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The Western Way: Democracy and the Media Assistance Model

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Essay:

The Western Way?

Democracy and the Media Assistance Model

Daire Higgins

Abstract: International media assistance took off during a time where the ideological extremes of USA vs. USSR were set to disappear. Following the Cold War, international relations focused on democracy building, and nurturing independent media was embraced as a key part of this strategy. Fukayama called it the 'End of History', the fact that all other ideologies had fallen and Western style democracy was set to become the one common ideology. The US and UK led the way in media assistance, with their liberal ideas of a free press, bolstered by free market capitalism. America was the superpower, and forged the way around the globe with its beacon of democracy. Under that guiding light they would bring truth, accuracy, freedom of expression and independent reporting to the countries which had so long lived under the shadow of communism, or authoritarian media systems. This is what propelled and justified American foreign policy, and their media assistance, for many years. Much work was thus carried out in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet satellites, but many now question the impact and legacy of these projects. When the US and UK spoke of media assistance they seemed to mean 'free market'. These days, the 'democracy promoters' focus has turned more to Africa and the Middle East. The ideology is apparently the same: to help establish and support democracy with a stronger and more independent media. But with Western economies, and their media systems, in crisis, the relevance of this media assistance model is questioned. This essay looks at the history of media assistance and the ongoing debate on the impact of media assistance over the long term, its motives and the new balance of power appearing in international media development.

Keywords: Media Assistance, Democracy, Ideology, Geopolitics, Eastern Europe, Africa, China, Journalism, Development

Media Assistance and Democracy Promotion

International media assistance grew in the period after the Second World War. The US government joined with European agencies and other institutions in the reconstruction of Europe which included efforts to re-establish a viable news media following the defeat of Nazism:

“The machinery of fascist propaganda was dismantled, and new broadcast media were instructed in independent news production. Newspapers were created with mixed editorial boards, free of party control. These efforts were especially effective in Germany, where a vibrant and politically diverse media culture flowered within a decade of the Nazis’ defeat” (Kaplan, 2012: 12).

Independent media was understood to be integral for the development of democracy. Media assistance efforts were directed towards the ideal of a Fourth Estate which, “when allowed financial and editorial independence”, would hold state authorities accountable and nurture democracy by encouraging an “open but respectful exchange of ideas and opinions” (Kumar, 2006: 1).

The ideology of media assistance was that of a Western, liberal, press “to lay the foundation for the emergence and consolidation of a media sector free of state editorial or financial control, relying on advertising and sales for its survival” (ibid). Media assistance was expected to produce better journalists, better media organisations, and better media systems. And these media systems were supposed to contribute to the development of democracy.

Media assistance continued throughout the Cold War, and was supported by both the US and the Soviet Union in their different spheres of influence. Miller (2009: 12) claimed that media assistance during the Cold War was embedded in theories of modernisation that guided foreign aid generally and was “unavoidably influenced by the political self-interests of North America and Western Europe, which were then engaged in a ‘war of ideas’ with the USSR” (ibid: 5). The media missionaries and funders were aware of medias’ central role in political and social control.

The fall of the Berlin wall, according to Francis Fukuyama, signalled the ‘End of History’ as his famous work was titled. It argued that western liberal democracy was the end point of humanity's sociocultural evolution and the final form of human government: “The triumph of the West, of the Western idea, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism” (Fukuyama, 1989: 1).

In his 1991 book *The Third Wave of Democratisation* Samuel Huntington argued that the widespread Western belief in the universality of the West's values and political systems was naïve and that continued insistence on democratisation and such ‘universal’ norms would only antagonise other civilisations. Huntington warned about the potentially disastrous effects of “an arrogant and naive democratic imperialism” and insisted that promoting democracy and modernisation abroad “means more war, not less” (Kurtz, 2002). Fukuyama's celebration of liberal democracy was criticised also by Jacques Derrida who felt that:

“At a time when some have the audacity to neo-evangelise in the name of the ideal of a liberal democracy that has finally realised itself as the ideal of human history: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity” (Derrida, 1994: 106).

In fact, despite Fukayama’s optimism, since the fall of the Soviet Union the process of global democratisation has seemingly slowed down. Since then, the state of freedom has been situated somewhere between stagnation and decline.

“Political crises and malaise in east central Europe have led to disappointment and questioning of the strength of the region's democratic transition. ... In the developed West, a precipitous decline in political participation, weaknesses in the functioning of government and security-related curbs on civil liberties are having a corrosive effect on some long-established democracies” (Economist, 2008: 3).

