

The political role of the media in the democratisation of
Malawi:

The case of the *Weekend Nation* from 2002 to 2012

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

This study investigated the political role of the *Weekend Nation* newspaper in the democratisation of Malawi between 2002 and 2012 within the context of its foundational and ownership structures by a politician. Bearing in mind that the newspaper was founded by a politician belonging to the first democratically elected ruling party, the United Democratic Front (UDF), this research sought to examine the impact of media ownership on the political role of the *Weekend Nation*'s journalistic practices in Malawi's democratisation. Between 2002 and 2012, Malawi was governed by three presidents – Bakili Muluzi of the UDF from 1994 to 2004, Bingu wa Mutharika of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) from 2004 to 2012, and Joyce Banda of the People's Party (PP) from 2012 to 2014 – all of whom were hostile to the *Weekend Nation*.

Taking into cognisance the ownership of the *Weekend Nation* by a politician, the critical political economy theory of the media was deemed to be the most appropriate theoretical framework for this study. In media research, the critical political economy theory asserts that owners are able to regulate the output of the media institution either by intervening in the day-to-day operations, or by establishing general goals and understandings and appointing managerial and editorial staff to implement them within the constraints set by the overall allocation of resources. The study employed a qualitative research methodology, in particular in-depth interviews and qualitative content analysis. Research findings indicate that overall, the political ownership of the newspaper had no direct bearing on the journalists' political role in the enhancement of democracy and good governance in Malawi. It established that despite the ownership of the *Weekend Nation* belonging to a prominent and influential politician, the editorial independence was not compromised. Contrary to general expectations, this study established that the *Weekend Nation* in Malawi, was critical to the political elite in an indiscriminate manner.

Although it was not the focus of this study, the research also showed that market forces, in line with the stance taken by the critical political economy theory, had some impact on the *Weekend Nation*'s editorial independence. The quest for more advertising revenue, to an extent, undermined the struggle for complete editorial independence.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie het die politieke rol van die koerant die *Weekend Nation* in die demokratisering van Malawi tussen 2002 en 2012 vanuit die konteks van sy fundamentele rol en eienaarskap deur die politieke elite ondersoek. Met as vertrekpunt dat die koerant gestig is deur 'n politikus wat lid was van die eerste demokraties-verkose regerende party, die United Democratic Front (UDF), het hierdie navorsing die impak van media-eienaarskap op die politieke rol van die joernalistieke praktyke van die koerant in Malawi se demokratisering ondersoek. Tussen 2002 en 2012 is Malawi deur drie president regeer – Bakili Muluzi van die UDF van 1994 tot 2004, Bingu wa Mutharika van die Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) van 2004 tot 2012, en Joyce Banda van die People's Party (PP) van 2012 tot 2014 – al drie was vyandiggesind teenoor die *Weekend Nation*.

In ag genome dat die *Weekend Nation* aan 'n politikus behoort, is die kritiese politieke ekonomie van die media-teorie die mees toepaslike teoretiese vertrekpunt vir hierdie studie. In medianavorsing dui dié teorie daarop dat die eienaar die inhoud van die media-instelling bepaal deur hetsy inmenging in die dag tot dag uitvoering van pligte, of deur algemene doelwitte en veronderstellings wat gestel word, en deur bestuurders en joernaliste aan te stel wat dit sal uitvoer binne die bepalings van die toegewysde hulpbronne. Die studie het kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodologie toegepas, spesifiek in-diepte-onderhoude en kwalitatiewe inhoudsanalise. Die bevindings dui daarop dat die eienaarskap van die koerant geen direkte invloed op die joernaliste se politieke rol in die versterking van demokrasie en goeie bestuur in Malawi gehad het nie. Dit het vasgestel dat, ondanks die eienaarskap van die *Weekend Nation* aan 'n prominente en invloedryke politikus, die redaksionele onafhanklikheid nie gekompromitteer is nie. In teenstelling met algemene verwagtings het die studie bevind dat die *Weekend Nation* in Malawi krities ingestel was teenoor die politieke elite sonder om enige onderskeid te tref.

Hoewel dit nie 'n fokus van die studie was nie, het dit ook aangedui dat markkragte, in ooreenstemming met die kritiese politieke ekonomie-teorie, tog 'n impak op die *Weekend Nation* se redaksionele onafhanklikheid gehad het. Die stewe na groter advertensie-inkomste het tot 'n mate die stryd vir algehele redaksionele onafhanklikheid ondermyn.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my late father, Damian Gunde, and my mother, Fidelis Benedicta Gunde, whose love and guidance motivated me to dare and realise this dream.

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Acronyms

ACB	Anti-Corruption Bureau
ADMARC	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation
ALC	African Lakes Corporation
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BP&P	Blantyre Print and Publishing
CABS	Common Approach to Budget Support
CCAP	Church of Central African Presbyterian
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHRR	Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
FISP	Farm Input Subsidy Programme
FIDH	International Federation for Human Rights
GoM	Government of Malawi
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JUMA	Journalists Union of Malawi
MACRA	Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority
MANA	Malawi News Agency
MBC	Malawi Broadcasting Corporation
MCM	Media Council of Malawi
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MIJ	Malawi Institute of Journalism
MISA	Media Institute of Southern Africa
MP	Member of Parliament
MWG	Malawi Writers Group

NAC	Nyasaland African Congress
NAMISA	National Media Institute of Southern Africa
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NMG	Nation Media Group
NPL	Nation Publications Limited
NSO	National Statistical Office
PAC	Public Affairs Committee
PP	People's Party
PS	Principal Secretary
PPM	People's Progressive Movement
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UDF	United Democratic Front
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNIMA	University of Malawi

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CHAPTER 1

Background and Introduction

1.1 Motivation for the study

The *Weekend Nation* is a Saturday newspaper that was launched in Malawi in 1995 at the dawn of democracy (Lwanda, 2002:12). The newspaper was of research interest for two reasons. The first reason is that to a great extent, it is Malawi's leading weekly political newspaper. This is evident in the newspaper's circulation figures which stood at an average of 24,000 copies as of 2014 (NPL Circulation department, 2014). On the other hand *Malawi News*, the *Weekend Nation*'s weekly political competitor, sells around 22,000 copies (Times Media Group Circulation department, 2015). It is worth noting that as of 2002, which is the period that the investigation of this study commences, the *Weekend Nation* had a circulation of 36,000 while its competitor *Malawi News* had 27,000 (Kondowe, 2008:6). The seemingly low newspaper circulation levels in Malawi are attributed to two major factors. Firstly, the readership of newspapers is hindered by low literacy rates estimated to be 61 per cent (UNESCO, 2013:36), although Malawi's population is estimated to be 16 million (UN data, 2013; NSO, 2012:1). Secondly, high costs of production have over the years led newspaper publishers to concentrate on maximising in advertorials and reducing circulation (Banda, 2015¹). Additionally, due to high costs of living, it has become more expensive for many Malawians to buy newspapers over the years and, as a result, readers have resorted to share or circulate publications amongst each other. Due to similar reasons aforementioned, some readers tend to prefer reading online versions of the newspapers, including that of the *Weekend Nation*, which are offered for free in Malawi.

