Randal Beam (1998) hypothesize.

5.2.3. Advertisers as News, News as Advertising

Advertisers continuously influence journalists to cover advertising in the camouflage of news (see Screenshots 5.9 and 5.10). “We often receive “requests” to cover news, such as product launch, from friends and professional networks.”126 The News Editor of Channel i acknowledges that corporate brander has become an unavoidable source in the news selection, while it might not be newsworthy at all:

It may require us to give some minor coverage that usually go at the bottom rank of news treatment, but it cannot dictate the top of the run down. For example, if a corporate brander bank comes with a request to cover their service, we may cover it without stating the name of the bank directly, and after the second break.127

124 Zakaria Mukta, News Editor, Somoy Television, 30 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
125 Interview with Shykh Seraj, Director & Head of News, Channel-i, 7 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
127 Interview with Mir Masrur Zaman, News Editor, Channel-i, 9 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
A simple study of daily reporting assignment schedules would reveal evidence of direct gatekeeping within the pre-production, selection and treatment of news in favor of the market and political elites. For example, if there is a product launch by a high-profile advertiser, the reporting assignment schedule in NTV has boldly marked the event as “must be covered” and a cameraman will be sent to collect the video “footage” to supplement the advertiser’s press release (Rahman, 2009, p. 14-15). Channel i follows similar sourcing and gatekeeping in pre-selecting the advertiser’s events as news. A collection of small sample of assignment schedules show that in between December 7 and December 14, 2013, Channel i instructed 20 event items for the 10.30 PM prime time news which serve as advertisements in the camouflage of news (Table 4.6).

Table 5.6. Examples of Advertisements Camouflaged as News in Channel i Assignment Schedule 10.30 PM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Branded News Slot/Segment</th>
<th>News Item and Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec 7, 2013</td>
<td>EXIM Bank Business News</td>
<td>Chittagong Bank Meeting (supply footage and CG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 8, 2013</td>
<td>Standard Bank Economic News</td>
<td>Standard Group and Central Bank (footage and CG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 9, 2013</td>
<td>Standard Bank Economic News</td>
<td>REHAB* Press Conference (footage and CG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 9, 2013</td>
<td>S.I.B.L.** Special News</td>
<td>Army-Robi-Channel i (CG and Reporter’s name) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 10, 2013</td>
<td>After second break</td>
<td>Reckitt Benckiser**** Award Ceremony (footage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 10, 2013</td>
<td>Grameen Phone Sports News</td>
<td>Coca cola-World Cup Trophy (footage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 13, 2013</td>
<td>EXIM Bank Business News</td>
<td>Volkswagen sales record (footage and CG)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Assignment Schedule, Channel i Newsroom, Dhaka.
Note: CG refers to Character Generator a screen graphics technology to present names and designs.
* REHAB means Real Estate & Housing Association of Bangladesh.
** S.I. B. L means Social Islami Bank Limited, a local bank in Bangladesh
*** Robi the second largest cellphone operator in Bangladesh, owned by Robi-Axiata Ltd, a multinational venture of Malaysian company Axiata, Indian company Airtel, and NTT DOCOMO of Japan.
**** Reckitt Benckiser (Bangladesh) is a multinational consumer goods producer headquartered in the UK

Table 5.6 displays how the news production in Channel i is pre-guided with prominent local and transnational advertisers. It looks all natural when the “news” of an advertiser (e.g.) when it is presented inside a branded news slot. It’s all synchronized in a rhythm when the sales story of Volkswagen is narrated by EXIM Bank Business News, as if a trans-ideological storytelling working in a harmony. Indeed, corporate branders news-advertisements are cousins and sometime even clones, living happily ever under the functional family of media owners and business enterprises. For example, Standard Bank Economic News presents the meeting of Standard Group (Dec 8, 2013), or even better, when the “Social Islami Bank Limited Special News” segment (Screenshot 5.8) presents Social Islami Bank Business Review Meeting as the “special news” (Screenshot 5.9), see evidence here, note the timeline:
Screenshot 5.8. Example of News Slot Branding: Social Islami Bank Special News in Channel i

Screenshot 5.9. Example of a Brander Becoming a News in Channel i: Social Islami Bank Business Review Meeting
If the first layer of commodification turns commercial events into economic news, the second layer of impact on news production is that it also encourages editors to filter the selection and production of news in favor of the market elites allowing commercial ideology to appear as political (for example, Screenshot 5.10 shows how a cell phone company with foreign ownership commodified the National Liberation War Victory Day of Bangladesh. With many trends like this, Bangladesh has made a significant progress towards what Yuezhi Zhao describes, a ‘propagandist-commercial model of journalism’ in China (Zhao, 1998, p. 151).

Screenshot 5.10. Example of Commodified Nationalism as News in ATN Bangla
Note: Robi [a major cellphone company] organized a human flag campaign in celebration of National Liberation War Victory Day, and to beat Pakistan’s world record. All major TV channels including ATN Bangla who receive ads from Robi followed up this event with extensive coverage [Aired on Jan 11, 2014, 10.23 PM, Dhaka. Accessed using a TV screen capturing device]

Such commodification makes the exercise of bribing for covering news as an acceptable but best kept secret practice for many journalists. Journalists directly benefits from commodification of news as advertisers gains more access to audience. A reporter at Somoy News who requested to remain anonymous revealed that several mid-levels to high profile reporters in Somoy News, NTV, RTV, and Ekushey TV use investigative reporting as a threat to extort the corporations with dubious and fraudulent activities. The corporations, in return find bribing as a better method to kill a possible corruption report given that the formal way to do it (advertising) would be more expensive.
5.2.4. Legitimation of Symbolic Dominance of Advertisers

In the era of market liberal hegemony and state- and corporate-driven globalization, all fields have become more subject to direct determination by the economic field, and more specifically the untrammeled logic of capital accumulation. But journalism/mass media are especially vulnerable, because they are so heavily integrated into processes of generating political and economic capital. (Hackett & Carroll, 2006, p. 35)

Following the statement of Hackett and Carroll, the subfield of television\(^{128}\) in Bangladesh, can be considered as a particular site where an acute competition for political, economic and especially symbolic capital takes place. The market-orientation of television not only projects an economic control but also glows a cultural politics that signifies the ideological hegemony of consumerism. In many case the logo of the corporate brander or sponsor appears bigger than the logo of host television channel itself (Screenshot 5.11). Showing (or announcing or both) the logo at the beginning of news bestows a pre-arrival legitimation for the advert to show up during the news break.

**Screenshot 5.11. Example of Multi-sponsor News Slot Branding: Trust Bank DLF IPL News in Channel i**

Note: In this branding, the logo and the symbol of the corporate brander appear as larger than the logo of the television (Channel i). [Airing date and access information not available.]

\(^{128}\) French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu situates television as a subfield of the journalistic field. As a powerful “mediator among all fields”, journalism lies within the interlocking of power (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 6, and Johnson & Bourdieu, 1993, p. 15). In analytical terms, a field is defined as a “network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 96-97). The journalistic field is characterized by a high degree of heteronomy, and thus it is a very weakly autonomous field (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 5). This view is applicable in the case of Bangladeshi TV channels as explained by media scholar like Shafiul Alam Bhuiyan (2012b).
In many cases, an upbeat and culturally infused melodious stings/musical tune accompanies the presentation of a corporate branded logo that surrounds the acoustic of television listeners. Thus, the whole period of 40-50 minutes of primetime news becomes a subtle audio-visual continuum of embedding advertiser’s symbolic and representational dominance over the journalistic field with or without a conscious collective consent of the journalists. Such marketization practice is a global movement “that lies at the heart of cultural capitalism… and media systems have been in the vanguard of marketization” (Murdock & Wasco, 2007, p. 3). It’s also a part of the worldwide tendency of the economic field to override journalistic autonomy which makes the unethical attempts of selling the news to the advertiser whether appear as the most desirable norm.

This commodification trends in television industry hinders the potential for a healthy public sphere to form by subjecting the democratic discourse of the public sphere to market forces. In liberal theoretical model, Habermas (1989) sees the commodification of news as the enemy of rational-critical debate in the public sphere. An independent public sphere should remain separated from state and market pressures, and should be devoted to debate and deliberation rather than buying and selling (Fraser, 1992, p. 110). However, news today occupies a marginal position in television due to the growth of the advertising industry, particularly during the primetime.

It is clear from the discussions in Chapter 4 and 5 that the reason there is almost no investigative report against the corruption of corporations in television news, it is because the television channels are afraid of losing a premium advertiser. It is also because that many advertisers are interlocked with the business interest of the television owners. There is evidence that media often kill the news if it goes against their major advertisers/sponsors and owner’s joint interests. Some journalists admit that hiding the corruption and maleficence of mobile operators and real estate agencies has become pervasive among both print and electronic media. Media are interested in investigative reporting mostly if it helps to take down their opponents. Thus, a market-oriented journalism is deepening in Bangladesh that promotes consumerism as the highest democratic ideal rather than critical engagement through public debate. The popular newspapers of Bangladesh follow the same route. Nevertheless, some elements of investigative reporting are visible in newspapers. (Rahman, 2012a, p. 86)
5.2.5. Talk Show: Making Any Difference?

In parallel to the growth of political news, there is an increase of political talk shows in the TV channels in past ten years. From a Western point of view Wessler and Schultz (2009, p. 15) argue that the political talk show has the potential to become an important stage for public deliberation that transforms “social and political conflicts into argumentative debates.” Such an aspiration does not fit the political reality of Bangladesh. The selection of guests in the Bangladeshi talk shows is dictated by the logic of the political power (rank, affiliation, prestige) rather than the media logic (newsworthiness, balance). With few exceptions, talk shows serve to renew discourses of dominant political parties rather than offer alternative or counter discourses.

The format of the talk shows limits its potential to facilitate a democratic public sphere in two ways; firstly, they are mostly limited to male viewers, and secondly, they are not openly accessible to all citizens. Professor Gitiara Nasreen, a prominent critical scholar puts this in economic and gendered contexts:

Talk shows has its own economy. TV channels are constantly finding cheap ways to produce programs to fill the time slots. Talk show offers low production cost, easy availability of participants, and relatively low time and expertise to organize it. Besides, the airing time of talk show (mostly late night) limits participation. It is a television genre mostly participated by males and aimed at urban male viewers. Television talk shows is not compatible with the idea of public sphere. Apart from some random presence of elite aboriginal leaders, counter-public sphere is nil in television talk-show. In fact, the very concept of public sphere would not have existed in early Europe if Habermas would have been a female. Because she would not be a participant.129

The talk shows also reflect the division and publicity of mainstream party politics, which is primarily dominated by two parties, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Awami League (AL). As of January 2014 there are 51 television talk shows being aired on various television channels. The most popular talk shows such as Ajker Bangladesh (Independent TV), Ekattor Journal (Ektattor TV), TritioMatra (Channel i), Our Democracy (RTV), and Sompadokiyo (Somoy TV) primarily reflect the agenda of dominant political parties. The ruling party often provides verbal directives to keep the tone down.130

129 Interview with Gitiara Nasreen, Professor, University of Dhaka, October 30, 2013
130 Interview with Tushar Abdullah, Director, Somoy Television, 17 June 2014, Dhaka
There are some common deficiencies of television talk shows in Bangladesh that underscores the limit of talk show in contributing to the visibility of public debate, such as lack of diversity in guest selection, lack of preparation, and lack of adequate avenues for public engagement. Sourav Panday, a Producer of news and talk show at Maasranga (television channel owned by Square conglomerate) provides a context of how guest selection works in a generic talk show:

A producer usually has a list of talk show guests with three grades, such as Grade A, Grade B, and Grade C. We first try to invite guests from grade A. The guests often get 24-hour notice, depending on the topic and availability of the guests. Sometimes a selected guest gets no time to prepare at all due to attending multiple talk shows. In most cases, we invite guests who are politically prominent and elite member of the civil society.131

In fact, the guests barely get any time to prepare or to do research for the talk show. In many cases the producers invite listed participants by telephoning them in the morning to attend a talk show in the evening or at mid-night.132 With some exceptions, the A and B lists of guests exclude intellectuals from oppositional ideology (such as leftists and political minorities). Only few voices being heard from one channel to another. Sometime, a high-profile guest attends one talk show in one television channel in the evening, and then rushes to another television channel for another talk show.

Grassroots hardly get a chance to participate in the popular talk shows. Except ‘Songlap’, an open dialogue show arranged by BBC Media in Action in collaboration with Channel i, no talk shows directly invite ordinary public as a guest. In some cases, such as the moderator of “Bangladesh Protidin [everyday]” talk show by Independent Television picks questions from audience messages and Facebook discussions by the followers of Bangladesh Protidin program.133 They are allowed to comment and ask question by telephone call and messages (Screenshot 5.12). However, such passive participation requires audience to fulfill a precondition to watch advertisements in the show. This opens up opportunities for further commodification of television audience and television content which is the primary reason why there are so many talk shows.

131 Interview with Sourav Panday, Producer, News, Maasranga Television, 21 November 2013
132 Interview with Gitiara Nasreen, Professor, University of Dhaka, October 30, 2013
133 Interview with Khaled Muhiuddin, Executive Editor & Head of News, Independent Television, 7 Jan 2014, Dhaka
Screen shot 5.12. Example of a Commodified Talk Show with Audience Engagement in Somoy News

Note: This talk show in Somoy News is sponsored by Milk-Vita (repeat broadcast). Audience are invited to send their comments by text message, but first they have to watch the L-shaped advertisement of Milk-Vita, which appears to be larger than the speaker. Also, there is another Milk-Vita advertisement in the projector behind the stage. In addition to these, a small scroller brander appears on with a variety of brands (e.g. Walton). [Aired on Oct 9, 2017, 9:25 AM, Dhaka time, Retrieved from http://www.somoynews.tv/pages/live]

Screen shot 5.13. Grameen Phone Tritiyo Matra: A Branded Talk Show

Note: Grameen Phone Tritio Matra website, a signature program of Channel i, broadcasting new episode each week, aired four times a week.
**Channel i Tritio Matra** [third dimension] talk show can be extended as a case to reflect on all these observations. The broader goal of this talk show, as stated in its mission, is to “strengthen democratic processes”. “To ensure transparency and accountability among politicians and policymakers.” For a brief period, when there was no oppositional party in the parliament, the goal was “to supplement the debates in the parliament in absence of an oppositional party in the parliament.” Its host, Zillur Rahman claims that Tritio Matra is the longest running TV talk show in Asia, with highest number of episodes aired in 11 years, 3807 episodes (as of Jan 7, 2014), and it is one of the 7 longest running talk shows in the world.  


Tritio Matra so far engaged thousands of guests and hundreds of diverse topics. Subject matter determines who are relevant guests from various fractions of opinion. It is often decided on “those who matters” basis. Subjects are determined by “current affairs and events”. There are no specific criteria to select guests or topic, and there is no research team or logistics. It the host, who singlehandedly decides and contacts the

---

134 Starting from July 2003, as of 2017 July Tritio Matra has produced 5000 episodes. Source: Retrieved from Tritio Matra official Website http://www.tritiyomatra.com/, accessed July 15, 2017
potential guests. “We have resource constraints,” notes Zillur Rahman. There is usually no follow-up on the provided information by the guest, and no immediate verification or cross-check of data for accuracy. They depend on the guest of the counter-opinion to keep the speaker in check. Guests are not informed about the questions in advance, no research-preparation is requested other than to be aware of the discussion topic. There was gender consideration for selecting guests. Out of 3800 episodes, 435 episodes (only 12 per cent) had at least one female guest in their talk show.¹³⁵

Grameen Phone, a leading mobile phone company branded the talk show for many years (Screenshot 5.13). As brander did Grameen Phone ever attempt to influence content of the talk show, I asked. Zillur Rahman answered, “We never face any pressure or restriction from Grameen Phone.” According to him Grameen Phone was never a consideration for topic selection or guest selection. But interestingly, there is no single episode dedicated to debate cell phone issues. I asked about whether there was any debate or discussion on Grameen Phone’s tax-evasion investigation by the government. “I didn’t find it as important issue in that time,” responded Zillur Rahman.