Headlines announcing the victory of democracy have given way to news that “citizens in some countries with poor development records show a willingness to sacrifice some of their freedoms for the possibility of better economic development” (Carothers, 2006: 56). So, what enthusiasts were calling ‘the worldwide democratic revolution’ has cooled considerably. Last year Freedom in the World, a yearly index of global civil liberties and political rights, declined for the eighth consecutive year (Puddington, 2014). Democracy no longer enjoys an unchallenged place on the international scene as the only political system viewed as successful and credible. The question is now whether the United States, and the West, should rethink their approach and commitment to democracy promotion. And while liberal theorists argue that media liberalisation usually results in democratisation this may not be the trend since 1989.

Media Assistance and Transitions

The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 was a defining moment in media assistance with ramifications for media systems much further away than the immediate soviet satellites. With the huge political changes following its collapse, there was a transformation of media systems in many regions and the trend for many countries was the shift from government control to private ownership. Media change often happened hand in hand with social and political change. In post-Communist Eastern Europe, for example, media freedom was often “the first sign that the old communist system was truly dead and a new, free system had begun” (Curry, 2005: 139).

Much further away, in Africa, there was also widespread liberalisation of media. Without continued Soviet support, many autocratic leaders began to loosen their own grip on their countries’ media. Countries newly separated from the Soviet Bloc, “replaced socialism with a free market and made steps towards multi-party democracy” (Myers, 2014: 6). Many countries introduced legislation, giving local media “the freedom it lacked in previous decades ... after years of muffled

expression” (ibid: 4). Since then almost every country in Sub-Saharan Africa has seen a huge rise in the number and diversity of media outlets.

However, despite optimism regarding media liberalisation, “the feeling that ‘things haven’t come out as they should’ emanates from many studies or essays dedicated to post-communism” (Coman, 2000: 50).

“When the communist world collapsed, the corresponding media model was declared history as well. At first sight, it was fully replaced by the Western model in the same way as society was reorganized according to Western principles. On a closer look, however, western influence seems to be restricted primarily to the market area. The reshaping of the media system into a pluralist and independent Fourth Estate, the transformation of the journalistic community into an autonomous professional group dedicated to a public service ideal and the redefinition of the audience into a group of citizens all failed to occur” (De Smaele, 1999: 1).

Understanding the potential power of media, political elites did their best to bring the press, radio and television under their control, or to “monopolize” the media (Splichal 1994: 107). In Eastern Europe politicians perceived the media “as being a magic wand ... [with] the power to mould and reshape public opinion”, believing that “if they control the media—they should not [have to] worry about what people think” (Goban-Klas, 1994: 244).

Africa’s media liberalisation also resulted in media ownership by a few powerful individuals, most often with political allegiances, and providing less than quality reporting for audiences who were once excited by what liberalisation of the market might mean for public debate.

From the perspective of Western donors, journalism in the transitioning countries could become like the West’s. This achievement was central to “fashioning a new, post-Cold War world order central to which would be the widespread adoption of Western democracy” (Miller, 2009: 4).

“Media assistance donors – project originators, designers and funders – conceive of their work in ideal terms as a kind of supra-political, even altruistic technology transfer. Exporting Western journalism as a means of establishing democracy, from this point of view, is hardly contentious; it is, instead, a gift, from the developed West to the ‘transitional’ or developing Rest. [...] Journalism training in countries donors judge to be in transition to democracy–post-communist, post-colonial, post-autocratic, post-conflict, less developed–is very much a Western project. Sometimes couched in the language of universal human rights, such as freedom of expression the export of Western press practices raises fundamental questions that donors seem rarely to address.” (Miller, 2009: 2-5)

The most basic, of course, is whether westernised news media actually function “as a building block for the future stable set of democratic institutions” (Price, 2002: 51). What we have seen is that media liberalisation does not necessarily mean greater democracy, and this applies to Africa as much as it does to post-communist Europe.

This brings us back to the model. Many scholars suggest that a Western-like ideology cannot be simply transplanted to Eastern Europe and other developing countries because of huge cultural and ideological differences (De Smaele, 1999; La May, 2001). William Orme is “sceptical of the causality arguments that are often laid out with regard to media and development”, and referred to China’s robust economic growth, “the fastest in human history, manifestly without a free press...” (BBC WST, 2009: 9).