The second reason that drew an interest in this research study had to do with the newspaper's ownership and the political implications thereof. The *Weekend Nation* was established by Nation Publications Limited (NPL), a news media house founded by a politician, Aleke Banda² – in the then governing United Democratic Front (UDF) party “to promote and consolidate the democratic culture” that Malawi had just attained (Achuthan, 2014³). The UDF was Malawi's first democratically elected governing party which was voted to power in 1994, after 30 years of one-party rule since colonial

¹ Mabvuto Banda is the Managing Partner of MediaCorp, a media research and public relations organisation in Malawi. He is also former investigative journalist for the *Weekend Nation*. Hence, his name features in Chapter 5 (Research Design and Methodology) as one of the interviewees in this study. This information was obtained by personal correspondence a year following the face to face interview.

² Banda is a common surname in Malawi. This thesis often makes reference to Bandas but they are not related. Except for the journalist Mabvuto Banda mentioned earlier, the rest were politicians: Aleke Banda, Kamuzu Banda and Joyce Banda. Only these politicians will be referred to with both their first and last names.

³ This was from a personal interview on 6th March, 2014 with Mbumba Achuthan, CEO of Nation Publications Limited (NPL). She co-founded NPL, publishers of the *Weekend Nation*, with her late father, Aleke Banda in 1993. References to Achuthan throughout this thesis were drawn from this interview.

independence. This study was based on the recognition that the news media play an important role in fostering democratic governance but at the same time are subject to many social, political and economic forces particularly when the owner(s) have links with those in political power (Bogart, 1998:7; Kasoma, 1995:538).

For nearly 30 years after attaining independence from Great Britain in 1964, Malawi's news media landscape was under the control of the repressive regime of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) (Chimombo & Chimombo, 1996:26). Kamuzu Banda owned and controlled the press through his Blantyre Print and Publishing Company – now called the Times Media Group – publishers of the *Daily Times*, *Malawi News* and the *Sunday Times* newspapers (Mphande, 1996:84). In essence, the news media served as propaganda apparatus of Kamuzu Banda and his one party regime (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:9). In view of its foundational and organisational structure, the *Weekend Nation* was of great research interest. The major research interest in this study was the political role of the *Weekend Nation* in the enhancement of Malawi's democracy within the context of its ownership by a politically partisan family.

What generated further interest was that of around 20 newspapers launched at the advent of democracy in Malawi by politicians and other private entrepreneurs – including experienced journalists – only NPL titles have survived with the *Weekend Nation* being the country's highest circulating political weekly newspaper (Nation Publications Limited, about us: n.d online). The other competing political weekly newspaper as mentioned earlier is *Malawi News* of the Times Media Group. Malawi is then left with only two major players in the print news media: The Times Media Group belonging to former President Kamuzu Banda's family through a trust called Chayamba, and the NPL of the late politician Aleke Banda's family. Aleke Banda [not related to Kamuzu Banda] was the vice president and cabinet minister of the UDF under the leadership of President Bakili Muluzi for nearly ten years since 1994. However, following intra-party leadership crisis over succession towards the end of Muluzi's ten year presidential tenure, Aleke Banda left the then governing UDF in 2003 to join a then newly formed political party, the People's Progressive Movement (PPM) where he was elected president and member of parliament (Rakner & Svåsand, 2005:8). Aleke Banda died in 2010 after he had retired from politics in 2008. This then begs the question as to whether the role of the *Weekend Nation* to consolidate democracy and good governance in Malawi would be compromised bearing in mind its political foundational and ownership structures.

The period is of research interest as it marks an era of major shifts in political dimensions of Malawi within which the news media was at the centre stage. During the period from 2002 to 2012, Malawi was governed by three presidents, representing different political parties, namely: Muluzi of the UDF from 1994 to 2004, Bingu wa Mutharika of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) from 2004 to 2012, and Joyce Banda of the People's Party (PP) from 2012 to 2014. Within this period, these leaders had expressed distaste towards the *Weekend Nation* newspaper (Achuthan, 2014; Kanyang'wa & Mhagama, 2011:76). When the *Weekend Nation* became critical of Muluzi's bid to run for the third term of office between 2002 and 2004, there was an "unofficial" ban of government advertising with the newspaper (Achuthan, 2014). In like manner, in the era of Mutharika, specifically in 2010, the president ordered all government ministries and statutory corporations to stop advertising with the NPL, publishers of the *Weekend Nation*, saying their news articles were unpatriotic (Kanyang'wa & Mhagama, 2011:76). After Joyce Banda ascended to power in 2012 following the sudden death of Mutharika, her People's Party (PP) officials made threatening public pronouncements against the private press, including the *Weekend Nation* when the newspaper unearthed systemic corruption within the government (Achuthan, 2014; Kasunda, 2013). These identical developments provided a wonderful opportunity to explore the impact of political media ownership on journalistic roles with respect to Malawi's emerging democracy. It is worth noting that at the beginning of this study in January 2013, Joyce Banda was the sitting president but she was voted out of office in May, 2014.

Nevertheless, during this period (2002 to 2012), specifically in 2009, the Malawi chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), a regional body that seeks to promote democracy through pluralistic media, awarded the *Weekend Nation's* reporter, Frank Namangale, a top prize for "democracy and good governance reporting" (Gondwe, 2009). Considering that the *Weekend Nation's* reporter was awarded a prize for "democracy and good governance reporting", this was one of the themes that this study examined. Bennett (1982:294) underlines the significance of themes in the study of the political role of the media, noting that to "speak of the political role of the media is not an abstract undertaking". To embark on such a study, Bennett further notes, this "can be done only through a study of the role played by the media in concrete, historically determined political conjunctures; and to study these, it is necessary to deal not only with the media but also with the political issues at stake in those conjunctures". Therefore, "good governance" was one of three themes this study investigated.