While Zillur Rahman claims that Tritio Matra contributed to increase the exposure of political discussion among ordinary people, there is no systemic study of its impact on public discussion, and no way to quantify public reaction other than by looking at its Facebook and Youtube comments. The ordinary people have no direct participation in Tritio Matra, except only 7 or 8 episodes which took place in open stage with public audience.¹³⁶

In sum, hyper-commodified talk shows in Bangladesh barely have any impact on political dialogue other than to signify a colossal publicity of many members of the civil society. It follows the same logic of market-orientation that the news production does, such as minimizing cost production while maximizing profit for the channel. Most alarmingly, despite its apparent popularity talk shows extend another avenue for depoliticizing investigations against sponsor corporations, thus contributing to the broader culture of self-censorship.

¹³⁵ Interview with Zillur Rahman, Talk Show Host, Channel i, 7 Jan 2014, Dhaka
¹³６ Interview with Zillur Rahman, Talk Show Host, Channel i, 7 Jan 2014, Dhaka
5.2.6. Silencing the Voice of the Counterpublics?

With the global growth of the middle class, television industry in Bangladesh is so deeply obsessed with the singular public sphere of middle-class that it has become fundamentally incompatible with the notion of *counterpublics* as defined by Nancy Fraser (1992) (Chapter 1). One example of such incompatibility is its comparative silence on the disappearance of the jute mills industry and the issue of garments exploitation. Since 1980s, poor peasants were allured to industrialization. However, along with the demolition of state-owned jute industries - as demanded by the World Bank and the IMF, the potential of agricultural labor has been systematically diverted to private ready-made-garment sector in collaboration of government, politicians, garment owners and supranational agencies, which was/is ideologically backed by organic intellectuals of neoliberal economics – rendering the whole export-based economy to an unsustainable shortcut for development – and ultimately a death trap for the factory workers. Vijay Prashad rightly noted that “Made in Bangladesh” has now turned into a symbol of the “Terror of Capitalism”, more specifically... of neoliberal globalization... “a system that produces pockets of low-wage economies in the south in order to feed a system of debt-fueled consumption in the north” (Prashad, 2013, April 28). While there was a good amount of coverage of the collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013 and follow up reporting on the safety issue of the garments factories, the exploitative nature of the garments industry was largely absent in TV media. This absence is further naturalized and neutralized by advertisement of the garment industries which is often interlocked with television ownership (e.g the owner of *ATN Bangla* and *ATN News* also owns garment factories).

Another failure of television journalism is lack of diversity of voices due to various forms of biases, such as class-bias, urban-bias, as well as pro-market ideological bias. With the rapid growth of urban-centric middle-and-affluent classes population in the country, and with increasing market-orientation, commercial television channels are leaning more towards news and entertainment programs that primarily cater to urban “middle and affluent consumers”.137 Local and transnational advertisers are increasingly interested in penetrating the rural and suburban consumer markets, but the base of target-consumers for advertisements in private television channels remain predominantly

---

137 A 2015 report states that 7 per cent of the population (roughly 11 million) constitutes the “middle and affluent consumers” with an average annual income of US$5,000 (Hashim, 2015). This number is expected to grow rapidly in next ten years with a steady growth of GDP.
urban. The proliferation of television channels does not guarantee a substantially greater diversity of content that can represent any multi-ethnic (Husband, 1996) and subalternpublics (Fraser, 1992). Due to its structural subordination to the political and economic elites, the television journalism in Bangladesh does not possess a universal scope that can accommodate alternative voices. Unfortunately, private TV channels pay rare attention to aboriginal ethnicities and religious minorities, such as Hindus. The religion Islam works as a by-default-political-determinant for the TV channels as their majority target audience is Muslim. Since the TV channels show symbolic favor to pro-market neo-liberal ideologies, they give extensive coverage to the dominant political parties and conform ideologically to the dominant social norm and patriarchal values—all together it leaves a very small window for the subaltern and counter-cultural groups (such as working class, anti-globalization leftists, anarchist, feminists, and homosexuals) to form movements and thus become strong publics. Except for a few cases (e.g. Screenshot 7.2), the issues of class struggle, industrial pollution, and leftist movements against state-and-corporate capitalism are often invisible in television news.

Most importantly, while there a great deal of television drama focusing on the lives and cultures of the rural population, the news production network of the most television has remained comparatively urban-centric. While majority of the population in Bangladesh (more than 70 per cent) live in rural areas, crossing the thousand signposts of urban beats, it becomes very difficult for the news editors to put equal attention to the treatment on the rural reports that comes from district correspondents. No matter how many reports pass the reception gate of television channel in Dhaka, only few of them qualify to enter the primetime news coverage.

What makes journalists further internalize urban-centered definition of news value is the lack of strong financial and technical supports. There is no wage board for TV journalists in Bangladesh that can erase the discrimination of salary between the urban and the rural correspondents. Except for the few of the first-tier channels, television workers are not well paid. Most of the second and third tier channels are not technically well equipped, do not have sufficient manpower, and the majority of their journalists are not well trained. These limitations keep their in-depth reporting area limited to metropolitan beats. Aside few exceptions (for example, Screenshot 7.3) most of the rural population and their problems or potentials have become a less important news agenda to pursue. Rural journalism is virtually absent in television media.
5.2.7. Rating as a Fake Commodity?

One indirect impact of market-orientation of television is the rise of a very feeble and controversial rating industry. SIRIUS Marketing and Social Research Ltd (aka MRB Bangladesh) calculates and publishes the only Television Rating Point (TRP) weekly.

![Sample Television Rating Point May 2016](image)

**Figure 5.2. Sample Television Rating Point May 2016**  
Source: Banglanewslive.com, May 7, 2016. Genuinely of this source could not be authenticated by a secondary data.

While advertisers value TRP document as the only authentic source and many TV channels are often willing to pay to see themselves in higher ranking, Tushar Abdullah is frustrated with TRP, “TRP in Bangladesh is bogus. The number of boxes, which is only 120 of them, is ludicrously small comparing to the size of television viewers.” Even *Channel i*, which appears to score top position in the ranking (Figure 5.2), its Director is not so sure about the authenticity of the ranking, “We do not have the DG boxes in enough number of houses to claim TRP as a valid indicator of popularity or program rating.” There is also allegation that cable operators frequently misuse their power to rank the television channels. Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, the Head of News at Boishakhi Television puts the rating of SIRIUS to rest:

SIRIUS rating is faulty. First, it is depended on only few meters in urban and suburban households. Second, it counts the popularity of the TV channels that airs a lot of cinema during day time. Third, there is no way to verify the accuracy of the numbers provided by SIRIUS. Advertisers

---

138 Interview with Tushar Abdullah, Director, *Somoy Television*, 17 June 2014, Dhaka.
139 Interview with Shykh Seraj, Director & Head of News, *Channel-i*, 7 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
depends on it because there is no other alternative rating technology or agency.\textsuperscript{140}

The key point here is that although the television industry in Bangladesh embraces market-oriented logic for news production, there is no invisible hand of market that can fix its lack of professional standards. As Chapter 4 indicates, the market of the industry is unrealistically dependent on a network of political affiliations and informal economy, which makes the business of the television industry often unmeasurable in quantitative terms, i.e. ratings or ranking. The idea of \textit{rating as a commodity} (Meehan, 1984), thus may not fully apply to the developing market where it is deeply politicized. Standard market logic does not function here properly, although the marketing executives of the television channels might claim otherwise.

5.2.8. Perceived Loss of Credibility

The final impact I want to bring to discussion is the question of credibility. Can news be perceived as credible if it is market-oriented? Market-oriented journalism is partly responsible for the loss of media credibility among the audience. There is evidence that gradual privatization and deregulation in India (Rao & Johal, 2006) and Nepal (Adhikari, 2005) have resulted in increased entertainment-driven rather than public-oriented news but decreased the perceived credibility. In Bangladesh, the increasingly market-orientation of TV news results in a loss of credibility among the audience especially in their perceived loss of independence and objectivity (Andaleeb & Rahman, 2014).\textsuperscript{141} 61 per cent of the respondents (with scores of 1, 2, and 3 on the 7-point scales) seem to believe that TV news is not free from the influence of the channels' owners, which supports the critique of MOJ by McManus (1994) and McChesney (2004). A similar percentage of people felt that TV news is not free from political bias. Respondents were aware of TV channel owners’ political and corporate affiliations;

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{140} Interview with Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Head of News, \textit{Boishakhhi Television}, and Member of \textit{National Broadcast Policy 2014} Committee, 8 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Independence of TV news was defined as a TV channel’s freedom from influence of various stakeholders and was operationalized as the channel producing news free from political bias, from owners’ influence, from the interest of its shareholders/partners, and having reporters who are not politically motivated. Independence of TV news was measured using four scale items: owner’s influence, interest of shareholders, political bias, and reporters’ political views. These measures had mean scores of 3.03, 3.31, 3.06, and 3.49, respectively, which reflect that TV news is not perceived as independent.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
consequently, they appeared to believe this affiliation might lead to the news being politically biased. The audience provided low ratings for the ‘independence’ factor. This suggests that market orientation of TV news is likely to be high, attenuating credibility; in other words, political and corporate influence, as well as owners’ actions may be undercutting the independence of TV news such that market orientation is not sacrificed to safeguard political and/or commercial interests.

5.2.9. Chapter Conclusion

The key findings of this chapter suggest that the domination of political and economic elites over the television industry makes the various fragments of public spheres invisible, instead it presents news as a homogenous, urban-centric, and commodified television program. Historically, since its origin, television journalism’s position within journalism as a whole has never been completely unproblematic, as it possesses an “essential tension” (Dahlgren, 1995, p. 48). From the previous discussions it becomes clear that the arrival of private channels contributed to the growth of the tensions by increasing urbanization of information and championing commodification of news broadcasting. It also signifies a tension between normative expectation of public sphere in a liberal democracy and the political reality of the state of television journalism in Bangladesh which is predisposed with class-inequalities and urban-rural divides. Compared to print media, the new television channels could have become an extended platform of public debate for the illiterate population. However, on the contrary, the state of public deliberation produced by the commercial television channels appears to be fundamentally incompatible with the idea of counterpublics.

The reason can be summarized as follows: first, the private television channels foster unequal participation by producing chiefly market-oriented and urban-centric discourse; second, TV channels provide sound bite jumbling of political figures to grab the attention of citizens; however, their non-radical nature of political news analysis depoliticizes the political awareness of the public; third, commercialization of television news poses severe threat for the independence of journalism from commercial pressures as the journalists cannot go against their advertisers, thus the ideological basis of news selection and production remains mainly commercially-biased instead of public service oriented; fourth, frequent closure of TV channels and a culture of suppression make journalists conform to self-censorship; fifth, the newsroom of the TV
channels are male dominated, and the news production processes are structurally unsympathetic to the subaltern counterpublics. While these findings are mostly observational, they serve as an invitation to engage further debates and to pursue broader empirical examinations. It does not mean that news makes up the whole of public sphere; however, following the above-mentioned trajectories, if private television ever succeeds to build any social space that may look like a public sphere, no mistake, it would be a hegemonic consumer-class-sphere in the fabric of a public sphere, it would be very far from universal in scope, and it would be an extended site for constructing consent for the dual hegemony of the state and market authoritarianism. From this perspective, the limit of the private ventures in television industry must be recognized and the public alternatives must be explored.

However, it is important to recognize that the newsroom does not always agree with market-orientation. One must acknowledge that a large amount of “on request” news that are being rejected by the newsroom from airing on regular basis. In most of the cases, news editors combat with the marketing/advertising division of the channel to protect their own independence and space for their news as much as possible (Rahman, 2007a). This tug of war varies in every channel. A reductionist approach, in which all news as sellable commodity, cannot explain the internal disagreements and serious conflicts among the journalists in terms of treatment that the commercially or politically influenced news deserves. It might also fail to explain why two different TV channels under the same ownership may respond differently to an identical external pressure (e.g. ATN Bangla and ATN News).

Journalism is not always a game of competition; it is also about collaboration. To a large extent, for example, the routines of journalism allow easy cooperation among the journalists (Hallin, 2005, p. 135). Albeit small, the expanding television journalism profession in Bangladesh creates a network for collaboration among the journalists as well, which goes beyond -and even against -the ideological or political differences of the owners of the television channels. During my field visit, I observed journalists from different television channels share camera footages, news sources, and information. Thus, journalism in Bangladesh, especially the television journalism, is comprised of journalistic struggle, inter-organizational competition and mutual collaboration at the same time, which are not always governed by a single variable of market-orientation.
Chapter 6. The Politics of Broadcast Policymaking and Prospects of Media Democratization

The television industry in Bangladesh is not democratic at all. It begins with the problem of licensing television channels at the will of the government in power. This reflects a bigger problem, the crisis of democracy in the national politics itself. The democracy of media is deeply intertwined with the state of democracy in the country. Despite the political situation, print media still able have some power to go beyond national politics and effect public opinions regardless who is power, but television channels have not reached that level yet. Having effective broadcast policies and industry guidelines in place will not make the industry fully democratic but they will at least improve our working conditions for the time being.\footnote{Interview with Tofael Ahmad, Senior Reporter, \textit{Maasranga Television}, Oct 29, 2017, by telephone.}

This chapter\footnote{Much of the content in this chapter previously appeared in "Rahman, A.; Reza, S. M. S.; & Haq, F. (2017). The politico-commercial nexus and the broadcast policy reform in Bangladesh. In S. Udupa & S. D. McDowell (Eds.), \textit{Media as politics in South Asia} (pp. 110-126). London: Routledge" Content reused with the editors’ permission.} argues that although the broadcast policymaking processes in Bangladesh has apparently become more inclusive and dynamic by allowing multiple stakeholders to participate, they remain top-down, class-biased and dominated by a politico-commercial nexus. The nexus refers to a complex relationship of mutually interdependent interests and interlocking networks between the political leaders, media owners and top tier commercial conglomerates indicates an intricate alliance between some political leaders and television owners (Chapter 4). To recap, Abdur Razzaque Khan (2013) argues that the majority of television owners in Bangladesh are businessmen-cum-politicians and politicians-cum-businessmen. He also argues that in absence of a comprehensive policy on how to license a TV channel, ruling parties tend to grant licenses to their political allies. They are able to do this only by violating rules and regulations, or even sometimes by bending existing policies. Khan (2013) shows that the affiliation of politicians and business owners in Bangladesh is enveloped by a strong and vivid system of crony capitalism. Only those who are very close to the chief of the ruling party or chief of the government are provided with private television licenses.

In this chapter, I go beyond this assertion and argue that the \textit{politico-commercial nexus} is not only influencing television channel licensing practices but also actively
taking part in policymaking processes to influence their outcome. Therefore, this chapter challenges the assumption that filling the policy vacuum alone will fix the media system problems that comes from its ownership structures. In order to avoid a policy-text centric analysis, I locate the broader political and social affiliations and biases of the policymakers, and argue that such policy formulation and reform measures have to be seen as a part of the broader movement of democratizing social inequalities inherent in capitalistic system, otherwise the policy will never achieve its goal. To make my point, I take the making of National Broadcasting Policy 2014 as a case study. I use the notion of media democratization as a broad theoretical anchor to problematize policy reform.