In fact countries like China are breaking the old models of media freedom and development. “The majority of scholars appear to work with a more or less unrevised set of ideas inherited from the depths of the Cold War, whose contemporary relevance is open to serious questioning” (Sparks, 2001: 2). Those ideas came from a time when opposite ideologies were pitted against each other and justified any foreign policy activities.

A number of scholars have also demonstrated that the activities of ‘democracy promoting’ organisations are usually strongly tied to the interests of transnational capitalism and/or US geo-strategic ambitions (Gills, 2000; Saltman, 2006; Taylor, 2002). This became undisputable in the aftermath of the intrusion into Iraq and the search for the elusive WMD’s. “What is now widely acknowledged is that PR-friendly ‘democracy promoting’ efforts were a central legitimising role for wars”, and “these activities first and foremost satisfy the interests of transnational capitalist elites” (Barker, 2008: 4).

This idea has been taken up by those who question the promotion of democracy, and with it media assistance. Barker wrote how ‘democracy’ has become a legitimising force for US foreign policy “helping fuel the myth that America is a benign and democratic leader of international affairs” (Barker, 2008: 1) and that US-American or British foreign policy is protecting the interests of powerful elites who want to protect the status quo at home and expand their (profitable) interests overseas. Other scholars are also extremely cautious of democracy programs:

“The claim to promote democracy worldwide is one that needs a particularly critical scrutiny... Indeed, there is ample empirical evidence for peoples of the world to be wary and for them to run and duck for cover whenever a stranger greets with offers of democracy, for this has come to mean the privatization of their commons, the erosion of public services, the unleashing of corporate greed through deregulation, and the commodification of just about everything that a human being needs to survive on this planet” (Bauzon, 2005: 27).

Barker claimed that “countries of greater geostrategic value” needed more democratisation, “for example, both Afghanistan and Iraq have roughly the same population but oil rich Iraq received 20 times more American (media) development assistance per year than war-ravaged Afghanistan, one of the poorest nations on earth” (Barker, 2008: 17). In fact, in 1996 President Clinton, possibly with unintentional candour, celebrated the need for more “democracy... particularly in countries of strategic importance to us” (ibid: 1). The same geo-

strategic interests can be seen also in Africa today where China has become a leading donor and a growing presence in the media development field, going hand in hand with increasing investment in the continent.

While globalisation has led to foreign investment in developing nations' media, such investment does not always translate into greater diversity of content and often has the effect of diminishing domestic programming in favour of imported programming.

“Directors of broadcasting stations (in many transitional countries) soon realized that replays of American films, whether or not they had been properly obtained, were far more successful at drawing audiences – especially in a competitive environment – than the production of documentaries or serious drama. A larger audience or more reliance on the market did not, in this sense, magnify contributions to public discourse” (Price and Krug, 2002: 5).

Mihai Coman (2000: 54) believed that “the source of crisis resides in the liberal media system, with its market battles, political struggles, ethical challenges and professional pressures”. And while classic market economic theory argues that competition among media is better for consumers, research in emerging media markets suggests otherwise. “High levels of competition in markets with limited advertising revenues may lead to poorer journalistic performance” (Becker et al. 2009: 1). The newly liberalised media systems have been thrown into “the tyranny of the market” (La May, 2001: 15).

It has been suggested for example that problems within African media exist because of the Western media model. Authors such as Berger (2002), Nyamnjoh (2005) and Shaw (2009), believe that a reason for many of the issues with African media are due to the fact that Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to act according to a neo-liberal paradigm which is not suited to the continent. “The tragedy facing African journalism is that the continent’s journalists have closely imitated the professional norms of the North” (Kasoma, 1996: 95). Kasoma is only one of the many scholars who have expressed discontent with Western influence in African journalism. They felt that Western media practices applied in the African context arguably reinforce neo-colonialism (Banda, 2008), suppress people’s participation (Shaw, 2009) and are generally seen to be at odds with African philosophy (Skjerdal, 2012).

“The African model of journalism lays emphasis on the community (civil society), or communities (civil societies), the Western Liberal model emphasises the individual...This meant that the middle ground position, or objectivity, that is unique to the Western liberal democracy model, was, and still remains, an unpopular option” (Shaw, 2009: 20).

Berger (2002) called for the rethinking of concepts like ‘civil society’ and ‘public sphere’ as understood in the West to reflect the cultural structures of public life expressed in other regions. Even ‘Governance’ and ‘Democracy’ like many political concepts can be understood differently in Africa than elsewhere (Booth, 2011).