The other two were "floor-crossing" and the "Farm Input Subsidy Programme" (FISP). The three issues were regarded as being among some of the major political issues or themes during the research

period of this study (Chirwa & Dorward, 2013:67; Chinsinga, 2012b:4; Dulani, 2012:5; Mayaya, 2012:21; Mpesi & Muriaas, 2012:377; Wroe, 2012:135).

The next section outlines the rationale behind the choice of the three themes in this study to get an insight into the implications of the political ownership of the *Weekend Nation* newspaper and the political role of its journalists in the democratisation of Malawi between 2002 and 2012.

1.2 Rationale

As mentioned in the preceding section, good governance, floor-crossing and the FISP were the major political issues that dominated the media between 2002 and 2012. These issues are explored in the next segments.

1.2.1 Good governance

The notion of governance and its multiple dimensions is dealt with at length in Chapter 3. The following discussion contextualises governance from 2002 to 2012 when Malawi was led by three presidents representing different political parties.

1.2.1.1 Governance in the Bakili Muluzi era

The demise of the one party dictatorship government under Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) in 1994 ushered in a new era of multiparty politics under Bakili Muluzi and the UDF party (Posner, 1995:131). In his inaugural speech on June 30, 1994, Muluzi stressed his desire to build an open society governed by democratic rules and institutions which encourage participation of individuals, groups and communities in the political, economic and human development of the country (Makuwira, 2011:618). According to a survey by *Afrobarometer* researchers-Khaila and Chibwana (2005:4), conducted during the last term of Muluzi's ten year presidential tenure, one thing acknowledged by everyone about his presidency and the UDF, was "the willingness to allow free speech and expression". However, the research pointed out, that was all – "everything else was taken with a grain of salt". Khaila and Chibwana further note that violence and intimidation perpetrated by the youth wing of the UDF – the Young Democrats – was said to be equal or even worse than that of Kamuzu Banda's Youth Leaguers during the one party dictatorship.

It is also observed that the Muluzi-led government was pre-occupied with castigating political opponents but overlooked rampant corruption in the nascent democratic dispensation (Khaila &

Chibwana, 2005:4; Tenthani, 2002a). Due to poor political governance and economic mismanagement by Muluzi and the UDF, Denmark – one of Malawi’s key bilateral donors – withdrew all its development aid to the country in January 2002 (Resnick, 2012:2; Tenthani, 2002a). The Danish government, through its Charge D’Affaires, Finn Skadkaer Pedersen, issued the following statement (Tenthani, 2002a):

A weak administration since 1995 has made it difficult to implement development programmes. Corruption and misuse of Danish and other donor money has become a markedly increased issue. . . Systematic intimidation of the opposition has made it difficult for Denmark to continue assisting Malawi.

In addition, other financial aid donors who supported Malawi through the budget – Common Approach to Budget Support (CABS) – suspended all aid, citing corruption and lack of transparency concerns (Resnick, 2012:4). Resnick (2012:6) points out that there are six members of the CABS donor group in Malawi, including the African Development Bank, the United Kingdom, the European Union, the World Bank and Norway. For instance, the European Union (EU) suspended support for road rehabilitation due to non-compliance with tendering procedures, according to Resnick. In the midst of all that, the EU demanded a reimbursement of 8 million euros that Muluzi’s UDF government had diverted from its intended use (Tenthani, 2002b).

The pinnacle of Muluzi’s governance came to the limelight with the issue of the Open Terms Bill which dominated the news media between 2001 and 2003 (cf. Resnick, 2012; Khaila & Chibwana, 2005; Ross, 2004; Baker, 2002). Muluzi’s ten year presidency was due to end in May 2004. However, he attempted to secure an amendment to the Malawi Constitution, which only allows two five-year terms of office, to let it “open” in order to allow him to stand for the third term (Ross, 2004:91). Following protests from civil society, the media and the clergy, the Open Terms Bill did not garner the required two-thirds majority in a July 2002 parliamentary assembly (Tenthani, 2003). In March 2003, Tenthani further notes, Muluzi publicly withdrew his “third term” bid and appointed Bingu wa Mutharika, who was little known to the UDF party, as his successor and candidate for the May, 2004 elections. It must be noted that this was deemed as a surprise since Mutharika was a party outsider who had spent most of his life working for the World Bank, the IMF and other regional bodies during the formation of the UDF party and subsequent struggles for multi-party democracy in the early 1990s (Tenthani, 2003).

Following Mutharika's appointment, some key members of the national executive, notably the then Minister for Environment and Natural Resources, Harry Thompson, and UDF's Vice President Aleke Banda, founder of the *Weekend Nation*, left the party [the UDF] in protest against the lack of intra-party democracy (Rakner & Svåsand, 2005:8). For Aleke Banda, in particular, Mutharika was "completely unknown and had no track record" (SAPA-AFP, 2003). Thompson later joined the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a party founded by another ex-UDF executive member and former Minister, Brown Mpinganjira, whereas the founder of the *Weekend Nation*, Aleke Banda, joined a new party named the Peoples Progressive Movement Party where he was elected president (PPM) (Ross, 2004:91; PANA, 2003; Tenthani, 2003).

Given the role played by Muluzi in choosing the UDF's presidential candidate for the May 2004 elections, Malawians were anxious about Mutharika, who won with 36 per cent of the vote (Resnick, 2012:5). However, Mutharika's governance, as it will be discussed next, had two contrasting terms.

1.2.1.2 Governance in the Bingu wa Mutharika era

In May 2004, President Bingu wa Mutharika took over the leadership of Malawi on the sponsorship of the UDF, with the UDF holding 49 seats in parliament (Chilenga, 2008:49). As Chilenga further observes, a few months after ascending to power, Mutharika left the UDF and formed his own party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The DPP consequently became a minority government in the National Assembly which in itself had a huge bearing in the democratic governance of Malawi in the subsequent years, according to Chilenga. Encouraged by the new president's commitment to sound technocratic management of the economy and fighting corruption, Resnick (2012:5) observes, donors re-established relations with Malawi and released the previously suspended budget support as a sign of goodwill. When the new government established the country's 2006 to 2011 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), governance was identified as a key priority, although the emphasis was on economic rather than political governance, according to Resnick. One of the most significant policies that the Mutharika government was hailed for by Malawians had to do with food security, a topic that will be discussed later in the chapter.