After several years of work, the government of Bangladesh released its National Broadcasting Policy in 2014. The policy was developed with participation of a range of stakeholders who have vested interest in the policy, but excluded the general public. Despite a growing debate and discontent surrounding the policy voiced by a multitude of informed publics, very recently, the government went ahead with forming a national committee for drafting a broadcasting law with structure and functions of a broadcast commission. In their analysis of media coverage, Haq and Reza (2017, forthcoming) find out that most of the mediated debate about the broadcast policy has been centered on the issues of freedom of expression. However, very few question or challenge the very processes of policymaking themselves: why and how the policy is made, by whom, and in the service of whose interests. The lack of direct public participation in policymaking is obscured by the overwhelming debate about communications policy content.

Drawing from contemporary participation practices in and through media around the world, Carpentier, Dahlgren, and Pasquali (2013) note that the concept of participation is one of the many societal fields, where a political struggle is waged between the minimalist and the maximalist variations of democracy. In the minimalist model, democracy is confined mainly to the processes of representation, participation to elite selection and the political to politics. In the maximalist model, democracy is seen as a more balanced combination of representation and participation, where attempts are made to maximize participation (Carpentier, Dahlgren, & Pasquali, 2013, p. 289). In a maximalist model participation is defined as indirect inclusion of public opinion as well as their direct input in communications policymaking processes. In this view, the term public refers to not a single entity but comprises multiple contending voices. The role of government should be to make all attempts to elicit active responses from the multiple
public groups in decision-making. Here the public is considered as a vital stakeholder along with others such as government bureaucrats, media owners, NGOs, and journalists who represent the delegation of power. Assessing such a web of actors necessitates a holistic approach to locate communications policymaking as a broader site of political struggles surrounding the inclusion and exclusion of the masses. Drawing from Hackett and Zhao’s (2005) notion of “media democratization,” this chapter also posits that public participation in policymaking processes is a crucial component for the broader goal of democratizing communications systems at national and global levels, and that the public have an active role in creating and sustaining movements for communications policy reforms, especially broadcast policy reform.

In order to establish these arguments, the next section offers a brief discussion on the role of policy-reform in media democratization and subsequently points out the areas of crises where policy-reform interventions are deemed crucial. I make reference to two key policy documents in the areas of television: 1) the *National Broadcasting Policy 2014*, and 2) the *Private Television Channel Establishment and Operation Policy 2012 (Draft)*. I explore the institutions and processes that are involved in making these policies. I particularly ask: What influences do political and commercial elites have on policy regimes? What role does the public play in policymaking? Are there any prospects of communications policy reform within the current regulatory structures? The chapter concludes by highlighting the importance for democratization of communications as a whole through a progressive social change movement while identifying some scopes for policy reform in the broadcast sector.

**6.1.1. Why Policy and Why Reform Policy?**

Policy is imperative for broadcasting, both in theory and in practice. This is because airwave frequencies are finite resources and are considered to be public goods requiring governance. Marc Raboy points out that “it is impossible to sustain the notion of broadcasting as a socio-cultural activity without providing for appropriate policy as well as regulatory control” (Raboy, 1994, p. 6). Abu Jafar Md. Shafiul Alam Bhuiyan, who participated in the making of *National Broadcast Policy 2014* as a civil society and academic member, offers a rationale for a broadcasting policy in the context of Bangladesh:
A policy is imperative with the sudden growth of the industry, increase of popularity, and more and more people depending on television for information. Besides, television has responsibility to uphold the values of the nation, i.e. secularism, democracy, and public service. Television owners have to use it with responsibility. With all these into consideration, the state must respond to the changing circumstances with forming a policy and with a view to protect the public interest.144

Broadcast policy is in fact one of the most contested sites where the struggles for cultural hegemony and identity politics become most visible and acute, not only for competing interests within national economies but also among policymakers at an international level (Chakravartty & Sarikakis, 2006). Generally speaking, broadcast policy reform is crucial to maintain the adaptability and functionality of a policy as it faces continuous socio-cultural, institutional, and technological changes and challenges over the period of time. Policy expert Shameem Reza reminds us of the technical aspect of the policy: “Formulating or reforming a policy could be instrumental to discipline an emerging industry, i.e. to define and articulate in detail the criteria of spectrum allocation, registration, renewal, and transfer of ownership—foreign and national, eligibility, deposit requirement, investment limit, fair competition rules, etc.”145

From the industry workers’ point of view, there is a demand for broadcast policy as well as institutional guidelines to make the industry more organized and secured for working journalists. Tofael Ahmad, who worked in various television channels more than 12 years, feels such need in the face of growing number of television channels:

The biggest challenges for the television journalists are lack of adequate and coherent industry guidelines, wage policies, and policy mechanism to professionally guide the industry. At present, every decision about the television channels and within a television station are taken on adhoc basis, which makes it possible for every government to intervene anytime they want. Once we have the draft policies finalized and enforced, we will have more stability and occupational shelter from external interventions.146

However necessary, policy reform is neither neutral nor apolitical. Depending on the preference of the government, media policy can be reformed to ensure a greater

145 Interview with S M Shameem Reza, Associate Professor, University of Dhaka, 19 June 2014, Dhaka.
146 Interview with Tofael Ahmad, Senior Reporter, Maasranga Television, Oct 29, 2017, telephone interview.
public role of broadcasters, but it can be also reformed to enable deregulation that gives way to private broadcasters. In a liberal-pluralist tradition, such crucial decisions for policy reform usually come from a broadcasting commission which makes recommendations for institutional, infrastructural and legislative changes after a thorough public consultation.147

6.1.2. Shifts in Policymaking

Media and communications policy emerged as a discernible field in 1950s Western academia, as scholars from various perspectives began to interrogate the connections between media/communication and the numerous political, economic, social and psychological aspects of modernization and development (Mansell & Raboy, 2011; Raboy, 2002).148 Over half a century, a range of scholarship has been produced covering the breadth of media policies and depth of policymaking processes. Several literatures have addressed the particularities of the Global South from the perspective of postcolonial historiography, revealing that postcolonial media policy is still guided by the colonial legacy (Alhassan, 2005; Alhassan & Chakravarty, 2011). The postcolonial nation-states in Africa, Asia and Latin America continue to enforce exclusionary authorities in the name of modernization and development. This is very relevant to our study. Television was deemed to be essential as a tool of modernization during the pre-independence period in East Pakistan. Both West Pakistan and East Pakistan television were engaged in propagating the significance of activities of the government. After independence, with brief intervals, the authoritarian governments continued this legacy.

---

147 One classic example of such recommendation is the Aird Commission Report (1929) in Canada, which eventually gave birth to the Canadian public broadcaster, CBC. A recent example is Taiwan’s Public Television Services (PTS), which was born as a result of legislative changes and extensive public lobbying.

148 Modernization theorists, such as Lerners, Schramm and de Sola Pool theorized communication as a top-down vehicle to “modernize” the population in “traditional” developing countries, where the role of policy was to equip the governments with planning and implementation tools. However, this approach was heavily criticized by the critical scholars (such as Dorfman, Mattelart, Dizard and Schiller) in the 1960s, arguing that this paradigm overlooked how the “free flow of information doctrine” assisted Western countries, particularly the United States, to imperialize its culture in the name of modernization. Subsequently, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of developing countries that launched in the 1960s, along with UNESCO talks on the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), demanded democratization of communication. The efforts of NAM and NWICO talks still bear significance to the discussion of democratizing WSIS and its implication to global media policy (see Mansell & Raboy, 2011; Zhao & Hackett, 2005).
Despite wide-scale political and economic shifts, nation-states remain the key site of media and cultural policymaking. One of the important shifts is that governments have become more open to allowing participation of various interest groups in policymaking, which is very similar to the multi-stakeholderism approach. Multi-stakeholderism refers to a participatory political decision-making process involving multiple actors. For instance, various civil society organizations have become new stakeholders in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)’s policy effort on Internet Governance (Raboy, Landry, & Shtern, 2010). In addressing the complexity of multiple stakeholder policy processes, Cammaerts (2011, p. 135) puts forward four components of analysis: participation, power, inclusion/exclusion and consensus/conflict. Des Freedman argues that the growth of stakeholders may not really pose any significant challenge to the power of a policymaking core (Freedman, 2008, p. 104). This is because compromises and trade-offs often remain hidden in media policymaking. This observation is relevant for media democratization. While a multi-stakeholder approach may allow multiple voices to participate in the decision-making processes, it does not guarantee that all voices will be listened to an influential. While multi-stakeholderism emerges from North American and European contexts, the government of Bangladesh enthusiastically embraced the notion of “stakeholders” in its policy drafts, claiming that the policymaking process is now driven by the opinion of multiple stakeholders. In this chapter, I contend that Bangladesh’s power to formulate its own communications policy as a nation-state is a crucial part of its colonial legacy, but it also embraces a multi-stakeholder approach of policymaking. Should this be considered as a step toward media democratization? Not necessarily. The next section shows that despite apparent participation of multiple stakeholders, there was an overall lack of public participation in the preparation and development of the National Broadcast Policy 2014. The objectives of policy committee stakeholders closely align with the interests of the politico-commercial nexus, while allowing some contradictory outcomes to appear. Although there are some draft and actual policies and laws, due to broader social, political and economic constraints these policies have not fully materialized or are being misused for assorted reasons. From these vantage points, this study suggests that: First, policy reforms should be accompanied with a stronger public participation (e.g. public surveys, polls, systematic consultations, direct representation in the policymaking committees); and Second, media democratization needs external catalysts – such as social movements for media reform that include monitoring the transparency of policymaking.
6.1.3. The Politics of Broadcast Policy in South Asian Contexts

South Asia presents itself as a rich hub for policy experiments, which is yet to be mined by powerful governments, NGOs, and business owners. There is no uniformity among South Asian countries in terms of regulating their broadcasting industries. Regulation varies greatly from country to country. For example, PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) has a hybrid interest in protecting both business and political interests in the television industry that helped the industry to grow in a large scale. Nepal does not have a broadcast policy, yet Cable TV operators in Nepal were able to block 42 Indian television channels in protest of what they call an unofficial "blockade of goods" into the country (India), forcing the Indian government to negotiate with cross-border transport issues. This move comes after a former Maoist fragment party started a campaign against Indian movies and television channels in Nepal (BBC, 2015, September 29). Previously, the Nepalese government allocated spectrum to a large number of community radio stations without requiring any specific eligibility criteria. Although a large part of them did not survive, it indicates that Nepal’s non-government sector has emerged as a powerful entity. Sri Lanka on the other hand attempted to form a broadcast policy, but was not successful. Conversely, India is very keen to control the spectrum allocation through heavy policy measures. They had several policy attempts (e.g. Prasar Bharati Bill 1978, Prasar Bharati Bill 1989, Prasar Bharati Act 1990) to turn Prasar Bharati autonomous, yet, it couldn’t become fully autonomous. Later, India handed a large number of frequencies to private entrepreneurs. These examples indicate that the prospect of broadcasting policy in South Asia is always shaped by politics that exist beyond the media, or even beyond the nation-state.

India as a regional communications superpower has a spillover effect on the policymaking of its neighbor countries, argues policy expert Shameem Reza. Reza claims that Indian policy precedents have tremendously influenced the formation of Right to Information Act and Community Radio policy of Bangladesh, but it is not the same for Pakistan. Pakistan is less likely to be influenced by Indian broadcast policy compared to Bangladesh, although the same neoliberal forces such as deregulation and privatization

---

149 Interview with S M Shameem Reza, Associate Professor, University of Dhaka, 19 June 2014, Dhaka.

150 Interview with S M Shameem Reza, Associate Professor, University of Dhaka, 19 June 2014, Dhaka.
policies liberalized the media industry in both countries. Regardless of the influence of policy, Indian and Pakistani broadcast business competition is seen as a challenge by the Ministry of Information in Bangladesh, which is keen to counter it by regulating its own market. A high official of the Ministry of Information justifies:

We have a relatively small market for broadcast industry with growing domestic investment and limited foreign investment. While we allow foreign ownership, it is restricted to 49%. Comparing to big neighbors, India and Pakistan, we are significantly behind regulating our media industry as we have high political instability and the policy changes with the regime change. In this context, we do need a coherent broadcast policy to foster a favorable environment for the media industry to grow.151

This bureaucratic opinion of a top bureaucrat conceals the weakness of the secretariat but rather makes its role in policymaking look like an imperative. What is very interesting here is that despite heavy trade exchange between India and Bangladesh there is a power asymmetry in terms of cross-border broadcast access to regional markets where India enjoys a monopoly. While the Bangladeshi government allows hundreds of Indian Channels to be aired in Bangladesh, there is no presence of Bangladeshi television channels in India. I wondered why there is such imbalance: is it yet another sign of India’s regional hegemony at the cultural level? Or is it due to a diplomatic failure on the part of Bangladeshi government? Can the Bangladeshi government resolve this imbalance by negotiating relevant policy measures with India? As a policy expert, Shafiul Alam Bhuiyan posits that “this is not diplomatic failure, but the question of ability.”152 When I asked the same questions to the Secretary of Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Ranjit Kumar Biswas suggested that it is up to the willingness of the government, primarily the Prime Minister and Minister of Information.153

In practice, while there are no legal restrictions in India to the downlinking of TV channels from Bangladesh, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of India has imposed a strict barrier of requirements for foreign television downlinking to Indian territory that is difficult for Bangladeshi TV channels to fulfill. In order to downlink any foreign television channel in India an application is required to be submitted to the

151 Interview with Abul Hasan, Joint Secretary (Broadcast), Ministry of Information, Dec 3, 2014, Dhaka.
153 Interview with Ranjit Kumar Biswas, Secretary, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 4 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in India through a company registered under *Indian Companies Act 1956* and having the prescribed net worth. Some of the other requirements are listed in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 A locally (Indian) registered office</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Minimum net worth for first Non-News &amp; Current Affairs TV channel</td>
<td>Rs 5 crore</td>
<td>950,500 CAD</td>
<td>64,089,500 BDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Minimum net worth for first News &amp; Current Affairs TV channel</td>
<td>Rs 20 crore</td>
<td>3,802,000 CAD</td>
<td>256,358,000 BDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Fee to obtain permission, valid 10 years</td>
<td>Rs 10 lakhs</td>
<td>19,010 CAD</td>
<td>1,281,790 BDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Per annum fee per channel for down-linking channels uplinked from abroad (e.g. Bangladesh)</td>
<td>Rs 15 lakhs</td>
<td>28,515 CAD</td>
<td>1,922,685 BDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Deposit money or <em>Performance Bank Guarantee</em> for each non-News and Current Affairs TV channel</td>
<td>Rs 1 crore</td>
<td>190,100 CAD</td>
<td>12,817,900 BDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Deposit money or <em>Performance Bank Guarantee</em> for each News and Current Affairs TV channel</td>
<td>Rs 2 crore</td>
<td>380,200 CAD</td>
<td>25,635,800 BDT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The table indicates that the Indian government does not restrict foreign television channels to be watched by Indian audience, but they reformed the broadcast policies (e.g. *Orders for Amendment in the Policy Guidelines for Uplinking of TV Channels from India*, see India. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2011) with a barrage of strict requirements, which are hard enough to discourage the neighbor television channels. This is a strategic and structural move that is asymmetrical in nature. Because the smaller countries like Bangladesh will not be able to demand the same from Indian television channels due to the popularity of many Indian television channels in Bangladesh. It is also because of the pressure of the cable owners’ associations who would like to continue to provide Indian channels to Bangladeshi audiences. The broadcast policy thus becomes a matter of regional and bilateral diplomatic negotiations in which the semi peripheral superpower like India holds the upper hand over its relatively poorer neighbor states. Bangladesh is on the losing side of this negotiation.
6.1.4. Major Policies Related to Broadcasting in Bangladesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Broadcast Regulatory Regime in Bangladesh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>License (No Objection Certificate) providing Authorities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Licensing Fees and Tax</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Regulatory Laws and Guidelines</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership patterns</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods of broadcasting</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adopted from Reza (2012a), and from interview with Abul Hossain, Joint Secretary (Broadcasting), the Ministry of Information. December 3, 2013.