Unfortunately this very argument about using Western concepts such as democracy and governance has been used by authoritarian regimes in the region to justify clamping down on freedom of expression and other human rights within their own borders. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has emphasised this universality and indivisibility of rights, including freedom of expression, no matter their cultural interpretation. Despite the nuanced meaning that concepts such as democracy can have in different regions and cultures, this should not be a justification for preventing of rights such as freedom of expression.

This raises the similar issue of how journalism itself does not operate in isolation, but is an integral part of culture, which must take local values and factors into consideration. Zelizer argues that

“despite the prevalence of arguments for journalism’s universal nature, the culture of journalism presupposes that journalistic conventions, routines and practices are dynamic and contingent on situational and historical circumstances” (Zelizer, 2005: 211).

It was felt for example that Western media programs, instead of acknowledging local conditions, decreed that “aspiring journalists in Africa must, like containers, be dewatered of the mud and dirt of culture as tradition and custom, and filled afresh with the tested sparkles of culture as modernity and civilization” (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 3). Nyamnjoh describes this as

“a journalism of mimicry, bandwagonism and self-debasement, where African creativity and originality are crushed by the giant compressors of the One-Best-Way, as the Eurocentric assumptions and indicators of humanity, creativity and reality are universalised with the insensitive arrogance of ignorance and power” (ibid).

John C Merrill (2002: 18) argued the idea that the media elsewhere conform to Western media structures is “not only an arrogant and ethnocentric one but also betrays a stultified, intellectual view of reality. Cultures are different; the values that shore up such cultures are different. Stages of national development are different, Citizens expectations are different”.

The belief that transitioning countries would follow the Anglo-American journalism paradigm has not come true for many reasons: One is that in the United States, the laws relating to freedom of the press, developed over 200 years, have for the most part been respected by power elites and the public. Development in newly democratic nations has lasted only a few decades at most, and the Western ‘liberal’ model of fact-based, impartial journalism competes with other styles of journalism – both old and new – for the public’s attention. These countries are “in permanent flux, simultaneously fighting legacies of the past and searching for successful ways of building up the states based on the rule of law, as well as civil societies” (Lauk, 2005: 16).

To suggest that the media in Africa have followed the same change model as the media in post-communist Europe would be simplifying the process of media assistance and reform. Media development projects, when at their best, take place after rigorous country context and needs analysis, and a review of the political economy of the program countries. Baseline audience research is conducted so that the appropriate media are used to achieve project objectives. In this way each media development project differs from another, and it is impossible to transplant one model from country to country. “The maxim ‘one size does not fit all’” is ideal here (Kumar, 2009). Media assistance takes place in dynamic environments, with different histories, cultures and politics, to suggest the interventions can have the same democratic outcomes would be naive.

So, while liberal theorists argue that media liberalisation usually results in democratisation, since the fall of the Soviet Union the process of global democratisation has seemingly slowed down, or in some cases has been reversed: “Within several regions, there appears to be a worrying trend in which societies that previously boasted robust press freedom are suffering declines” (Karlekar, 2010: 2).

Norris and Zinnbauer (2002) suggested that the globalisation of media sources has not increased the strength of democracies, and in some cases semi-authoritarian regimes have cracked down on media freedoms in an effort to combat the influence of the seemingly ubiquitous foreign media, thus weakening democracy. In the case of Africa, we have seen that

“Introducing media liberalisation whilst simultaneously introducing multi-party politics, in a country context where identity politics play an all-determining role in defining the social contract between state and society, where poverty, deprivation and international marginalisation persists, and where formal democratic institutions are weak or not yet institutionalised the opening up of the radio market to private parties can and has shown to produce undemocratic outcomes in Africa” (Minderhoud, 2009: 1).

At its root, media assistance after the Cold War took place in contrasting political environments and economic contexts. In post-communist Europe there was a ready consumer group, hungry for media products, and a populace that might be able to afford the abundance of media products that the free market brought. In Africa there was also widespread liberalisation, but media assistance took place in an environment where, despite a dynamic media sector, the majority of the consumer populace have extremely limited means to purchase media products and thus support the long term financial viability of media organisations.

For this reason many media outlets are forced to turn to other means of income and support for their survival, ownership generally ends up being by the ruling elites or politicians, and this can very often result in a drop of quality, independence and impartiality of news journalism.