While Mutharika's first term of office (2004 to 2009) earned him praise from the donor community for his zero tolerance on corruption, it was in the second phase that he abused his majority in parliament – having won by a landslide in 2009 elections – to formulate some bad laws (Kayira, 2012:3). For example, in 2011, the DPP government unsuccessfully tried to repeal Section 46 of the Penal Code in the Malawi Constitution which bars any law that infringes on the right to information

and freedom of speech (Nyalugwe, 2011:3). In this context, the DPP government had proposed to empower the Minister of Information Simon Vuwa Kaunda, to ban publications and all forms of media that were deemed critical of the government. In addition, diplomatic ties between Malawi and Britain were severed in 2011 following a report by the British High Commissioner, Fergus Cochrane-Dyett, which was critical of Mutharika and was leaked to the *Weekend Nation* (Wroe, 2012:138-139). Following the publication, Mutharika ordered the expulsion of the British envoy from Malawi. Incensed by his attitude, donors cut off more than US\$400 million in aid money for an economy that largely depends on outside budgetary support (Kayira, 2012:3). Bad governance further came to the limelight on July 20, 2011 when 20 Malawians were killed by the police during widespread demonstrations organised by a coalition of civil society organisations against Mutharika (Cammack, 2012:378). Mutharika died of cardiac arrest on April 5, 2012 and as Kayira (2012:3) observes, events unfolding in Malawi prior to his death spoke volumes of a country that was courting disaster.

Next is a brief background of governance and politics during the first few months of former President Joyce Banda, who took over leadership from Mutharika.

1.2.1.3 Joyce Banda and governance in 2012

The Constitution of Malawi, which is the supreme law of the country, enshrines in Section 83(4) that should the president become incapacitated or die in office, the vice president takes over leadership in a caretaker role until the next general elections are held (Government of Malawi, 2013). With this being the case, the then Vice President Joyce Banda, who was the president of the People's Party (PP) took over the leadership of Malawi when Mutharika died in April, 2012. It must be noted that Joyce Banda had been expelled from the DPP in December, 2010, after refusing to endorse Bingu wa Mutharika's brother (Peter) as the party's presidential candidate for the 2014 elections – she formed the PP in 2011 (Sichali, 2011).

Following her ascendancy to the presidency, there was a glimmer of hope on several fronts, with donors restoring aid and diplomatic relations, but as Chinsinga (2012a:5) points out, the question of “good governance remained elusive”. Main areas of concern from the onset included failure to implement Section 65 of the Malawian Constitution (to be discussed later), un-procedural dismissals of senior public officials, worrying traits of executive arrogance, refusal to declare assets as required by law, apparent incapacitation of the Anti-Corruption Bureau and the co-option and progressive weakening of the civil society, as Chinsinga (2012a:5) further observes.

Furthermore, another concern with respect to Joyce Banda and her administration related to the abuse of the state broadcaster – Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC). As Patel (2013:4) notes, the Joyce Banda administration was not tolerant towards dissenting views and used the MBC for her People’s Party (PP) propaganda. Patel further notes: “The fundraising events of the People’s Party get full coverage on MBC (TV) immediately after news.”

The foregoing has looked at the concept of political governance at a broader level between 2002 and 2012 when Malawi was under the leadership of three consecutive presidents, each with newly formed political parties. The next section is a focus on the issue of “floor-crossing”, which was commonly referred to as Section 65 in the Malawi media domain between 2002 and 2012.

1.2.2 Floor-crossing (Section 65)

Floor-crossing (Section 65) is a political issue that dominated the Malawi media since 2005, a year after Mutharika succeeded Muluzi as the country’s second president under the democratic dispensation (Resnick, 2012; Chinsinga, 2012a, 2008; Chilenga, 2008; Khaila & Chibwana, 2005). Former *Weekend Nation* Editor, Steve Nhlane (2006a:11), noted in his opinion column – *My Diary* – that “the section has caused so much consternation, tension and controversy in our politics than any other”. The issue of floor-crossing relates to Section 65 of the Malawian Constitution which states:

The speaker shall declare vacant the seat of any member of the National Assembly who was, at the time of his or her election, a member of one political party represented in the National Assembly, other than by that member alone but who has voluntarily ceased to be a member of that party and has joined another political party in the National Assembly (GoM, 1999:37).

As stated earlier, although Mutharika took over the presidency under the UDF party in 2004, the following year he formed the DPP. This led to parliamentary legal tussles from then until the Joyce Banda era in 2012. The constitutional crisis was precipitated by the president’s decision to leave the UDF and form a new party, which then prompted 65 out of the 193 MPs in the National Assembly to defect (cross the floor) to the DPP, thereby contravening Section 65 of the Malawi Constitution (Resnick, 2012:8). The development was seen by the opposition as a government strategy to boost its support in parliament and it was further viewed as weakening the opposition (Kalengamaliro, 2010:16).

Following this, opposition parties petitioned the then Speaker of Parliament, Rodwell Munyenembe, to invoke the Constitution, but Mutharika obtained an ex parte order of injunction (based on one party or side) restraining the speaker from acting on Section 65 until a ruling was made on the presidential

referral (Chilenga, 2008:53). The floor-crossing debate was a huge crisis within the National Assembly as Chinsinga (2008:12) notes, because the government had to operate for close to three months without a budget due the opposition's insistence on the implementation of Section 65. Furthermore, it was for this reason that opposition MPs held on to the budget as a bargaining tool to force the speaker of parliament to invoke Section 65 on the legislators during the 2007/08 budget session of parliament, Chinsinga further observes.

According to Chinsinga (2008:12), the issue of floor-crossing paralysed several government operations which were critical to the development of democracy in Malawi. For example, due to their numerical strength, opposition MPS turned down some proposed appointments of senior public positions such as the Judiciary, Auditor General's Office and the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB). In view of the foregoing, donors could not release budgetary support funds until it was passed – the opposition's intransigence over Section 65 was portrayed as a hindrance to the country's development (Resnick, 2012:8). Due to pressure from the civil society and the donor community, the opposition passed the budget but with Section 65 not enforced (Resnick, 2012:8; Chilenga, 2010:54; Kalengamaliro, 2010:16).