There are around 50 laws and regulations that currently govern the media and communication, advertisement and entertainment industries of Bangladesh. More than 30 acts have either direct or indirect bearing on the installation, operations or broadcasting of audio-visual media, including BTV and Bangladesh Betar (Reza, 2012a). However, due to broader social, political and economic constraints, many of these policies are not fully functioning or are being misused for assorted reasons. The British colonial rule resulted in a top-down policy formulation. Although there is no shortage of rules and regulation to bestow controlling power to government, Shameem Reza cast a different opinion on the history of policymaking in modern Bangladesh. In his view, most of the major media policies that apply to broadcast regulation are guided by out-of-date colonial-era policies. “Other than to control the press Bangladesh governments were never so interested in forming policies, they were rather reluctant to do so.”154

---

154 As Reza elaborates, “In the 1980s, the state did not have any competitor to share the telecom or broadcast spectrum with. Ershad government was interested in creating a commission for mitigating news broadcast needs, especially those of quasi-judiciary nature, and he indeed formed...”
In the 1990s, the advent of numerous telecommunication companies, commercial radios, community radios, and new private television companies motivated the government to think about finding manageable ways to distribute and allocate spectrum frequencies. Reza reminds us:

We do have a commission to manage spectrums, BTRC. Its job is to measure, allocate, and regulate the frequencies. But BTRC couldn’t handle policy provisions and decision-making matters, which are rather political affairs. The criteria of allocating frequencies, such as, eligibilities, qualifications and disqualifications of ownership, numbers of approvals – these policy issues must be determined by the government and the people of the country. Under these necessities, it is justified for the government to form a coherent and comprehensive broadcast policies.155

One of the loopholes of television licensing process in Bangladesh is that there is a lack of coordination when it comes to the question of transfer of the technical (such as spectrum), financial (such as ownership share), and business (such as registration of the company) aspects of ownership of a television channel. This seized the attention of mass media when several channels such as RTV were sought to be transferring of ownership from one owner to another owner violating Telecommunication Act 2001.

The office of the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms (RJSC) is responsible for registering the names of companies and their ownership information. Any transformation of ownership must be registered with this office, and approved by the registrar. However, there are coordination gaps among RJSC and Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC). There is no mandatory coordination meeting between regulatory bodies. “We follow “company law” [Companies Act (Bangladesh), 1994], while BTRC maintains “Telecommunication law” [Bangladesh Telecommunication Act, 2001]. It is possible that one can get away with violating telecommunication law as long as they follow company law. RJSC does not have sufficient manpower to coordinate all regulatory bodies and to enforce the laws.”156 This indicates that the success of any broadcast related policy largely depends on the coordination and implementation ability with other regulatory bodies.

---

155 Interview with Shameem Reza, Associate Professor, University of Dhaka, 19 June 2014, Dhaka.
156 Interview with Bijon Kumar Baishya, Registrar, Office of the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms, 28 Nov 2013, Dhaka. Bracketed information added.

In an attempt to “build up a pluralistic, accountable and responsible broadcasting sector,” the government of Bangladesh announced the National Broadcast Policy 2014.\(^{157}\) Compared to earlier drafts, popular responses to the National Broadcast Policy 2014 were extraordinary and indicative of public concerns over mainstream broadcasting’s independence. The media owners, editors, journalists, academic intellectuals and civil society leaders joined with extensive discussions in the television and radio talk shows and contributed to op-ed columns in major newspapers. The policy was also widely debated by the participants in the social media. They contributed enormously in creating critical and alternative views on the policy. The primary concerns surrounded provisions that could allow government “strict monitoring” and “plenty of scope for misuse.” Normatively, it was hoped that the government would take into consideration the public responses. In practice, the public responses changed nothing except garnering a defensive press briefing by the Minister of Information (Haq & Reza, 2017, forthcoming). The policy was approved by the Cabinet. “If the Prime Minister appoints me as a Minister of Information again, I will get the National Broadcasting Policy approved within couple of months after the election,” mentioned Hasanul Haq Inu, the Ministry of Information.\(^{158}\) Indeed, he got the job done within couple of months of the Awami League government assumed its third tenure in 2014.

But an important question about the policy is its timing. Why did the government become proactive in forming broadcast policy after they approved dozens of new TV channels? Assistant Chief of Planning at the Ministry of Information offers a candid answer: “This is a post-facto approval. First, the government needed freedom to approve the channels for their desired owners. Then the government needed the policy to keep a subtle veil of control in hand to make sure that no channels go rogue.”\(^{159}\) Another explanation, by policy expert Shameem Reza, questions the intention of the Ministry:

---

\(^{157}\) See background, aims and objective of the National Broadcast Policy 2014 (Bangladesh. Ministry of Information, 2014b).

\(^{158}\) Interview with Hasanul Haq Inu, MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Information, 24 Dec 2013, Dhaka.

\(^{159}\) Interview with Gazi Shariful Islam, Assistant Chief (Planning), Ministry of Information, 17 June 2014, Dhaka.
The scope of policy could have been brief, and it could serve as an umbrella or guiding principle for further details to be determined by a commission. But the government was more interested in drafting a policy first, and then to form a commission. It is because, proposing a broadcast commission buys more time for the Ministry of Information to secure further control and exercise more discretion to hire the right staff for the job.\(^{160}\)

Similar concern was expressed by Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, who joined the policy committee as a stakeholder representative of journalists,

A policy is essential to set the discipline of an emerging and growing industry. However, the biggest loophole of the National Broadcast Policy is creating the policy itself, without creating a broadcast commission first. … The government was supposed to create the commission first and the commission would hire the experts to create the details of the policy including its bylaws and rules. … I think the Ministry wants to increase its power by creating an incomplete policy with vague restrictive language, because this will allow them to buy more time to make a commission while the Ministry takes everything under control using the policy.\(^{161}\)

The biggest concern is that, as Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul fears, the policy will bestow unabated power to the Ministry of Information: “The scariest and the most dangerous part of the policy is that if this policy draft gets approved, according to the policy the Ministry of Information will continue to determine every detail of the regulation criteria and will control the industry.”\(^{162}\)

6.2.1. Position of Stakeholders in National Broadcast Policymaking

The Ministry of Information was the key stakeholder and the government body responsible for preparing, drafting, and finalizing a broadcast policy, including coordinating inputs from a range of stakeholders. In fact, the National Broadcast Policy is heralded as “the largest ever policy initiative of the Ministry of Information.” There was no specific model to guide the development of the broadcast policy. However, the

\(^{160}\) Interview with S. M. Shameem Reza, Associate Professor, University of Dhaka, 19 June 2014, Dhaka.

\(^{161}\) Interview with Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Head of News, Boishakhi Television, and Member of National Broadcast Policy 2014 Committee, 8 Dec 2013, Dhaka.

\(^{162}\) Interview with Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Head of News, Boishakhi Television, and Member of National Broadcast Policy 2014 Committee, 8 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
Ministry acknowledges that it followed British regulator Office of Communication (OfCom) policies as a guideline, whenever needed. 163

Table 6.2. Members of National Broadcast Policy (2014) Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position (not according to rank)</th>
<th>Stakeholder Group Represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Minister, Ministry of Information</td>
<td>Government, Key stakeholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Secretary, Ministry of Information</td>
<td>Government, Key stakeholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Joint Secretary, Ministry of Information</td>
<td>Government, Key stakeholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Chief Information Officer, Ministry of Information</td>
<td>Government, Key stakeholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Vice Chancellor, University of Dhaka (his representative)</td>
<td>Academic and civil society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Director General of Bangladesh Television</td>
<td>State-broadcaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Director General of Bangladesh Betar (Radio)</td>
<td>State-broadcaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Owner, Channel i</td>
<td>Television owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Editor, Daily Somokal</td>
<td>Print media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Head of News and CEO, Boishakhi Television</td>
<td>TV media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 President, Bangladesh Computer Society</td>
<td>IT sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Owner, Somoy Media Ltd</td>
<td>Television owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Professor of International Relations, University of Dhaka</td>
<td>Academic community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Article 19</td>
<td>NGO community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interview with Md. Akhtaruzzaman Talukder, Senior Assistant Secretary, TV-2, Ministry of Information, 4 Dec 2013, Dhaka, and Meeting Notice (document date: July 30, 2013; meeting date: Aug 5, 2013, see, Appendix D).

Among other members of the policy committee were: two high officials from the state broadcasters (Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar), the Vice Chancellor of University of Dhaka (his representative) representing the academic and civil society community, two owners of private television channels (Channel i and Somoy News) representing the interest of the television industry, one senior journalists representing TV journalists community (Boishakhi Television), one member of print media community (Daily Somokal), a representative of IT sector, a University professor, a member of the academic community and a member of the NGO community (see, Table 6.2, Figure 6.1). The following section delineates the political and ideological positions of some of the key stakeholders participating in the policymaking process.

163 Interview with Md. Akhtaruzzaman Talukder, Senior Assistant Secretary, TV-2, Ministry of Information, 17 June 2014, and 5 December 2013, Dhaka.
As Figure 6.1 shows there were other governmental, non-governmental, and private actors who were not in the core committee, but with whom the Ministry of Information consulted at various stages of the policymaking process. These consultations were primarily used to get some nominal feedback on the draft policy. Respondents included different ministries, BTRC, UNESCO Bangladesh, the Institute of Communication Studies, and most importantly the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO), making it a multi-stakeholder process indeed.
The Ministry of Information – Key Stakeholder

The discussion of a policy was going on for several years. There were several relevant policies already in place at draft stage or in action. In between 2011 and 2012 the Ministry initiated the process of formulating a centralized and detailed draft of a national broadcast policy, and then another year to revise the draft. “The original draft of the National Broadcast Policy had a lot of vagueness and it lacked specifications,” notes Nyma Nargism, a Program Officer at UNESCO Bangladesh.

When I visited the Ministry of Information, there were more than a dozen high profile staff working on the policy revision. Among them, was Gazi Shariful Islam, Assistant Chief (Planning), Ministry of Information, emerging bureaucrat at the Ministry with some very important duties to perform. He provided some valuable perspective to the inner working of the policymaking process. When I asked why it was taking the Ministry so long get through the draft stage, his answer revealed a weakness of the ministry: its enormous size, which comes with equally enormous bureaucratic processes. “Making a policy is not a straightforward, nor an easy process,” says Islam. “The Ministry of Information lacks internal coordination. It has 14 divisions, too huge. Even with revision it will take years to coordinate all inputs.” Such enormity of bureaucracy allows organizational complexity to prevail, and makes the process of policy-making often incomprehensible and inaccessible to a public that will never see it in its entirety.

The lack of coordination goes beyond the officials of the Ministry. Some relevant policy frameworks that already exist were neither discussed, nor shared with the members of the National Broadcast Policy committee. When I asked whether the members of the National Broadcast Policy committee considered the draft policy in relation to other key policy documents, Shafiul Alam Bhuiyan responded, “I’m a member of the policy committee but I have no knowledge of the Private Television Policy Draft of 2012. Perhaps the Ministry didn’t find it necessary for us to know about this policy.”

---

164 For instance, Bangladesh Television Authority Act, 2001; Bangladesh Betar Authority Act, 2001; Private Television Ownership, Establishment and Operation Policy 1998 and its 2012 revision Draft
165 Interview with Nyma Nargism, Program Officer, UNESCO Bangladesh, 19 June 2014, Dhaka.
166 Interview with Gazi Shariful Islam, Assistant Chief, Ministry of Information, 17 June 2014, Dhaka.
Besides this, the majority of members of the committee were in the dark about the new television channel licensing that the government were approving while the Ministry was preparing a draft that would suggest that no members of a political party or its affiliate be the owner of a TV channel. The government didn’t even stand by its own “pious wish,” as put by Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, a journalist member of the committee:

We wanted that the policy will set the details of a licensing regime and criteria of ownership, such as financial qualifications, personal qualifications, eligibilities and ineligibilities. Unfortunately, the draft ignores this most crucial part, and instead borrows some existing elements from here and there, such as, the initial consultation with ABU (Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union) for the state broadcaster BTV advertising policies and film censorship acts. Therefore, this document turned into neither a complete policy for licensing regimes, nor for employee administration.168

It appears that the Ministry, despite their goodwill, didn’t want all members of the policy-committee to go deeper into the issue of ownership. Why such reservation? “One of the problems with having a broadcast policy in Bangladesh is that we do not have policy-continuity in this country. Every government wants to change the policy to suit their own agenda,” informs Shafiul Alam Bhuiyan. However, there is a bigger obstacle in play – the unified interests of television owners– which do not change much with the change of the government. This is something that the Ministry officials are in better position to attest, given that they deal with the interventions from the private enterprises on a long-term basis across several political regimes:

For any form of regulation there has to be a monitoring mechanism to hold the media organizations accountable. For example, there is no monitoring mechanism to oversee or to audit the expenditures of a private television channel in Bangladesh. If the government takes any initiatives, the television channel owners intervene and start colluding the process.169

One crucial example of how the common interests of private television channel owners prevail across different regimes is that there is an orchestrated lack of fees for television channel licensing. Regardless of who approves licenses or what government is in power, the channel owners make sure that there is no licensing fee:

168 Interview with Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Head of News, Boishakhi Television, and Member of National Broadcast Policy 2014 Committee, 8 Dec 2013, Dhaka.

169 Interview with Gazi Shariful Islam, Assistant Chief (Planning), Ministry of Information, 17 June 2014, Dhaka.
At present television channels are approved at almost no cost. The proposed guideline/policy draft recommended to charge 1 core taka as annual renewal fees. It got opposed by Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO), primarily by its [former] chair Mosaddaq Hossain Falu. All owners would agree in this question, to oppose any restriction or financial obligation to be imposed on TV channels.\textsuperscript{170}

This is how a negotiation between the private ownership and state regulation takes place in the era of neoliberalism, in which the top symbol of the \textit{politico-commercial nexus} (i.e. the ATCO) pursue their agenda in tie with the government. Such intervention was impossible in the authoritarian era. Neoliberalism enables private entities to become more powerful to influence the governing processes as the government goes deeper into sprawling its power within private-market entities.

\textbf{Position of Television Channel Owners (ATCO)}

Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) has a conservative role in policy formulation. While some of its members agree with the necessity of a broadcast policy to regulate the industry and safeguard it from government’s arbitrary intervention, the majority of them oppose regulation: “Most of the members of ATCO are political-owners, who are reluctant to impose any restrictive measures on news program. Even most of them are against having the idea of a broadcast policy,” notes Shykh Seraj.\textsuperscript{171} Consequently, ATCO managed to influence some of the policy outcomes in its favor. For example, there are major differences between the National Broadcast Policy (2013 Draft) and the final version of National Broadcast Policy 2014 in terms of licensing rules, political advertising, and mandatory broadcasting of government announcements. Table 6.3 shows that as a stakeholder of the policy process, ATCO convinced the government to accept their feedback. As a result, political advertisements are now legal in Bangladesh. Furthermore, the television channels that were licensed by previous governments do not have to have their registrations and legal documents checked for a new licensing. Finally, private television channels are no longer required to carry out important emergency announcements; instead, the decision to broadcast these messages is left to the “due discretion” of the TV channel.


\textsuperscript{171} Interview with Shykh Seraj, Founder Director & Head of News, Impress Telefilm Limited/\textit{Channel-i}, 7 Dec 2013, Dhaka.