A New Balance

In the West, the crisis of confidence in Western media has created confusion in media assistance. The traditional business model in newspapers and broadcasting in the West no longer seems to be working. Added to this are the pressures from online news sources, a younger audience less interested in traditional journalism, who create and source their own bespoke “news” from social media. As advertising income dwindles for traditional media, the question arises whether promoting this model in the developing world also is the right way forward.

There is also the question of quality – it would be misleading to export this model around the globe without noting that the media in the US and UK today has shortcomings. A decline in media standards has coincided with the growth of large media-based global business conglomerates that may not have concern for journalistic quality.

In reality, many news outlets in any country, East, West, North or South, cannot be held up as examples of quality, impartial and independent journalism. Yes there are leading quality news outlets but the majority are sensational, entertainment or ‘cut and rip’ journalism. If we cannot display high news standards in the West, where we have a supportive ‘enabling environment’ and public support for fact and impartiality, we certainly cannot use it as an example in our media projects elsewhere in the developing world.

And the crisis in journalism in the West is now paired with a loss of confidence in other Western institutions. Support for capitalism has fallen in most countries since 2007 (Pew Global Report, 2012) and media outlets relay statistics on rising global inequalities and the role of banks and corporations in marginalising the majority while accelerating systemic financial risk. More and more questions are being asked about the status of civil liberties in the USA in particular in the aftermath of the Snowden saga. This begs the question of Western democracy promotion and media assistance – is their way really the best way?

While the West is recovering from recession, other regions are taking the reins of economic influence. There are new allegiances appearing which do not include the USA or UK or Europe. In 2009 China overtook the United States as Africa's biggest trade partner.

In a recent Pew Global attitudes report (2012), more people say that China is now the world's leading economic power. The narrative is changing from the dominance of the West, and its capitalist, democratic gospel.

We see this new balance of power in the World Information Order. Many Western countries' news industries are suffering at the hands of harsh economic conditions and technological disruption. “Western news agencies that only recently set the

global agenda are now struggling to survive under hostile market conditions” (Nelson, 2013: 32). US networks have closed many of their foreign bureaus and global broadcasters such as CNN and the BBC are cutting staff and international reporting. International broadcasters, including the Voice of America, the BBC World Service, and Deutsche Welle, are “under increased pressure to defend their services” (ibid).

In this environment other governments are expanding their media outside their borders. China is making increasing and large contributions to media in Africa in recent years. CCTV opened its third international bureau in 2012 in Nairobi, with programming in English, Chinese, and Swahili and oversees dozen bureaus across the region. The Xinhua news agency has opened 20 bureaus on the continent, launched a China African news service, and joined forces with Safaricom to launch a mobile newspaper in Kenya (McKenzie, 2012).

Both China and Russia have been involved in media development since before the fall of the Berlin Wall but their activities in the international media sector are growing in scope again. China has been engaged with media support in some African nations since the 1950s (Yu Shan Wu, 2012). The Soviet Union provided massive amounts of aid for several decades during the Cold War – some \$26 billion in 1986 alone – and is now ‘re-emerging’ as a donor especially in the field of media.

“The push by Russia to influence the media among its near neighbors ... poses a major challenge to the international media development community, which over the past two decades has spent hundreds of millions of dollars trying to help build sustainable and independent media institutions in the former Soviet space.” (Satter, 2014: 5)

China's increasing role in Africa's media is creating ‘a sense of unease’ in the United States which echoes the larger issue about the country's declining influence as a world power and China's rising prominence (Kermeliotis, 2011). China's leaders appreciate that in the post-Cold War era, soft power approaches are replacing the influence of military power. And they know well that China can “not only compete in the international economic market” but also “the international ideological and cultural market” (Nelson, 2013: 17). Rather than use the terms of media assistance and aid, Chinese actors prefer to frame their activities in the media sector as forms of ‘collaboration and exchange’, aimed at encouraging ‘mutual understanding’ and at counterbalancing the negative reporting of both China and Africa in Western media.

China's government regards media assistance the same way it does other forms of assistance: as an instrument of foreign policy, intended to further the aims of both donor and recipient. This may be the same unspoken policy of some Western media aid, but what is different here is the model being promoted. Domestic Chinese news media are far less independent than those in the West, and China's media assistance emphasises cooperation with governments, many of them undemocratic. “A collateral effect is to strengthen the grip of authoritarian

governments on state control of the media in their respective countries” (Farah & Mosher, 2010: 6).