In the 2009 elections, Mutharika and the DPP won 113 seats in the 193 seat National Assembly with additional 25 independent MPs pledging to support the governing party (Kayira, 2009:5). But the issue of floor-crossing came again to the spotlight immediately following Mutharika's sudden death on April 5, 2012. Tenthani (2012:15) observes that a number of DPP MPs "decided to shift allegiance to President Joyce Banda and her party", thereby violating Section 65 of the Constitution. The debate over floor-crossing has spanned nearly ten years. The operations of the government thus continued with Section 65 un-enforced by the virtue of the courts to grant an injunction on the matter (Chilenga, 2008:54).

The next discussion focuses on the issue of the Farm Input Subsidy Program (FISP), a critical and sensitive food security policy that has entrenched politics in Malawi over the years.

1.2.3 The Farm Input Subsidy Program (FISP)

Malawi had grappled with pervasive food insecurity problems and chronic food shortages until the FISP was introduced by Mutharika early on in his presidential tenure during the 2005/2006 farming season (Chinsinga, 2012b:5). According to Kayira (2012:3), the FISP was introduced against the

advice of the IMF and the World Bank which were concerned that it would be an expensive programme for the country. Unlike the universal subsidy policy under the one-party regime and starter packs under the Muluzi regime, the FISP entailed the issuing of coupons or vouchers to poor households identified by traditional chiefs to enable them to purchase fertiliser at subsidised prices and receive free legume seed packs (Chinsinga, 2014:4). Redemption of coupons involves the presentation of a valid coupon and any necessary payment to an authorised retailer, who after checking the validity of the coupon issues the specified input (Chirwa & Dorward, 2013:108). The FISP targeted 50 per cent of the country's farmers or roughly 1.5 million households to help boost maize production, promote food security, and enhance rural incomes (Munthali, 2014:5).

In three subsequent *Afrobarometer* surveys (2003, 2004, 2008), Malawian respondents identified “food security and famine” as the most important political issue in the country (Mpesi & Muriaas, 2012:377). According to Chinsinga (2012b:6), the question of food security has always been a sensitive political issue and fertiliser subsidies were prominent in all political party manifestos towards the 2004 elections. Chirwa and Dorward (2013:69) contend that the FISP was particularly used by Mutharika to garner support from the masses when he left the UDF to form the DPP, leaving him with minority MPs in the National Assembly. It is important to note that an entirely appropriate and legitimate political preoccupation with food security arises not because of populism and patronage, “but because food security is an important preoccupation for poor people”, whether urban or rural, who spend large proportions of their income on staple food and who are very vulnerable to price changes, Chirwa and Dorward (2013:69) argue, further noting that the majority of the electorate are poor rural dwellers.

For three consecutive farming seasons following the introduction of the FISP, followed by good rains, Malawi enjoyed bumper harvests and the policy was touted as a major success for Mutharika and the DPP as it contributed to increased food availability, poverty reduction and wider economic growth (Mayaya, 2012:15). The immediate success of the FISP earned Mutharika international recognition on dealing with food insecurity, featuring in the international news media such as *the New York Times* (Sachs, 2012) and the *Mail&Guardian* (Christie, 2011).

Nevertheless, as Chinsinga (2014:3) observes, there has been a turn-around of this success story – for example, in 2012, eleven per cent of the Malawi population faced severe food shortages which required the government to import maize. Chinsinga further argues that while the recent developments might be attributed to climate change, politicisation and corruption of the FISP have

negatively affected the intended objectives. For instance, in 2009, a local newspaper, the *Daily Times*, revealed that government flouted tendering procedures by offering contracts for the transportation of fertiliser to some companies linked to politicians such as the Mulli Brothers, co-owned by a then cabinet minister in the governing DPP government, Felton Mulli and his brothers, Leston and Alex (Khanje, 2009:1). A World Bank study similarly reveals that 57 per cent of people who receive fertiliser coupons are not eligible to benefit (Kilic, Whitney & Winters, 2013:4). Furthermore, the diversion of the inputs is one of the most crippling problems facing the FISP because coupons and subsidised fertiliser are largely taken by government officials and then resold on the commercial market (Munthali, 2014:7). The FISP has also proven to be a very costly policy in that it increases budgetary pressure on the government, especially when prices of fertiliser increase worldwide (Mbamba, 2014:4; Munthali, 2014:6). In this vein, donors – the World Bank in particular – are of the view that the FISP has outlived its intended purpose (Munthali, 2014:7). But as Chinsinga (2014:7) postulates, the FISP is a “hot political potato” and no politician is bold enough to say they would do away with it. Chinsinga underlines that food security in Malawi lies at the heart of the social contract between citizens and the government. For instance, fertiliser redemption prices have been politically determined: generally announced by the president in political statements or at political rallies (Chirwa & Dorward, 2013:109).

The preceding discussion has set out the background to the political issues that were identified to have dominated the news media between 2002 and 2012. This is important so as to explore how the *Weekend Nation* dealt with these themes against the background of its political power relations within which it was entrenched.

1.3 Statement of the problem and focus

Preliminary research in studies (Rønning & Kupe, 2000:157) focusing on the media in the African continent indicates that the political elite have used their ownership and control of the media, during the colonial and the post-colonial era, to further their political power. This study seeks to investigate the political role of the *Weekend Nation* between 2002 and 2012 in the democratisation of Malawi within the context of its ownership by one of Malawi’s top politicians. It seeks to carry out this task by examining how the newspaper handled issues identified as the main political themes during the research period. These themes/political issues are: good governance, floor-crossing and the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP).

1.4 Research question

The central research question in this study is:

What was the political role of the *Weekend Nation* in the democratisation of Malawi within the context of its ownership by a top politician in the country?

Additionally, the following sub-questions constituted the research study in view of addressing the central research question. These questions were posed to the research participants as an interview guide and are further attached as Addendum A.

- What was the role that the *Weekend Nation* defined for itself since inception?
- Bearing in mind that the newspaper was founded by a politician, how did that impact the political role of the *Weekend Nation*'s journalists?
- How did the journalists relate to the *Weekend Nation*'s maiden slogan: "*Freedom of expression, the birth-right of all*"?
- On good governance, the civil society, opposition political parties and the international community condemned former President Bakili Muluzi's administration as well as the later stages of the late President Bingu wa Mutharika's government. What was the *Weekend Nation*'s position on that issue?
- What was the position of the *Weekend Nation* on the issue of Section 65 "floor-crossing"?
- The food security policy – Farm Input Subsidy Program (FISP – launched by the late president Mutharika in 2005 albeit opposition from multilateral donors such as the IMF and the World Bank, has been in the media domain to this day. What was the position of the *Weekend Nation* during the period under investigation?