Table 6.3. Examples of Television Owners’ Influence on National Broadcast Policymaking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1.5. All running private radio and television who already acquired approval of information Ministry, need to acquire their license in line with the new policy</td>
<td>“Remove this provision. We do not support it since we have been already paying Value Added Tax”</td>
<td>This provision was removed. There is no 2.1.5 section in the policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1. No opinion or statement of any political party can be aired directly through any program or advertising (in News and Informational Programs)</td>
<td>“Remove this paragraph. We recommend allowing political advertising, but it cannot be subversive to the state and public safety”</td>
<td>“3.2.1. No content or advertising subversive to the state and public safety can be aired.” Which means political advertising is allowed with conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.3. All private television channels must air government provided emergency announcements (e.g. weather warning, etc.)</td>
<td>“Remove mandatory requirement. We always air emergency news important for public”</td>
<td>Section 3.2.3. removed the word “mandatory”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


“Compromises and trade-offs” like these remain unannounced to public. A look at policy drafts and feedback documents can unearth the evidence of negotiations and compromises between the stakeholders that the final version conceals. ATCO is vying to exert influence in another important policy effort by the Ministry of Information. In the light of growth of television industry and all the legal troubles that the government keep facing, the Ministry of information decided to revise and upgrade the 2008 version of the Private Television Ownership, Establishment and Operation Policy with a 2012 Draft. ATCO intervened in the issue of ownership and financial requirement:

There was a major change in the draft policy in response to ATCO’s input as a stakeholder. Firstly, in terms of eligibility criteria of private television ownership, the original draft explicitly mentioned that any person who has any kind of political affiliation (e.g. membership, donor, or relative of a political leader) will be ineligible to apply for a television channel. The ATCO suggested to remove the provision. Secondly, there was a financial requirement provision for the new television channels to deposit a certain amount of money as a proof of financial solvency required to own and manage a TV channel. ATCO suggested to remove this provision too.\(^\text{172}\)

\(^\text{172}\) Interview with Md. Akhtaruzzaman Talukder, Senior Assistant Secretary, TV-2, Ministry of Information, 17 June 2014, and 5 December 2013, Dhaka.
Chapter 4 discussed how the ownership of television in Bangladesh is highly politicized across different regimes. It is obvious from ATCO’s feedback that a reform in the Private Television Ownership, Establishment and Operation Policy would put ATCO in trouble, especially by the provisions like 5.a and 5.d which proposes that no members of the political party or its affiliates can be an owner of a television channel. Table 3.1 and 3.2 in Chapter 4 show that many owners of the television channels, including the former and present Presidents of the ATCO, are affiliated with the mainstream political parties. They will lose eligibility if they would have to reapply/renew their license as the original National Broadcast Policy (2013 Draft) suggested, and if the drafted reform of the Private Television Ownership, Establishment and Operation Policy 2012 is adopted. Therefore, it is in the best interest of ATCO members to propose removing the provisions restricting political ownership of television (Table 6.3 and 6.4).

---

For instance, as mentioned in Chapter 1 and 4, the current leader of ATCO, Salman F. Rahman (Independent Television) is an adviser of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. He is there to make sure that ATCO’s works are consistent with the Awami League party’s long term political benefits.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed by the Govt. [Private Television Ownership, Establishment and Operation Policy 2012 Draft]</th>
<th>Statement by ATCO (Recommended to remove), in ATCO’s word</th>
<th>Statement by ATCO (Recommended to add), in ATCO’s word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section 5. The following person or company will be ineligible for licensing:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.a. Political party or their affiliate organization, or any member of trade union</td>
<td>“The whole paragraph should be removed”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.b. An individual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.c. Any foreign registered company or any company which is owned by the foreign citizens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.d. Any group or organization or alliance with political purpose or affiliation</td>
<td>“political purpose or affiliation’ should be removed”</td>
<td>“This clause should be added: ‘Any person who is leading a political party’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.e. Any person or organization with criminal record or charges including sedition</td>
<td>“criminal charges’ should be removed”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 14 Conditions for broadcasting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.g. The total Advertising time cannot exceed 20% of the total broadcast time</td>
<td>“The whole paragraph should be removed”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Position of Civil Society Members

Broadcast policy in Bangladesh merely plays a decorative role. It is deployed from a theoretical point of view but has limited effect in practice. Journalists are hardly affected by it. The participation of owners and journalists may have some impact in a limited scale, but the government will get what they want out of this policy. If it was a Caretaker government to make the policy, it could make some meaningful change, but the Awami League government will always protect its interest, and it will hire only those committee members whose loyalty to Awami League is proven.  

A close examination of stakeholders in the National Broadcast Policy 2014 reveals that the members of the policy committee were selected by the Ministry based on their ties to the government. Several NGOs (e.g., Article 19) served as proxy-stakeholders for all of civil society (see Figure 6.1). By participating in the policymaking process, civil society members tacitly legitimized the government’s agenda, even though they had little prospect to help shape it. It is because the key decision-makers worked together in close ideological conformity with the broad interests of politico-commercial nexus, and that apart from few exceptions, the members of the committee sit closely in broad agreement with each other. The exceptions, however, are not powerful enough to invert the key policy issues such as advertising and wage labor – two crucial areas of media profit making.

There was an expectation form the civil society that the policy will do something to reduce excessive advertising in television programs. This will help to reduce the severity of the corporate branding effect, “Policy cannot make a radical change but can reduce the degree of market-orientation, for instance, by putting restrictions on time and space amount of advertising,” mentioned media critic Fahmidul Haq. As an academic and civil society representative of the committee, Shafiul Alam Bhuiyan expressed concern regarding the hyper-commercialization in television channels (such as corporate branding); however, this issue did not make it into the policy draft.

This country is very peculiar that television channels have sold out their news headlines to advertisers that goes against objective journalism. This means that when a television channel has “Markentile Bank Headline” in its news, it will not be able to broadcast or even have any intention to

---

174 Interview with Tushar Abdullah, Director, Somoy Television, 17 June 2014, Dhaka. Bear in mind, the owner of Somoy Television, Ahmed Zubair, owner of City Group also sat in the policy committee.

175 Interview with Dr. Fahmidul Haq, Professor, University of Dhaka, 18 June 2014, Dhaka
explore corporate corruptions in that company. I particularly insisted there should be some guideline related to how much advertising can be allowed during news hours and programs hours. I also suggested that there should be some specific time limit on advertising but that was not incorporated in the draft. That is why I didn’t approve the draft.176

The resistance did not work. The draft was approved at one point, without the recommendations made by Abu Jafar Md. Shafiul Alam Bhuiyan. He also notes:

When you have a committee with all the stakeholders involved, which is a neoliberal policymaking regime, they will speak out from their point of view. As an academic, I had significant disagreements with the journalist-leaders and industry-owners on two grounds. One was the advertising issue. Another was the representation of interest of the broadcast journalist and the media workers. I recommended that there should be some provisions related to payment, salary, and work-environment of the journalists and media workers in the policy. The labor issue was totally absent. It’s unfortunate they did not include my recommendation.177

Historically, “there is a strong lobbying from the television owners’ side that there is no provision to restrict the scope and depth of advertising in the news and programs.”178 For evidence, while the Ministry of Information suggested that the advertising limit should be 20%, ATCO recommended it be changed to 30%.179 This reveals a dual failure of national broadcast policy initiative. On the one hand, it failed to impose any limit on hypercommercialization. On the other hand, it could not provide any policy-direction to improve the working conditions, let alone agreeing to any minimum-wage or benefits (e.g. pension, bonus, parental leave or medical allowance) for journalists. In both cases, the ultimate policy decisions benefited the owners of the television channels.

It is evident that the interests of the key commercial actors (selective owners of private TV channels) were given priority in the issue of restricting advertising and ensuring fair wages and improved working conditions for journalists. Inclusion of civil

178 Interview with S M Shameem Reza, Associate Professor, University of Dhaka, 19 June 2014, Dhaka.
179 Interview with Shykh Seraj, Founder Director & Head of News, Impress Telefilm Limited/Channel-i, 7 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
society in this case filled the need for collective consent but did not provide collective bargaining power. This bias did not go unnoticed by local policy scholars: “The making of National Broadcast Policy represents a strong presence of private television owners’ interest but no so much of their workers. As a result, you will see barely any content on workers’ wage and rights,” observes S M Shameem Reza.

The participation of the public cannot be substituted with the inclusion of selected civil society members or media owners. The selected members of NGOs might be complicit with the government’s view rather than being critical of it. During the revision phase, Article 19 maintained its position in favor of the broadcast policy while other prominent NGOs (e.g. Transparency International) criticized it. The Daily Star (August 6, 2014) editorial pointed out that the government followed a wrong procedure by formulating the policy by itself. The government should have formed an independent commission first, which would subsequently undertake deliberation to consult on the policy. The approved policy grants the Ministry of Information full authority to decide the fate of state media until an independent national broadcasting commission can be created. Thus, Bangladesh goes back to square one of devising broadcast commissions, which have rarely have worked in the past.

### 6.2.2. Public Participation in Policymaking

The government claims that the National Broadcasting Policy was “open to all” revision and suggestions. There were also formal mechanisms to allow the public to express their opinions and suggestions. The Ministry of Information (MoI), responsible for facilitating the process of drafting the policy made a draft (National Broadcast Policy 2013 Draft) available online for a limited time for the general public to submit comments on the draft by post or email. However, there was no clear indication whether or how any opinion from general public would be valued. The policy draft did not invite any feedback even from the usual policy experts, such as SM Shameem Reza, who served in previous policy committees. Reza notes, “Comparing to the Right to Information Act 2009 and Community Radio 2008 policies the National Broadcast Policy was less participatory, and the scope and window of public consultation on the draft was too brief.”

---

180 Interview with S M Shameem Reza, Associate Professor, University of Dhaka, 19 June 2014, Dhaka.
Policy drafts, in these cases, are made visible to the public to lend support and legitimacy to the policymaking process, but otherwise the process remains largely out of reach for members of the public. “People did not respond to 2013 draft of the National Broadcast Policy,” confirms Akhtaruzzaman. He notes, “Ordinary people did not bother with the policy. They have a distrust in the government that no matter what is their contribution, until there is a change in the power structure, it will not work.” But would it have made any change to the policy, had people sent their comments to the Ministry? According to Akhtaruzzaman, “Even if someone had responded to the draft, it would have made no immediate change or visible difference in the policy provisions since this is a long-term process.” This statement unveils a core weakness of policymaking in Bangladesh: the lack of value that policymakers place on public consultation.

The participation of the public is thus reduced to a mere marketing of the idea of participation rather than allowing a systemic survey and consultation to take place. The Ministry of Information, however, organized a few consultative meetings on the draft policy where only invited stakeholders, including one representative from BTV, Bangladesh Betar, private television owners, public university, and policy experts participated (see Figure 6.1). There was no direct participation of any audience or media workers, except two senior executives of media.

Interestingly, the making of National Broadcast Policy 2014 appears to be more restrictive than other policies the government has initiated in the recent past, although the Ministry would argue otherwise. I had an opportunity to interview the current (2017) Director General of BTV, who was serving as the Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Information in 2014. In his view, the communications policy-making of Bangladesh is far more open and more democratic than the critics of the policy admit. He gives evidence:

---

181 Interviews with Md. Akhtaruzzaman Talukder, Senior Assistant Secretary, TV-2, Ministry of Information, 17 June 2014; 4 Dec 2013, 5 Dec 2013, Dhaka.

182 To add, such weakness is visible in even in the developed countries. For instance, Federal Communication Commission (USA) dismantled net neutrality despite receiving negative feedback.

183 Very recently, the Ministry of Information formulated a draft “Broadcasting Act 2016” guided by the National Broadcast Policy 2014. Instead of allowing a thorough public scrutiny, the Ministry made the draft available on its website, and invited the general public to submit opinions and suggestions only within ten days (April 24, 2016 to May 4, 2016).

184 Interview with Abul Hossain, Joint Secretary (Broadcasting), the Ministry of Information. December 3, 2013, Dhaka.
We (the Ministry of Information) have formed the Right to Information Act (RTI Act 2009) in participatory approach. The Community Radio Policy (CR Policy 2008) was formed with extensive consultation with UNICEF and local NGOs. The Ministry of Information even did not write the draft of the National Broadcast Policy, it was written jointly by various stakeholders, including a prominent NGO (Article 19), television channel owners’ representatives, and public university teachers.185

Haroon-or-Rashid also claims that the government does consider the voices of the workers whose interests are directly affected by a policy. He feared that the privatization of telecommunication would cause job losses. He further notes,

Back in 1997, when we were preparing the draft of the Telecommunication Act 2001, there was a proposal that the T&T Board (Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board) will be privatized as a “market-share-holding company” in 10 years, which was vigorously protested by the T&T Board staff, including myself as I was one of the writers of the draft.

While the Ministry responded to some selective suggestions from the stakeholders, there was virtually no input from the public in the final version of the policy. This is primarily because the ordinary public (along with their responses) were not considered to be stakeholders in the policymaking process.

6.2.3. Policy Overload, Policy Conundrum

There is also concern that the policy bestows unchecked power upon the authority to use the licensing approvals and cancellations processes as a mechanism to keep the industry within the capture of the politico-commercial nexus. Notably, there is no appeals process for those who have had new TV channel applications rejected. There is no assessment review process to challenge any decision within the Ministry should the government choose to shut down a running TV channel. Other than this, as Shameem Reza points out, the policy serves to save the face of the government rather than to execute any actual change. Shameem Reza goes on to stress, “The government is primarily interested in adopting new policies without deciding the fate and usage of the existing ones, such as Radio/Television Act 2001.”186

185 Interview with S. M. Haroon-or-Rashid, [former] Additional Secretary, Ministry of Information, 17 June 2014, Dhaka.
186 Interview with S M Shameem Reza, Associate Professor, University of Dhaka, 19 June 2014, Dhaka.
One might ask: if some of the policy stakeholders, such as selected television owners, are a part of the politico-commercial nexus, then why are the content provisions of the policy so restrictive, and why are the media afraid of the muzzling power of these provisions? This might appear to be contradictory, but it is in fact a result of carefully orchestrated negotiations among stakeholders. Both the government and owners of private television are comfortable so long as there is no provision that prohibits political ownership and hyper-commercialization. I asked the Ministry of Information, at what point would the government propose restrictions on political ownership, given that the government itself considers its own political interests when granting licenses?

Akhtaruzzaman Talukder, Senior Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Information, gave a long and patient answer:

The owners exploit the power of the political leaders as their interests are interwoven. If you analyze the ownership of TV, you will see it is to protect their political and business interests. Those who own the television channels are not doing it for financial viability but for non-financial viability [such as reputation, prestige, and power] that exists outside the market.

Power is the key to make and to break a policy. The instruction of the government [the ministers] is the final policy. Bureaucrats are powerless, a visible hand of policymaking. It is the invisible power of political leaders what matters.

Policies are mostly procedural. Most of the decisions what should be in the policy, are not there. They are kept discrentional.

Changing a provision in the policy is a highly narrow-sighted approach to change or to reform a policy, because the most critical policies are not often in the policy. For instance, the draft policy even does not mention the issue of media ownership, i.e. the criteria of television licensing. 187

This case bears trifold significance to visualize communications policy and politics. First, it shows that party politics play a key role in determining the creation, maintenance and execution of broadcast policy. The role of the state here is to negotiate consensus between various power groups. Second, an analysis of the stakeholders in policy processes enables us to unpack the politics of inclusion and exclusion. By understanding who is included as a stakeholder we can also make sense of who is excluded from the process. This is evident in the failure of the government to respond to

---

187 Interview with Md. Akhtaruzzaman Talukder, Senior Assistant Secretary, TV-2, Ministry of Information, 5 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
the voice of the counter-publics in the policy documents. This is a structural problem that hinders the public from participating both in and through media to democratize media practices. Finally, despite its shortcomings, policy reform is still imperative to instill public values as a counter to the power of the politico-commercial nexus. The National Broadcast Policy 2014 must be reformed and the Broadcasting Act 2016 (draft) must be revised to enable the autonomy of the state-broadcasters. At this point, it seems likely that any standalone policy reform movement, as Napoli (2007, 2009) suggests, might not be sufficient to reach its goal in the context of Bangladesh unless it is situated within the larger nexus of socio-political movements against the dominant political culture or class-domination where the politico-commercial nexus is privileged.