With China becoming Africa’s primary trading partner, and a willing partner for aid, African governments are happy to be the recipients of untied and unrestricted foreign aid. They appreciate the ‘no-strings attached’ form of assistance. For so long beholden to the conditions of Western donors, African leaders – some of them authoritarian – no longer have to take lessons from the West about human rights issues. In fact, China has exhibited a tendency to privilege government actors and these efforts often result in helping authoritarian governments expand control of their local media. “Thus, such support is arguably undermining efforts at media freedom” (Myers, 2009: 21).

There are concerns that, just as Western countries have tried to promote their models in Africa, China will try to export its own, but to date no studies have proved this to be the case (Gagliordone, 2013). However, with it is estimated rank 10th among contributors to direct media assistance providing roughly \$18 million back in 2008 (Myers, 2009) it is certainly a presence of interest again in African media development.

Conclusion

There is much debate on the impact and effectiveness of media assistance. This is naturally tied to the discussion of media’s relationship to democracy, and aid, and whether interventions using either tool are a good thing for a country. The reality of “substantial democratic reversals” (Puddington 2009: 101), both in Africa and elsewhere in the world, frequently challenges media’s assumed positive democratic contribution. Critics argue that a “romanticised” (Temin & Smith 2002: 603) view of media’s democratic role – such as expressed by leading development actors – overlook the many, oft interdependent, challenges countries face in processes of democratisation and development (Minderhoud, 2009: 7).

As noted there are many who question the media assistance model, or whether there is a model at all, and what the legacy of media assistance is. This is very topical at a time when the post-2015 development goals are being formulated and the media development sector is keen to see the inclusion of at least freedom of expression, if not a free media, as part of these goals.

Media development is operating in a very different environment now than during the post-Cold War era. There are new power balances in global politics. And the advent of new media is also having a big impact in how journalism, and media development, is done.

“What donors did twenty years ago, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and dictatorships throughout the world, is unlikely to be appropriate today. Many of the issues, of course,

remain the same – such as how to ensure balanced content from a variety of independent sources – but there are new stakeholders, new technologies, new patterns of access, and new patterns of control.... It follows that the modalities for support to media development and freedom of expression need to be changed and modified” (Puddephatt & Oesterlund, 2012: 5).

Authors like Miller (2009) and Barker (2008) who criticise the hidden agendas of Western media assistance funders are commenting predominantly on the strategies and policies of the US and the UK, but these are not necessarily the only donors. In some African countries they are definitely not the dominant ones. The Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands are very much involved in media development and have a different approach to democracy and media assistance. These donors have different media systems in their home countries, with European countries more aligned to the public service broadcasting model, than the US.

Donors have different reasons for getting involved in media development. As described in a 2009 survey, “China has a very different motive for funding a radio station in Africa from, say, the Netherlands. The former is for influence, commercial self-interest and possibly propaganda. The latter is for the sake of more liberal – some would say ‘enlightened’ – goals” (Myers, 2009: 9). Most of the Western European donors have “well-articulated, rights-based justifications for supporting media development” (ibid).

Certainly though, with reference to dollars contributed, the USA is by far the biggest donor and that is why much of the literature refers to its policies. The United States is the largest national source of funding, at 46 percent of the total (Kaplan, 2012). The model it promotes is undeniably the liberal free market model of the press, but the positive relationship that is argued to exist between a liberalised media environment and democracy may be optimistic.

We know now that the outcome of such a model can be a drop in journalistic standards, and a highly politicised press. Media can “become co-opted by competing (ethnic) political forces in pursuit of protecting vested interests or obtaining political power” and “become a ‘battlefield’ on which ethnic differences and ethnic power struggles are fought” (Minderhoud, 2009: 39).

We have seen in the recent past the failure of Western media to self-regulate and maintain the standards of impartiality and independence it espouses. We see the erosion of the business model of free market media, the liberal model, and a ‘renaissance’ of journalism through new means and new media; You Tube, camera phones, blogging, citizen journalism. Is traditional media assistance as we know it obsolete?

The answer to that is whether there is still a place for a trusted news source, which might involve support other than from advertising revenue and the market. In

other words, “how to pay for content that is important to democracy is one of the most significant dilemmas facing the media, donors and anyone concerned with democracy and human rights” (Puddephatt & Oesterlund, 2012: 5).

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