1.5 Theoretical point of departure

To examine the political role of the *Weekend Nation* between 2002 and 2012 in the democratisation of Malawi within the context of its ownership by one of Malawi's top politicians, this study employed the critical political economy theory of the media. Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott (1982:16) observe that critical political economy searches for answers to the question of the power of the media in the analysis of their structures of ownership and control. Boyd-Barrett (1997:186) observes that the term "political economy" in media research has a broadly "critical" signification, often associated with macro-questions of media ownership and control. Taking into consideration that politically the media "may serve to enhance democracy or deny it" the question of who owns the media is a critical

issue for the critical political economy theory (McChesney, 2004:3), and was therefore deemed appropriate for this research study. The critical political economy theory of the media is dealt with extensively in Chapter 4.

1.6 Research design and methodology

The design of this investigation was that of a case study which entailed qualitative research methodology. This methodology employed qualitative content analysis and interviews methods. The study employed latent content analysis to ascertain the underlying meanings in the editorials and opinion columns. In addition, this researcher conducted personal interviews with the journalists who worked on the political beat for the *Weekend Nation* between 2002 and 2012 as an attempt to interlink the inferences made in the editorials and opinion columns. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

The immediate objective of this study was to explore and understand how the journalists at the *Weekend Nation* newspaper made sense of their journalistic role(s) in Malawi's emerging democracy bearing in mind the political ownership of the publication. In other words, the research aimed at getting an insight on the impact of the political ownership of the *Weekend Nation* on the role of the journalists with respect to the consolidation of Malawi's democratic governance.

In this regard, this researcher did not have any expectations in mind but rather wanted find answers from the naturalistic environment of the journalists themselves through interviews and their expressions on identified major political issues through the editorials and opinion columns. In other words, this researcher did not have a hypothetical point of departure. A hypothesis is a tentative answer to a research problem and is expressed in terms of independent and dependent variable (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987:65). A hypothesis is often associated with quantitative research (Miller, 2003:144) whereby researchers set out with ideas about relationships in the data, and will want to "test" these ideas to see if they really hold true. But as Silverman (2005:99) points out, in many qualitative research studies "there is no specific hypothesis at the outset". Thus, the *Weekend Nation* case study was exploratory and not confirmatory in design and does not entail "cause/effect propositions" which accompany hypothetical research as noted by Gerring (2004:350). Nevertheless, the study took cognisance of the assertions advanced by Herman and Chomsky (1994:xi) with regards to the critical political economy of the media that owners serve as primary definers of news and play a key role in fixing basic principles and the dominant ideologies.

This researcher's approach was further informed by Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson (2002:717) who argue that central to good qualitative research is whether the research participants' subjective meanings, actions and social contexts, as understood by them, are illuminated. This position is drawn from social scientific research approach called "naturalism" (Brewer, 2003:210). According to Brewer, naturalism is an orientation concerned with the study of social life in real naturally occurring settings, understanding and analysing the features of social life. Berg (2007:14) notes that this type of approach focuses on naturally emerging languages and the meanings individuals assign to experience. In this vein, this study sought to address the central research question and the additional questions from the journalists' interpretations themselves in their natural settings by exploring the *Weekend Nation* editorials and opinion columns as well as individual views from interviews.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 discusses the evolution of the news media in Malawi. This is in context with the print news media and largely focuses on the political implications of the foundational and ownership structures from three epochs, namely: the colonial period, the post-colonial era and the immediate era following Malawi's adoption of multi-party democracy. The chapter then presents a detailed discussion of the history and the political landscape under which the *Weekend Nation* newspaper was established.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature on the area of news media and democracy. It begins with the existing scholarship on the relationship between the media and democracy drawing from Western perspectives. Then the chapter looks at the role of the news media in other democracies across the globe. The chapter then presents a discussion of the media in the African context with respect to emerging democracies and the issues of ownership that are relevant to this case study.

Chapter 4 looks at the critical political economy theory and its relevance to this study which examines issues of ownership and control and democracy in Malawi. The chapter commences with an exploration of the liberal-pluralism theory of the media for the better understanding of the rationale behind employing the critical political economy as a theoretical framework of this research.

Chapter 5 is a discussion on the design and methodology of this investigation. It contains the research questions and the tools utilised to gather data in the study. Qualitative methods, namely: qualitative

content analysis and semi-structured interviews which were employed in the study are addressed in this chapter.

Chapter 6 presents the findings drawn from the *Weekend Nation's* editorials and opinion columns with respect to the major political issues identified to have been at stake between 2002 and 2012. It also provides an account of the interviews with the newspaper's political journalists in addressing the research questions in this study.

Chapter 7 is an analysis of the research findings by employing the critical political economy of the media as a tool of analysis. First, this researcher analyses the findings from the editorials and opinion columns. Second is an analysis of the views elicited from the individual interviews with the research participants.

Chapter 8 presents concluding remarks and recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER 2

Evolution of the News Media in Malawi

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the development of the news media in Malawi with particular reference to print. The history of the newspaper industry in Malawi dates back to the 1800s when the pioneer publications were established in four stages: firstly by the missionaries, secondly by the colonial government, thirdly by the one party state under the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), and fourthly by the “independent press” (Chitsulo & Mang’anda, 2011:1; Manda, 2007:241). The “independent press” refers to daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly and irregularly appearing newspapers that are published without direct state and government control (Campbell, 1998:3). For Chimombo and Chimombo (1996:26), the “independent press” further denotes newspapers that are not affiliated to political parties. In the view of Campbell (1998:3), such newspapers are infused with the ethos of independent journalism – a collection of values that promote and encourage the scrutiny of power-wielding institutions and individuals, notably government and government officials. As it will be discussed later in this chapter, most newspapers that were deemed as “independent” at the outset of democracy in Malawi were linked to politicians.

To trace the print news media’s evolution, it is essential to have a general geographical and historical understanding of Malawi. This is so because as Banda (2007:61) posits, historical research on the media in sub-Saharan Africa is patchy due to the region’s huge geographical landscape embedded with more than 48 countries. In the view of Banda, this has led to varied historical terrain of the media. Hyden, Leslie and Ogundimu (2002:vii) concur with Banda’s observations that the media scene in Africa is diverse in that it stretches from the well-developed and technologically advanced situation in South Africa to the still fledgling media operations that characterise most countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In exploring the historical development of the news media, the chapter also looks at the geographical and economic-historical trends of Malawi. The chapter is laid out in eight sections namely: the regional and historical perspective of Malawi, early missionaries and the press, news media in the colonial period, the nationalist press, post-colonial media landscape, news media and the transition from authoritarianism to democracy, the press in multi-party politics and the launch of Nation Publications Limited (NPL) – publishers of the *Weekend Nation*.