6.3. Community Radio Policy: A New Hope?

Community radio in Bangladesh is perhaps the only type of broadcasting that is dedicated to the service of the rural and suburban communities. The community-oriented culture of Bangladesh is favorable for fostering community media. Community Radio (CR) as a “third tier” in Bangladeshi media has the potential to address critical social issues at a community level and provide a platform for marginalized voices (Reza, 2012a; Reza, 2012b).

In the South Asian context, however, community radio is not immune to government interference. In the Indian case, for instance, the licensing process of community radio is controlled by bureaucratic red-taping. As Pradip Thomas (2014, p. 474) observes, the government in power enjoys ample opportunities to “delay or reject an application if the applicant is not seen to be fit enough.” While control of licensing is an issue, the expansion of community radio is gradual, and even unavoidable for the government as there is a big civil society push for it. The development NGOs are also supporting it. As of October 2017, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of India has 385 entries of Community Radio in its website. In Nepal, with approximately 350 radio stations, of which most are independent and community owned, community radio is the principal source of news for most people (The Conversation, 2015, May 5).

Bangladesh could not stay far behind. In the late 1990s a group of NGO activists, armature radio broadcasters, media development workers, and media journalists started advocacy campaign for community radio in Bangladesh. Bangladesh NGOs Network for
Radio and Communications (BNNRC) led and organized the campaign. The campaign was dedicated to creating a regulatory framework, legislation, and support mechanism to develop community radios in the rural areas in Bangladesh. Responding to a decade of advocacy, the Community Radio Policy (CR Policy 2008) was first enacted by the Caretaker government in 2007-2008. CR Policy 2008 is regarded as one of the most comprehensively written community radio policy in Asia, which involved a range of stakeholders in policymaking process, including responsible Ministries and regulatory bodies of the government, development NGOs and activists, journalists, academics/policy experts (Reza, 2012c). In 2011, the Sheikh Hasina government authorized 12 community radio stations. By the end of 2013, 125 organizations had applied for permission to operate Community Radio broadcasting. Out of the 125, 102 applications were shortlisted. After a review, the national technical sub-committee recommended 51 applications, of which it is expected that around 40 will go through to the final stage or permission (Rahman, Reza, & Haq, 2017, p. 120).

At present, there are 17 community radio stations on-air in the country, broadcasting altogether 138 hours of programming on information, education, local entertainment, as well as social and cultural development activities per day, with reaching nearly 6.6 million rural listeners in 119 upazillas (sub-districts) under 16 districts in Bangladesh (see, Figure 6.2).

These stations employ about a thousand local women and youth. Community radio thus brings new hope for regional diversity and may mobilize support for the decentralization of public information in locales. For example, Radio Mahananda, within its 17km radius, “helps farmers share their own crop research with listeners and even invites farmers to participate in studio discussions on capacity development, cultivating improved varieties of seeds, promoting use of organic fertilizers, using less water for irrigation and improving yields” (The Guardian, 2013, Feb 22). Community radio, therefore, has a progressive prospect for serving marginalized populations in remote rural habitats, particularly in arid expanses, riverine acres, perennial islands, and coastal areas where state or private media barely operate.

---

188 Source: AHM Bazlur Rahman, Chief Executive Officer, Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication, 2017, December 16, email communication.
Figure 6.2. **Ownership and Locations of Community Radio (2008-2017)**

Note: A infographic map showing the locations and owning organizations of currently operational 17 community radios and upcoming 15 radios, reaching suburban and remote rural communities. The map was created and supplied by Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) on November 11, 2017. Further information available here: [http://bnnrc.net/](http://bnnrc.net/)

Figure 6.2 shows that community radio has a greater diversity of ownership comparing to television. It includes a wide range of non-governmental organizations as well as a few governmental offices working across a diverse range of social issues.
One of the key limitations of community radio’s emergence is its policy realm within which it operates. While a majority of community radio stations are supported by local and international NGOs at the initial stage, there is no clear roadmap or policy indication as to how these stations will survive once donor support is depleted. Another problematic area is the lack of public participation. While activism and community participation are central to the success of community radio, the issue of public participation has been contested since the inception of the community Radio. The *Community Radio Policy 2008* did not engage its target communities either in the awareness initiatives or in policy process. Shameem Reza cautiously states that:

> Ordinary people were not at the forefront of the advocacy movement for a community radio policy in Bangladesh. It was an agenda primarily proposed by NGOs to relevant stakeholders. Grassroots and marginalized voices were never heard in the major consultations (Reza, 2012a, p. 112).

This observation epitomizes the politics of participation in making Bangladesh CR policy as it lacks community engagement in its connections with broader socio-political and cultural movements. This limitation is affecting the potential of CR to address greater socio-political issues, such as social inequality or exclusion. There are certain provisions in the policy that have an effect on creating possible alternative public spaces through community broadcasting as well as engaging counter-publics. To make the radio selection process more democratic, community members must be allowed to participate in the selection process (Rahman, Reza, & Haq, 2017, p. 120-121).

In his work, Reza (2012b) identified some major challenges that would affect community radio operations in Bangladesh. They were: challenges from commercial media; assessment of technical needs; community mobilization; and capacity building, research and development (pp. 170–172). In 2012, BNNRC organized a consultative meeting to suggest revisions and amendments of the policy. The suggestions are yet to materialize. At present there are no community television in Bangladesh. BNNRC as well as other development NGOs, such as CCD Bangladesh (working in the northern region of Bangladesh) is actively campaigning for establishing community television. While the issue of financial sustainability and donor-dependency cannot be overlooked, the community radio movement in general signifies a much-needed hope for non-commercial and non-government development communication actors to emerge as important contributors in making the media system more democratic.
6.4. Implications for Media Democratization

The findings of the above case studies demonstrate that communications policy reform along with a consistent culture of public participation in policymaking process is required to ensure the delegation of power to the grassroots at the national level. This is more so in the cases of ongoing policy formulation initiatives. In 2013, the AL-led government amended the *Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act 2006*. Earlier, in 2012, the government shared a preliminary draft of online media policy, which was finalized in 2015. The government is also going to enact the *Cyber Security Act 2015* and is currently working on a film policy. Taking into account these government policy initiatives, it seems that the government is interested in formulating policies for all types and forms of media.

There is hardly any disagreement with the fact that Bangladesh needed a broadcast policy to regulate its broadcasting sector. However, there is an enormous distance between the issues of policy rhetoric portrayed in the policy documents and drafts and the ground reality of level of implementation (Reza, 2012c). For example, clause 1.2.8 of the *National Broadcast Policy 2014* promises to ensure the role of broadcasting in establishing equality and equity in every sphere of the society. However, in practice the policy, privileges market-oriented and urban-centric discourses, and cannot even ensure an equal wage by-law for all genders in the broadcast industry. In the same vein, the *Community Radio Policy 2008* (clause 1.b) professes that community radio should be run by not-for-profit organizations; however, in practice it allows NGOs to increase their annual turnover and donor funding through grassroots participation.

One of the reasons behind the distance between policy discourses and the on-the-ground reality is the lack of thorough and methodical public consultation not only during the policy-formulation stage, but also at pre-formulation (agenda-setting) and post-formulation (implementation) stages. The inclusion of selective non-industry stakeholders indicates a sign of progress from an authoritarian and centralized model of policy-regimes toward a democratic and more inclusive approach to policymaking; however, it cannot guarantee the participation of counter-publics. Within the current structure of policymaking, any media reform movement of independent and free-standing nature would be insufficient in the context of Bangladesh.
Multi-stakeholder policy approaches alone, in this case, are never enough to ensure democratization of communications since the problem is deeply embedded in social inequalities, undemocratic political practices, and most of all the corrupt and exclusionary nature of the state. As a dedicated civil servant, Akhtaruzzaman Talukder is very critical of party-politics in policymaking:

The key problem to this is the looting politics of the political parties. They are primarily interested in looting the development budget, political appointments, and lobbying for own interests. It is not for business or profit but for power. The most important requirement for reform in this context is to ensure democracy and people’s right. This will fix everything else.189

Given the immense complexity of social relations of the policymaking processes and its associated external and internal factors, communications policy reform should be aligned with the agenda of a dramatic break of the social and political systems, institutions and practices. For example, in order to contain the malaise of corporate branding on news production, reforming a provision in the policy is never adequate. “There has to be both legal pressure and the owner’s in-house policy to regulate the invasion of advertising on TV screen.” 190 It has to be a holistic resistance because the problem of hypercommercialism is deeply structural and it is interrelated with the problems in the other fields such as political concentration of ownership and wage control of the media workers.

There is also a problem in the realization of the basic understanding of media policy by the key stakeholders, especially the Ministry of Information. The Ministry of Information has no specific research division to study the normative paradigms of communications policies around the world. In cases, the government seemed to have been unable to differentiate between media policy and media law, or between policy and codes of conduct. Ignoring academic perspectives has created conceptual lacuna in the policy. Media researchers and policymakers, therefore, should take a holistic approach to communications policy reform in collaboration with media scholars, activists, practicing journalists and international media reform advocacy groups.

189 Interview with Md. Akhtaruzzaman Talukder, Senior Assistant Secretary, TV-2, Ministry of Information, 17 June 2014, and 5 December 2013, Dhaka
190 Interview with Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Head of News, Boishakhi Television, and Member of National Broadcast Policy 2014 Committee, 8 Dec 2013, Dhaka.
The Media Reform Coalition (UK) is an example of how such collaboration can be beneficial for media democratization. In their recent work (Freedman, Obar, Martens, & McChesney, 2016), the Media Reform Coalition puts forward a collection of strategies for media reform. Some of the South Asian scholars joined the coalition and they are actively thinking about initiating a similar network with a nuanced regional focus. However, there is no significant presence of Bangladeshi media scholars or policy expert among the coalition, except for a few. S M Shameem Reza, who is a participant of the coalition, points towards the limitation of such project, “Our global presence and networking capacity are insufficient to create any external pressure on the government comparing to the degree of communications policy-reform advocacy required to build a tangible momentum for a media democratization movement in Bangladesh.”

“There is also a limitation” adds Reza, “to how far the successes of media democratization movements from the advanced industrialist countries can be replicated or even aspired in the countries like Bangladesh where every single institutions is deeply politically saturated.” This speaks to the core of the problem and echoes the kernel of the findings of all preceding chapters. The media solution has to be politically viable and executable. Proposing such solutions demands further scrutiny and more empirical research.

### 6.5. Chapter Conclusion

Drawing from a range of debates and case studies, this chapter indicates that media reform should be associated with a larger socio-political movement to question the issues of inequality and exclusion. It also emphasizes that the struggle of marginalized communities must be taken into consideration in order to achieve the fullest success of media reform leading to the broader goal of media democratization. The chapter does not claim to offer any strategic policy reform interventions, but acknowledges the need for such study. It postulates that policy reform alone can achieve very little in the contexts of postcolonial-turned-neoliberal nation-states like Bangladesh, as the problems are deeply rooted in political practices and social relations in which public participation is either made structurally impossible or rendered invisible to the

---

191 Interview with S M Shameem Reza, Associate Professor, University of Dhaka, 26 Oct 2017, by telephone.
masses. The political polyvalence of the government destroys any normative expectation or any real possibility of media democratization through media policy reform.

There is no counter-hegemonic bloc or media reform movement in Bangladesh that could challenge the opacity of communication policymaking and thus resist the threat of unaccountable media power. These observations necessitate a holistic approach to media democratization as opposed to merely a sector policy reform. In further study, the notion of civil society should be critically examined and its ambivalent role in embedding the policy with the market should be recognized. There should be efforts to insulate community media from capitalist monetization. Online media policy should be integrated with the broadcast reform agenda. This also stresses the need for public-oriented media with the inclusion of counter-publics. Finally, the chapter acknowledges the limitation of media democratization framework in the context of political reality of Bangladesh. The findings suggest that the government’s efforts for broadcast policy reform are incapable of bringing any structural change in the television industry, however, within the political reality the least the government can do is to reduce the degree of uncertainty and discriminations that exist in the industry. The work-in-progress National Broadcast Commission can delineate and interpret the details of the National Broadcast Policy 2014 with paying specific attention to improve the working environments, job security, and gender-balanced wage-criteria.
Chapter 7. Further Discussions and Conclusion

Drawing from a range of theoretical perspectives and literature review this study delineated the historical contexts of the troubled emergence of Bangladesh as a peripheral nation-state in the context of the world capitalist system and postcolonial transformations. Instead of taking “television content” as an entry point, I take up the task to situate television in the broader historical, regional, and structural map (Figure 1.3, p. xvii) to show how television licensing and television journalism are symbiotically embedded with the political and social transformation of the state, the postcolonial quest for nation-building, as well as uneven integration with the processes of neoliberal globalization that emanate from the peripheral status of the country in the world-system. The map (Figure 1.3, p. xvii), indicates the key events, factors, and outcomes that are interconnected to the state of television ownership, journalism, and broadcast policymaking in Bangladesh. The real scenario is far more complex and multilayered than any map can visualize, therefore, the project offers theoretical and analytical models (Figure 7.1) to build a coherent story, drawing insights from theories and concepts of global capitalism, postcolonial histories, critical and transcultural approaches to political economy of communication, critiques of the market-orientation of journalism, notion of subaltern counterpublics, as well as discussions of media democratization.

Figure 7.1. Theoretical and Analytical Models of the Dissertation
The study demonstrates that such broad theoretical and analytical modeling is an effective way to illuminate the evidence, and to navigate beyond complexity. Following these models, this multidimensional study departs from conventional news analysis, and contributes to an empirically grounded and multispectral framework showing how the production of journalism can be located in the broader context with a cross-cutting analysis of media, ownership, and policy. The study also contributes to the study of critical political economy of communication and journalism studies by drawing historical and holistic discussions. It does so by embracing a transcultural political economy approach that considers structural biases, socio-economic divides, urban-rural divides, and cultural politics (Chakravartty & Zhao, 2008). The transcultural approach also empowers the study to address the complex history of colonial legacy and postcolonial identity formation that shape the integration of political powers and mercantile elites and formation of a hegemonic \textit{polityco-commercial nexus} (Chapters 1, and 4). It also enables the study to go beyond the conventional discussion of the “role of state”, and to bring in the issues of structural inequalities, including, class divisions, urban-rural divides, and gender issues into the discussion of news production and newsroom hierarchy in both state-owned and private television channels (Chapters 3, 4, and 5).