2.2 Regional and historical background

Malawi is a landlocked country located in south-east Africa and is divided into three regions (provinces): northern, central and southern. There are four cities namely, Mzuzu in the northern

region, Lilongwe in the central region, Zomba and Blantyre in the southern region. The administrative capital is Lilongwe but the commercial/industrial city is Blantyre, see fig. 2.1.

Malawi has a population of 16 million and of this, 15.3 per cent resides in the urban areas of the four major cities of Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba (UN data, 2013; NSO, 2012:1). Malawi is the most densely populated sub-Saharan African country with a single, short rainy season (Booth, Cammack, Harrigan, Kanyongolo, Motaure & Ngwira, 2006:22). The most recent *Economic Activity Report* (2010:29) from the National Statistical Office (NSO) in Malawi reveals that subsistence farming is the main economic activity in all the three regions of the country and accounts for nearly 70 per cent of the Malawian population. In essence, agriculture is the main source of livelihood for Malawians. These are important statistics for this research because as it was pointed out in the preceding chapter, one of the key thematic areas entrenched in the media/political domain of Malawi is linked to agricultural input subsidies and subsistence farming.

Agriculture is not only the principal source of livelihood but contributes to the 90 per cent of the country's foreign earnings (Chinsinga, 2012c:3; Lele, 1990:1208). While maize is Malawi's staple food largely grown by subsistence farmers, agricultural export earnings are derived through large-estate farm owners mostly growing tobacco, tea, cotton and coffee (Chinsinga, 2012c:3). Malawi's heavy reliance on tobacco is rooted in the colonial rule of the British Empire as well as the arrival of missionaries in the late 19th century (Rafael, 1980:45; Pachai, 1973:153). This connection between the colonial rule, missionaries and agriculture is essential as it is linked to the first establishment of the print media in Malawi, a discussion which is addressed in the next section.

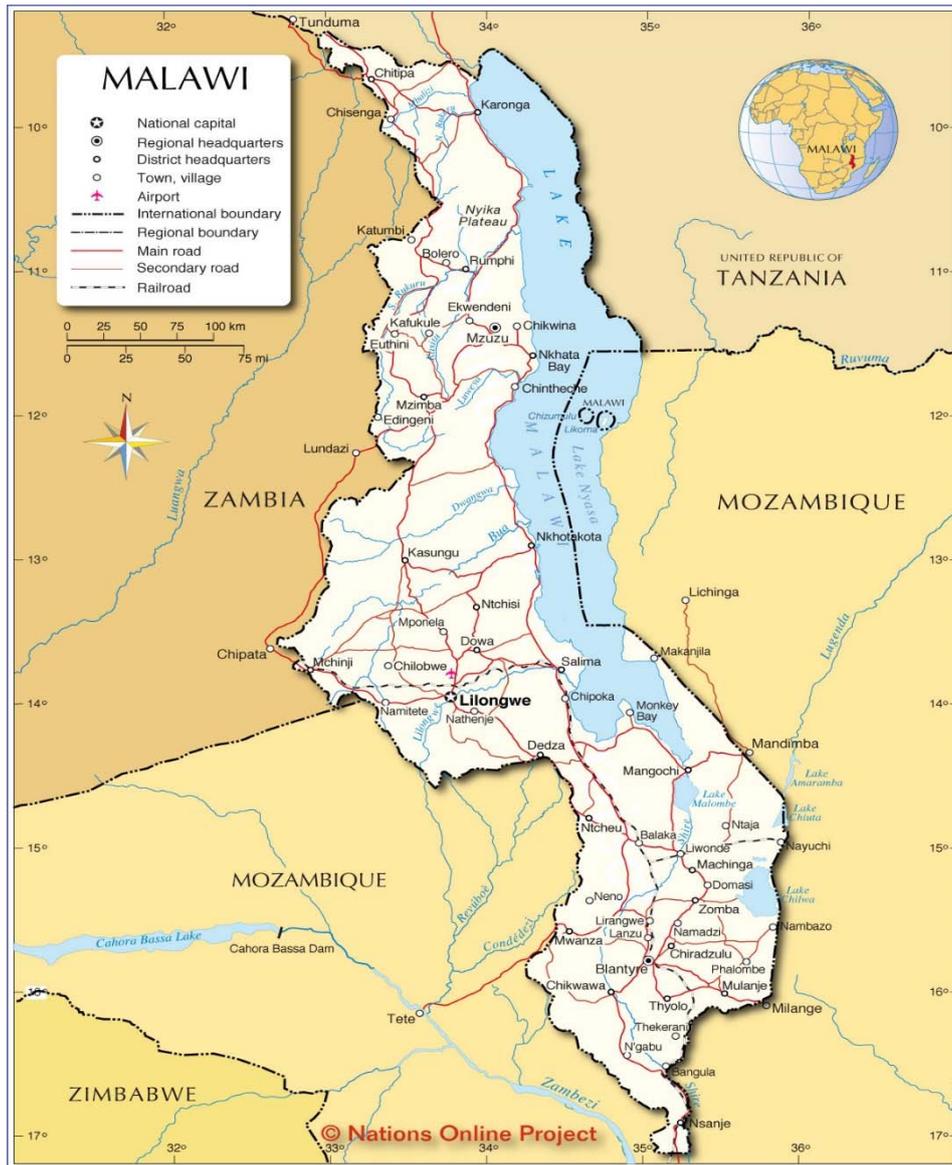


Figure 2.1: Political map of Malawi (Source: Nations online project).

Before proceeding to the next section, it is worth noting that Malawi was previously known as Nyasaland. The name “Nyasaland” denotes people who live by the lakeshore and the name was coined by Arab slave traders and 19th century missionaries to mean people from the shores of “nyasa”, which in the local language, Yao, “nyasa” means “lake” (Phiri, 2004:32). Therefore, the context of the next discussion relates to Malawi and the print news media when it was known as “Nyasaland”.