Going beyond the binary-critiques of authoritarian state versus market forces and political vs. commercial power, this study brings the regional and the global into the discussion of transformations of the nation-state and its renewing power in the era of neoliberal globalization. As opposed to any state-centrist or intra-state approach, the study shows why regional context is important to understand a media system, especially where the countries within a region have shared history, culture, and geography. The study also shows how addressing the issues of informal economy, political affiliation, and informal networks of power (e.g. the \textit{polityco-commercial nexus}) can enrich our understanding of media ownership, media productions, and media policymaking. By triangulating media ownership and social-political history of the country and the region in general, the study contends the theory and practice of market-oriented journalism, and contributes to an empirical understanding of symbolic and direct influence of advertising on journalism (Chapter 5). On the contrary to mainstream assumption, the study makes it clear that policy-reform as a stand-alone project can achieve very little to democratize the media industry, as the problems are deeply rooted in the nature of the nation-state, the social history and political reality of the country, and what surrounds it (Chapter 6).
While making the above mentioned contributions, the study faces some theoretical and analytical challenges and inconsistencies that I must acknowledge. For example, the study is faced with the historical and philosophical tensions that exist between the theories and analytical concepts deriving from liberal and Marxist traditions respectively. On the one hand, the study engages some analytical concepts, such as the public sphere, rational debate, stakeholder, public participation, and autonomy, which imply pluralist view of power. On the other hand, the study is heavily guided by Marxist concepts of class, hegemonic ideology, political economy, production relations, and global capitalism. These two routes are set on a collision course when the study engages the discussion of media democratization, with a strong normative expectation that a democratic media policy reform is desirable and possible in a postcolonial-turned-neoliberal country where the media system is profoundly integrated with the capitalist mode of production, and where class and social inequalities are deeply entrenched.

This apparent distance between the normative expectation versus the nature of reality leads us to a crucial question: is media democratization—in a radical sense—where all socially marginalized groups can own their means of media production and participate in decisions making processes—even possible without a socialist revolution that can overthrow the inherent inequalities and contradictions embedded in global capitalism in the era of neoliberal globalization? Or could Bangladesh and its media have had an alternative future if the founding leader Sheikh Mujib was alive, and was able to complete the implementation of socialism with an egalitarian mission?

The study faces some methodological challenges too, which delimit its scope of analysis. The study is based on a mixture of multisite case studies, cross-cutting in-depth and key-informant interviews, and documentary research methods. It also draws a significant amount of discussions from primary data sources and secondary literature (Figure 7.2). Several important are of discussions in this study (e.g. community radio, print media) are very brief, and are not empirically supported. The study provides solid structural analyses of television ownership, marketization techniques and their impact on the production of journalism, but it falls short in delivering any textual analysis of television news. Besides, the issues of representation of cultural politics and audience reception are nearly absent from the study. Also, the study narrows the discussion of media democratization to media policy reform.
While the study brought in frequent examples from regional and global perspectives, it did not offer a coherent promise for a comparative media analysis. A cross-media and cross-national comparative regional analysis could place Bangladesh in the broader scope of comparative South Asian media studies. Maybe this is where the next study could begin addressing the broader issues of global power shifts and the regional impact of BRICS media systems. Another limitation of this study that it does not provide any significant insight on the communicative prospect of the rural populace for cultural democratization, especially through horizontal public communication practices, such as folk culture. But I recognize the importance of folk culture as a traditional platform for democratic and grassroots participation.192

---

192 The folk culture in Bangladesh reflects the rituals and seasonal rhythms of rural life. This includes a range of historical transmedia storytelling techniques that transcends generations and geographies. Folk culture in Bangladesh encompasses a wide category of materials, performance, and functions, such as live music, dance, poetry, pottery, painting, quilting, drama, folk games, as well as mass celebration of cultural events such as harvest festival (nobanno), first day of Bengali calendar (Boishakhi), which are celebrated and enjoyed by people of all wax. Despite the heavy trends of urbanization, globalization, and marketization, folk communities and practice of folk culture in rural areas remain strongly resilient without surrendering itself entirely to the global chain of commodification. Although a significant representation of folk culture is visible in mass media, but it is getting increasingly commodified through branded programming, corporate sponsorship, and celebrity culture. Besides, television media, both state-owned and private channels fail to cover the depth of varieties and festivities of folk cultures in rural areas due to its urban-centric and middle
Notwithstanding these limitations, the study is successful in achieving its key objective, i.e. examining the impacts of postcolonial transformations and neoliberal globalization on television ownership, journalism, and policymaking. As the study highlights in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, the location of the country in the world-system (core, semi-periphery, periphery), as well as integration to global capitalist production system is important for understanding the origin of media. These chapters also accentuate that class-inequalities and social struggles are largely results of internal class-politics as well as external integration to global capitalism. The study historicizes how the country went through traumatic political turmoil in the postcolonial phase with deepening its socio-economic crises. As elaborated in Chapters 1 and 2, throughout the colonial and postcolonial era, mass media were an inseparable part of the socio-economic inequalities including marginalizing the contributions of women and lower income strata of the population. Facing even more adverse situations after its independence, Bangladesh renewed its class restructuration under despotic regimes, and widened the political divisions in terms of national identity. This division still dictates the political struggles in the democratic era, and is reflected further in the licensing of television channels (Chapter 4), as well as in the broadcast policymaking processes (Chapter 6). In the post-authoritarian era internal projects of neoliberal market-orientation and external pressures of integration with global production mechanisms both played essential roles in expanding the media industry in general, while political affiliations and class relations continue to facilitate the structural transformations of the television industry. This is evident in the discussion of integration of television into local, regional and transnational flow of capital in Chapter 2, 3, and 4. These chapters also suggest that in the era of neoliberal globalization the television media has emerged as an influential political medium in Bangladesh. The power of this media is constantly being negotiated by national, regional as well as global forces.

The historical account of origin of mass media in the broader political context of colonial-subcontinent as well as the examples of contemporary scenes of state-administered broadcasting and growth of private television industries in India and Pakistan signify the location of the development of media in Bangladesh in regional contexts. Such contextualization enables this study to contribute to make the regional class oriented news production. As a result, the communicative capacities of the millions of rural populations remain under the radar of mainstream and even alternative media in Bangladesh.
part of the scholarship more inclusive and more relevant to other countries. The analysis of the regional context of the study can be useful and replicable to understand the regional dynamics in the Middle East and Northern Africa, Latina America, as well as South-east and East Asian regions.

The findings in general contribute to the theoretical and empirical understanding of the political nature of Bangladesh as a nation-state in the postcolonial phase and in the light of its neoliberal transformations. It shows that Bangladesh has evolved from a colonial to postcolonial, and then from authoritarian to democratic political regime — while its contemporary neoliberal transformations of communication created the ground for a symbiosis between political instrumentalization and global capitalism. The study identified *político-commercial nexus* as a conceptual category as well as an analytical unit and situated it within the broad theoretical spectrum of CPEC approach and the critique of global capitalism. The discussions sufficiently evince that economic globalization has not weakened the power of the nation-state, but on the contrary the state itself has morphed into an integrator of local capital with private entities. Chapter 3, 4, and 5 overarch this key element from the view point of television industry and prove that translocalized commodification of TV programs is providing legitimation of symbolic power of the market elites in collaboration with political rulers, which is symptomatic of integration of national media power to global capitalism. Interestingly, the private television channels rely heavily on transnational advertisements and follow the structural logic of commodification, but at the same time, the industry also rejects foreign ownership to confine the accumulation of surplus to local political and business elites.

Another cumulative finding of this study is that it refutes the assumption that democratic political rule makes the media system more democratic. Chapter 2, 3, and 4 address issues of media ownership and the growth of media in Bangladesh since the colonial era. It shows that the growth of the media platforms is cemented by an increasing political and corporate concentration, and its profuse nature of engaging audiences do not necessarily indicate the democratizing potential of the media. It rather attests to a tectonic shift of control from the state to private hands, in which political and commercial concentration are replacing old forms of authoritarianism with political instrumentalization and market-orientation. It appears from the surface that the television industry in Bangladesh is flourishing as a private industry. In practice, it is merely a politicization of private entities, as well as privatization of political powers. The licensing
of television is strictly controlled, and it is insulated from outside intervention. A critical review of the television ownership and production of journalism indicate that new mechanisms of control and self-censorship are in place and are well entrenched.

The most common problem between private television channels and state broadcasting industry is the nature of ownership. On the one hand, the ownership of private television is strictly managed and dominated by a coalition or handful of political leaders and their allied commercial elites, which indicates the power of a hegemonic politico-commercial nexus. The impact of alliances between politicians and business owners on television journalism is often subtle and sometimes direct. It forces journalists to exercise self-censorship, and it buries investigative reporting against the political and commercial interests of the owners. On the other hand, the ownership of publicly funded broadcasters is historically and tightly controlled by the government bureaucrats, rendering them incapable of performing their public service role to the fullest potential. State broadcasters thus need complete overhauls, both in terms of policy and institutions, to function as proper independent public media organizations.

The second most worrisome area of television journalism involves the funding model and a lack of any clear policy directions in this regard. Advertising is crucial for the survival of broadcasters. However, as several media scholars have noted, besides airing more and more advertisements during primetime in order to maximize their profit, private television channels are increasingly leaning toward “corporate branding,” which refers to an exclusive practice of branding titles, time slots and screen space of news and other television programs to premium advertisers or sponsors. The core lesson is that the commercialization of news poses a threat to journalistic practices similar to that once sanctioned by authoritarian regimes, thus the potential of the television-mediated public sphere in democratic governance is being destroyed. Journalists cannot go against their premium advertisers; thus, the ideological basis of news selection and production remains mainly market-biased instead of oriented towards the public interest. The commodification of television news through “corporate-branding” and “media-advertiser joint-ventures” legitimizes the symbolic power of local and transnational market forces in collaboration with the political elites. It also contributes to depoliticization of serious debates. Television channels provide excessive soundbites by political figures to grab the attention of citizens; however, the uncritical nature of political news analysis depoliticizes the public’s awareness of class politics.
The third common area of concern is the hierarchical structure, repressive gatekeeping and exploitative working conditions in the television industry that paralyzes its journalistic autonomy. Chapters 3 and 6 illuminate that wage works as a means of control and subordination. While journalism has become a well-paid profession for some higher-ranking journalists, for the bottom-liners it remains a highly unstable and low-income occupation, which makes them vulnerable to political and economic influences. But there is no wage board or labor policy for this industry. Television channels decide their own scale. As a result, the income gap among staff is staggering. Despite a quantitative proliferation of media outlets, journalism remains an uncertain and hazardous occupation for most. There is also a gendered division of labor in the media production assembly line both in private television and the state-broadcaster. The social relations of the overall journalism occupation reflect a persistent patriarchal hierarchy. TV channels simply renew this tradition, as the assembly line of news production is largely male-dominated. In addition, a rigid hierarchy and discriminatory hiring process turns BTV into a bureaucratic media institution incapable of adjusting its organizational structure to meet the challenge of dynamic news-production strategies.

Chapter 6 reveals a core challenge to media democracy in Bangladesh which impacts all media. The state serves both as a prerequisite and a threat to democratic policymaking—a paradox that marks the limit of media democratization in a non-Western context. To democratize the media industry, first we have to democratize policymaking and policy-reform processes and align it with broader movements of resistance against social and political inequalities of power. It shows that with the introduction of a multi-stakeholder approach, the media policy-making processes in Bangladesh have apparently become more inclusive and dynamic. However, the policymaking core is influenced by the same politico-commercial nexus who also owns and leads the private television industry. As a result, some of the core outcomes of the National Broadcast Policy 2014 are compromised. Further to this, the general public was not considered as a stakeholder in policymaking, therefore multi-stakeholderism in this context offers merely an illusion of participation rather than an actual shift in policymaking. Grounded in this reality, formulating new policies or reforming existing media policies can do very little to make the media system more plural and inclusive, given that the problems are deeply rooted in divisive political practices and unequal social relations that were inherited from the colonial period and extended in the postcolonial era.
The lack of grassroots participation in the policy-making process also reveals a sheer absence of the public voice in the policy documents. Compared to broadcast policymaking, the Community Radio Policy 2008 was more open and provided opportunities of consultation, but ironically, the process excluded a most vital stakeholder, the grassroots. These findings suggest that a pursuit for any freestanding policy reform is not adequate to resist the threat of the unaccountable power of the politico-commercial nexus in Bangladesh. Media policy reform, therefore, should be taken as an immanent agenda for democratizing communications while keeping progressive social change as a long-term goal. However, also keeping in mind that there is a lack of any organized form of policy reform activism in Bangladesh. There is almost no visible collaboration among scholars, activists and policymakers. In fact, such culture is nearly absent in South Asia. The study itself serves a purpose to contribute to the creation of a movement against hypercommercialized private media hegemony.

To conclude the dissertation, I must acknowledge that television journalism in Bangladesh is not an utter failure operating in an unrelentingly bleak mediascape as it may appear by looking at its ownership and licensing processes (Chapter 4). Chapters 3 and 5 indicate that television reporters and producers, albeit modest in capacity, do have the agency to negotiate against the incumbent party-politics and the global culture of consumerism; in the same way the nation-state has the “relative autonomy” to negotiate the terms of integration with the global capital (i.e. restricting foreign ownership while accepting transnational advertising). One minor but noticeable example of such agency is an in-depth coverage, by Ekattor Television, of mass protests to the government’s decision to construct a 1320-megawatt coal-based thermal power plant in Rampal, adjacent to the largest mangrove forest in the world and an UNESCO World Heritage site, Sundarban, threatening its unique natural habitat. Despite the fact that the Ekattor Television is licensed by the current Awami League-led government and managed by an ATCO executive, the channel was able to produce a long documentary (Amin, 2014, July 11), featuring the “long march” (a mass trek) performed by a coalition of leftist academics, students, and grassroots activists. Such powerful coverage that defies the logic of political affiliation or market-orientation are not extremely rare.

193 Its Managing Director Mozammel Haque Babu, is a pro-Awami League journalist and son-in-law of a member of parliament. He also holds the Senior Vice President position at ATCO. See, p. 119.
There is also a considerable visibility of critical environmental reporting in various television channels, even in those that are owned by conglomerates (e.g. Independent) (Screenshot 7.2). Notwithstanding my critique of NTV’s complicity with the politico-commercial nexus under the leadership of Mossaddaq Ali Falu, there are some exceptional and commendable efforts by NTV reporters (e.g. Screenshot 7.1) to bring up the issues of struggles, pains, and sufferings of socially marginalized groups (e.g. social and structural discriminations against the transgender population) that no corporate-brander would find attractive. A longitudinal discourse analysis will benefit the future researchers to bring in such evidences from heterogeneous, counter-trends of reporting that exist within the mainstream, homogenous, and market-oriented trends of journalism.

Screenshot 7.1. An Example of Award Winning Reporting on Transgender Issues

194 Interview with Arafat Siddique, Senior Report, NTV, 22 Dec 2017 (by telephone). In his report, Arafat Siddique emphasizes that transgender people in Bangladesh faces severe social discriminations, and they are deprived of property inheritance, voting right, and social services due to the state’s inadequate efforts to ensure the rights of transgender people as third gender citizens.
Screenshot 7.2.  Example of a Report on Industrial Pollution in Dhaka City and its Impact on Child Health

Screenshot 7.3.  Example of a Reputed Agricultural Program in Channel i: Hridoye Mathi O Manush
While the majority television channels are obsessed with and profit from urban beat-reporting, more specifically Dhaka-centric reporting, there are exceptional programs both in the state-owned and private television channels that allow regional or rural voices to be heard. One example of a program that goes against the overwhelmingly Dhaka-centric approach is a long-running TV show, Hridoye Mathi O Manush (Channel i), hosted by Shykh Seraj that claims to take the debate to the farmers, report their concerns, bring them news and information, and campaign on issues in their favor (Screenshot 7.3). Another exceptional program of Channel i was “Bangladesh Sanglap” (2005-2015), co-hosted with BBC Media Action, a dialogue talk show, that enabled Bangladeshis from all walks of life to question their political leaders on governance, corruption, and accountability issues, frequently going outside Dhaka city. The “emulation effect” of such program brings the rural back to the urban.

Screenshot 7.4. BBC Bangladesh Sanglap - A Popular Dialogue Talk Show
Image retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/where-we-work/asia/bangladesh/sanglap

---

195 The original program, Mathi O Manush (Soil and Men), was first aired in 1980, and was hosted by Shykh Seraj for 14 years at BTV, the state-broadcaster. As the Director and Head of News at Channel i, he now hosts a similar program under a different name; Hridoye Mathi O Manush (The Heart of Soil and Men) (see, BBC Media Action, 2012, p. 10-11). Interview with Shykh Seraj, Director & Head of News, Channel-i, 7 Dec 2013, Dhaka.

196 Sanjib Saha, who has been working in BBC Media Action for more than a decade, informs that programs like Bangladesh Sanglap “empowers the existing local media by subsidizing standard of the quality of the content and the format of public dialogues”. Interview with Sanjib Saha, Head of Research, BBC Media Action, Dhaka. January 6, 2014.
How to explain such contradiction of public role of journalists in a corporate television? New areas of audience commodification? Sublating the subalterns to the current of hegemonic nationalism? Or an instant of subversion? Such anomalous behaviour of television inspires us to acknowledge the leverage for change that exist within the realm of journalism. It also forces us to reckon with the alternative forms and possibilities for democratic communications that thrive within and beyond the use of mass media for social change. This is also where the postcolonial agency and spaces of disruptions against the domination of the politico-commercial nexus lie. It reminds us that Bangladesh has a persistent political culture of mass movements against the most powerful and repressive actors (e.g. 1952 language movement, 1969 mass unrest against Pakistani military junta, 1971 war of independence, and 1990 uprising against dictatorship). The assassination of Sheikh Mujib, the subsequent neoliberal restructuration, alongside concentration of political powers, may have weakened the radical possibilities for a socialist revolution, but the seeds of mass resistance remain intact in the architecture of the DNA of the nation-state, and they are ready to be revived when there is a national crisis. The Shahbag Movement 2013 provided a glimpse of such revival, so did the rural-indigenous resistance against Phulbari open-pit coal mine project throughout 2006 to 2014 that ultimately forced the Asia Energy Corp. to leave the country. In both cases, horizontal networks of communications and folk culture (e.g. music, demonstrations, long march, slogans) and alternative forms of media (blogs, social media, online news media) contributed to the success of the movements.

The call for alternative media in Bangladesh is not new. The limitations of mainstream press led to a search for an alternative model of communication that can engage grassroots in the broader development processes, such as community radio, mobile phone, utilization of Internet-based rural information centers, and especially folk media (Rahman, 2007b, 2012b). In addition to these, in Fahmidul Haq’s evaluation, three important factors can open up opportunities for media democratization, such as, increasing media literacy, more proliferation of independent and alternative blog sites and online news media, and creating awareness campaign against the wrongdoing of political and commercial media.197 With all these, it seems, Bangladesh still has a good chance to let its alternative media to form a sizeable momentum for public mobilization.

---

197 Interview with Fahmidul Haq, Professor, University of Dhaka, 18 June 2014, Dhaka.
References

Books, Journal Articles, and Research Works


News, Surveys, and Online Sources


## Appendix A:

### List of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name (not according to order)</th>
<th>Position/Designation</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sourov Panday</td>
<td>Producer, News</td>
<td>Maasranga Television</td>
<td>21 Nov 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sarwar Sumon</td>
<td>Staff Reporter</td>
<td>ETV</td>
<td>25 Nov 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gazi Shariful Islam</td>
<td>Assistant Chief (Planning)</td>
<td>Ministry of Information</td>
<td>17 June 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>S. M. Haroon-or-Rashid</td>
<td>Additional Secretary (Currently Director General of BTV)</td>
<td>Ministry of Information</td>
<td>17 June 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Md. Akhtaruzzaman Talukder</td>
<td>Senior Assistant Secretary, TV-2</td>
<td>Ministry of Information</td>
<td>17 June 2014, and 4 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tushar Abdullah</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Somoy Television</td>
<td>17 June 2014, and 27 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Atikur Rahman Tamal</td>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td>Somoy Television</td>
<td>17 June 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Nyma Nargis</td>
<td>Program Officer</td>
<td>UNESCO Bangladesh</td>
<td>19 June 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dr. Fahmidul Haq</td>
<td>Associate Professor, Mass Communication and Journalism</td>
<td>University of Dhaka</td>
<td>18 June 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dr. Abu Jafar Md. Shafiu Alam Bhuiyan</td>
<td>Professor, Television, Film and Photography; Member of National Broadcast Policy 2014 committee</td>
<td>University of Dhaka</td>
<td>19 June 2014, and Jan 4, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>S. M. Shameem Reza</td>
<td>Associate Professor, Mass Communication and Journalism</td>
<td>University of Dhaka</td>
<td>19 June 2014, and 26 Oct 2017 (by telephone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Hasanul Haq Inu, MP</td>
<td>Honorable Minister</td>
<td>Ministry of Information</td>
<td>24 Dec 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Fakhrul Islam</td>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td>Daily Prothom Alo</td>
<td>27, 28 Nov 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Jannatul Bakea Keka</td>
<td>Special Correspondent</td>
<td>Channel-i</td>
<td>27 Nov 2013, 3 Dec 2013, and 4 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Shykh Seraj</td>
<td>Founder Director &amp; Head of News, and Member of National Broadcast Policy 2014 committee</td>
<td>Impress Telefilm Limited/ Channel-i</td>
<td>7 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name (not according to order)</td>
<td>Position/Designation</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul</td>
<td>Head of News, Member of National Broadcast Policy 2014 committee</td>
<td>Boishakhi Television</td>
<td>8 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Mir Masrur Zaman</td>
<td>News Editor</td>
<td>Channel-i</td>
<td>9 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Ebne Hasan Khan</td>
<td>Director, Sales &amp; Marketing</td>
<td>Channel-i</td>
<td>9 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Zakaria Mukta</td>
<td>News Editor</td>
<td>Somoy Television</td>
<td>30 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Abdullah Al Mamun</td>
<td>Producer, News</td>
<td>Bangladesh Television</td>
<td>30 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Gopal Chandra Deb</td>
<td>Chief News Editor</td>
<td>Bangladesh Television</td>
<td>30 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Diner Sultana</td>
<td>Producer, News</td>
<td>Bangladesh Television</td>
<td>30 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Zahidul Islam</td>
<td>Executive Producer, News</td>
<td>Bangladesh Television</td>
<td>30 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Ashif Rahman</td>
<td>Senior Producer, News</td>
<td>Bangladesh Television</td>
<td>30 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Khaled Muhiuddin</td>
<td>Executive Editor &amp; Head of News</td>
<td>Independent Television</td>
<td>7 Jan 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Zillur Rahman</td>
<td>Talk Show Host (Tritio Matra)</td>
<td>Channel-i</td>
<td>7 Jan 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Dr. Gitiara Nasreen</td>
<td>Professor, Mass Communication and Journalism</td>
<td>University of Dhaka</td>
<td>30 Oct 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Monirul Islam</td>
<td>Senior Technical Store Executive</td>
<td>Somoy Television</td>
<td>28 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Bijon Kumar Baishya</td>
<td>Registrar</td>
<td>BTV</td>
<td>30 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Dr. Ranjit Kumar Biswas</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Ministry of Cultural Affairs</td>
<td>4 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Abul Hasan</td>
<td>Joint Secretary (Broadcast)</td>
<td>Ministry of Information</td>
<td>3 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Sanjib Saha</td>
<td>(former) Head of Research</td>
<td>BBC Media in Action</td>
<td>6 Han 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Pramathesh Shil</td>
<td>Senior Correspondent</td>
<td>NTV</td>
<td>21 Oct 2017 (by telephone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Tofaeful Ahmad</td>
<td>Senior Reporter</td>
<td>Maasranga Television</td>
<td>30 Oct 2017 (by telephone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Salim Reza Newton</td>
<td>Professor, Mass Communication and Journalism</td>
<td>University of Rajshahi</td>
<td>31 Oct 2017 (by telephone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Arafat Siddique</td>
<td>Senior Reporter</td>
<td>NTV</td>
<td>22 Dec 2017 (by telephone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td></td>
<td>Somoy Television</td>
<td>17 June 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td></td>
<td>ETV</td>
<td>25 Nov 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td></td>
<td>Channel-i</td>
<td>9 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B:

Sample ‘No Objection Certificate’ aka ‘the License’ of a Private Television Channel Television (in Bangla)
Note: Sample ‘No Objection Certificate’ aka ‘the License’ of a Private Television Channel Television. The No Objection Certificate (NOC) is usually a one-page document that permits a company to operate a television channel in Bangladesh and describes the terms and conditions of broadcasting (in Bangla). This document is known as “the license” in Bangladesh. A general television channel needs NOC for both general entertainment programming and news and current affairs programming. Only the Ministry of Information can provide the No Objection Certificate. The above documents show NOC provided to Millennium TV (Millennium Multimedia Limited), dated November 24, 2013. File number of this document is removed to protect sensitive administrative information.

Appendix C:

Sample Application Form for Satellite Television

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC)

Application Form for License of Radio Communication Apparatus

1. Name of Applicant: ________________________________________________________________

2. Present Postal Address: __________________________________________________________

3. Name of Contact Person: ___________________________ Designation ___________________
   Mobile: ___________________ Telephone: __________ Fax: ___________ E-mail: ___________

4. Nationality: ___________________________________________________________________

5. Name and Address of Local Agent: _______________________________________________

6. Purpose of License: ______________________________________________________________

7. If Frequency Allocated Please Mention: ___________________________________________

8. Equipment information, Class of station (Please tick): Fixed/Base/Repeater/Land Mobile/Walkie-Talkie/ Satellite/Phone/SNG/DSNG/TerrestrialTV/VSAT/Amateur Paging/Trunking/SST/ISM/Data / Broadband/ Broadcast/Radar/Telemetry/Cordless/Other (indicate)_____________________________________

9. Equipment Information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SI No</th>
<th>Class of Station</th>
<th>Type/Model of TxRx with Manufacturer Name</th>
<th>No of Sets</th>
<th>Frequency Range</th>
<th>Power out put, W, Mw, dbm</th>
<th>Class of emission</th>
<th>Modulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>From</td>
<td>To</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. Equipment Information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SI No</th>
<th>Simplex /Duplex</th>
<th>XTL/Synthesized</th>
<th>Source of Power, Bt/Gen</th>
<th>B/W or Channel Spacing</th>
<th>TX/RX Separation</th>
<th>Type of Antenna</th>
<th>Antenna Polarization V/H</th>
<th>Antenna gain (dBi)</th>
<th>Height of Antenna from Sea level</th>
<th>Minimum code speed for Amateur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Equipment Information: (use this page as additional if required)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SI No</th>
<th>Exact location of the station with postal address</th>
<th>Class of Station</th>
<th>Latitude</th>
<th>Longitude</th>
<th>Azimuth for Point to point Link</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>D M S</td>
<td>D M S</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PTO
12. Terms and Conditions for use of wireless equipment in the People’s Republic of Bangladesh:

i. A Log Book for each equipment must be maintained regularly.

ii. The competent Authority shall physically inspect the said equipment time to time.

iii. On demand of the Competent Authority the station may be closed down at any time.

iv. The licenses of the wireless equipments are not transferable.

v. On expiry of the scheduled works the license must be returned to the competent Authority.

vi. Export and import of the wireless equipment is strictly prohibited without prior permission of the authority.

vii. A government levy is not chargeable for unserviceable wireless set if sealed by the competent authority.

viii. Telecommunication facilities will be disconnected for non-payment of Govt. dues.

ix. Charges on frequency, power output, station & License fees to be paid as per rate list in favor of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

13. Note:

a) Appropriate Network plan to be submitted

b) Technical Catalogue to be submitted

c) Period for which license is required (for foreigner)

d) Amateur Radio License (Local): Passport or Police Verification report to be submitted

e) Amateur Radio License (Foreigner): Photocopy of existing Amateur License, Passport & Visa to be submitted.

f) Prior Permission to be required for any coding or cipher equipment to be used.

g) Name of wireless equipment if installed earlier, please state frequency, Power output & number of sets.

h) Photo Copy of up to date Vendor License

i) Class of station means:

Fixed/Base/Repeater/LandMobile/Walki-Talki/Satetite/Phone/SNG/DSNG/TerrestrialTV/VSAT/Amateur/Paging/Trunking/SST/ISM/Data/Broadband/Broadcast/Radar/ Telemetry/Cordless/Others (indicate)..........................

14. Declaration: I under take to observe the conditions of license & hereby certify that the apparatus herein described and will be worked in accordance with provision of license, I further declare that all information’s mentioned are true and correct. If any statement kept concealed, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) reserves the right to seize the wireless equipment.

..........................................................

Signature of the applicant with seal & date

For official use

..........................................................

Analized by (seal)

..........................................................

Checked & corrected by (seal)

..........................................................

Countersigned by (seal)

Appendix D:

Meeting Notice to the Members of the National Broadcast Policy 2014 Committee (in Bangla)

Note: Meeting Notice (document date: July 30, 2013; meeting date: Aug 5, 2013) showing the names and affiliations of the members of the National Broadcast Policy 2014 Committee. The private address of a member and the file number of this document are removed to protect sensitive private and administrative information. Source: Field visit. The Ministry of Information, Section TV 2, The Secretariat. Dhaka. 17 June 2014. See, discussion in Chapter 6.
## Appendix E:

### Examples of Donor Agency Supported Media Initiatives on Public Issues in Bangladesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Donor Agency</th>
<th>Local Partner(s)</th>
<th>Agenda</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Grant amount</th>
<th>Media Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Council, UK</td>
<td>Pathshala South Asian Media Academy, Drik</td>
<td>Role of the media in good governance</td>
<td>Management training skills</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Photography, Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Transparency International Bangladesh, BBC Media Action</td>
<td>Promoting public dialogue on governance, corruption, accountability issues across the public sectors</td>
<td>Funding, Guidance</td>
<td>$12 million for 2009-2010</td>
<td>Television (Bangladesh Sanglap), Interactive Website (BBC Janala), Mobile, Social media, Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)</td>
<td>Citizens Voice for Improved Local Public Services, Local Government, World Bank, Transparency International</td>
<td>Employment and income generation, and local governance</td>
<td>Funding a range of media and networking projects</td>
<td>$25.3 million for 2011</td>
<td>Radio, Television, Interactive Website (Amader Sthaniyo Sarkar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)</td>
<td>Access to Information (A2i) project, Prime Minister’s Office (PMO)</td>
<td>Strengthening participatory local governance through e-enabled services</td>
<td>Logistic and funding support, Training</td>
<td>$416,000</td>
<td>Online interactive access to information, Rural information center, Television (HDTV), Social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)</td>
<td>Centre for Development Communication (CDC), Bangladesh Centre for Development Journalism and Communication (BCDJC), Ministry of Information, Institute of Communication Studies (ICS)</td>
<td>Media capacity building, aiding the establishment of media-friendly laws, and facilitating equitable access to information and knowledge</td>
<td>Media capacity Building, Support for building community radio, Support National Broadcast Policy 2013 review</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Policy reports, Publications (i.e. Election Reporting Handbook), Public Forums (Media Nagorik Forum), Community Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ethical reporting on children</td>
<td>Training of journalists and the creation of links with media establishments</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Agency for International Development (USAID)</td>
<td>Promoting Governance, Accountability, Transparency and Integrity (PROGATI) Programme, Institute of Governance Studies, BRAC University; and Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI)</td>
<td>Strengthening institutions to address corruption and increase accountability</td>
<td>Establishing a media center for investigative reporting (one of the goals), Training and networking</td>
<td>$18.2 million for 2007-2011</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on BBC Media Action (2012) survey. See, section ‘Donor responses and media support’ for extended information in this regard. Note: The information presented in this table might have changed by December 2017.