2.3 Arrival of missionaries and Malawi’s first newspaper (1880s-1920s)

On a mission to spread Christianity, commerce and bring an end to slave trade that had involved the Portuguese, Arabs and other locals in the east African region, David Livingstone, a Scot, arrived in Malawi in 1858 under the Church of Scotland (Rafael, 1980:32; Pachai, 1973:68). Phiri further

observes that this led to the establishment of the Church of Scotland in Malawi, now known as the Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP). As noted earlier, the missionaries were not only interested in the spreading Christianity but commerce as well because Livingstone believed that both of these activities were necessary “to combat slave trade” (Phiri, 2004:121).

Against this backdrop, the missionaries established the Livingstonia Central African Company, a commercial entity that initially traded in ivory with the indigenous communities in order to divert them from slave trade but also funded the missionaries from the proceeds (Phiri, 2004:121; Rafael, 1980:34). With a greater interest in commerce, some of the British abandoned the missionary work to devote their time to farming tobacco, tea and coffee which led to the birth of an agro-based monthly newspaper published by Robert Spence and Robert Hynde called *Central African Planter* (Schwarz & Hynde, 1983:10). According to its first editorial, the objective of the newspaper was to become a platform for the exchange of the ideas relating to the planting industry in British Central Africa (Hynde & Stark, 1895:3).

It must be noted that before the advent of the *Central African Planter*, there had been other recorded publications in the form of magazines, journals or newsletters that were launched by the missionaries (Mwiyeriwa, 1978:36). For example, the Church of Scotland missionaries launched *Kalilole* (Mirror) in 1881, a native language (Mang'anja) journal, which was followed in 1889 by an English language journal, *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, both aimed at disseminating information on missionary activities to the local and the Foreign Commission in Scotland (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:2; Manda, 2007:241). Nevertheless, since by this time Nyasaland was under the colonial rule of the British Empire, the missionary publications, besides the drive to spread Christian values and enhance literacy, consolidated the indigenous voices against some oppressive policies emanating from the government. According to Chitsulo and Mang'anda (2011:4), the publication, *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, for instance, was used as a “vehicle of protest” against exploitation on labour issues, in particular, the poor treatment and remuneration of the locals who were largely employed to work in agricultural estates owned by the colonialists. Therefore, the news media in Malawi commenced on two fronts, that of spreading Christianity and literacy, and that of consolidating colonialism for financial gains, which set the premise for our next discussion.

2.4 News media and consolidation of colonialism

As Uche (1991:1) posits, the mass media in most African countries emanate from colonial domination. This view is also shared by Banda (2007:63) who contends that the development of the

media in Anglophone Africa was directly or indirectly linked to the colonial objectives of the British Empire. Nyasaland, now Malawi, became a British protectorate in May, 1891 (Rafael, 1980:45). As noted earlier, the first commercial newspaper in the country was the *Central African Planter*. The *Central African Planter* newspaper ran from 1895 to 1897 before giving space to the more distinct *Central African Times* (Chipangula, 2003:21; Schwarz & Hynde, 1983:10). Being an agro-based economy, this was an area of great interest to the missionaries and the British colonial powers as it is underlined that one of the publishers and editors of the *Central African Planter*, Robert Hynde, was the real founder of the tobacco industry but also a pioneer of tea farming in Malawi (Schwarz & Hynde, 1983:10). However, although this was the case, Schwarz and Hynde further note that the newspaper did not cover articles on crops alone, but also other commercial sectors that would be potential areas of generating revenue in Malawi including health, weather and transport. The publishers exploited the opportunity of generating more income as the launch of the newspaper had coincided with the arrival of more white settlers who ventured into various commercial sectors, for instance, the Scottish African Lakes Corporation (ALC) who plied in agri-business, marine transport, general stores and motor vehicle investments (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:5). The *Central African Planter*, which had evolved into the *Central African Times* in 1897 as pointed out above, later changed to the *Nyasaland Times* in 1908, largely catering for white colonial interests (Chipangula, 2003:21). The circulation of both the *Central African Planter* and the *Nyasaland Times* were beyond the political borders of Nyasaland reaching Northern and Southern Rhodesia, which the settlers called "British Central Africa" now Zimbabwe and Zambia respectively (Kalengamaliro, 1993:2). However, during the outbreak of the first and second world wars in 1914 and 1939 respectively, the *Nyasaland Times* not only publicised the reports on the wars but was also used by the British to advocate and enlist the locals into the colonial army (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:6). But some the locals used the same newspaper to voice their discontent with the colonial government's idea to involve them in wars which they felt they were not part of. For example, native missionary, John Chilembwe, wrote in the *Nyasaland Times* that:

In time of peace everything is for Europeans only . . . and instead of honour we suffer humiliation with names contemptible. But in times of war. . .we are needed to share the hardship and shed our blood in equality . . . We have no voice in this government (Shepperson & Price, 1958:234).

Following the publication of Chilembwe's letter, the colonial government seized copies of the newspaper for "not initially presenting it to the government censor" (Shepperson & Price, 1958:235). This illustrates that from the early colonial period, the news media landscape was editorially controlled by the British government to promote their political and economic interests. Nevertheless,

the *Central African Planter* is significant to the Malawian newspaper industry because it distinguishes itself as the longest-running commercial publication in the country having evolved from the colonial times to the present day's *Daily Times* newspaper which, as pointed out in the previous chapter, is part of the present day Times Media Group of the the former President Kamuzu Banda's family. Chitsulo and Mang'anda (2011:9) argue that as Africans became more politically aware of the colonial project, their resentment against the white settlers grew and this spurred new publications from the indigenous citizens aimed at consolidating their quest for independence and addressing their grievances. The following sub-section discusses this issue.

2.5 Indigenous citizenry and the nationalist press (1920s-1960s)

The development of "popular" newspapers by the colonial government for the indigenous population began in 1924 with the launch of the dominant Chichewa language newspaper, *Zoona*, meaning "the Truth" (Kalengamaliro, 1993:2), and the objective was to disseminate news on the missionary work, commercial activities and any new laws implemented in the country. In 1937, *Zoona* was superseded by *Nkhani za Nyasaland*, a Chichewa version of the *Nyasaland Times* meaning "Nyasaland News" but the objectives were similar (Kalengamaliro, 1993:3). *Nkhani za Nyasaland* circulated until 1949 when it was superseded by *Msimbi (The Narrator)* which was truly narrative in nature but the themes largely focused on farming and conservation issues (Kalengamaliro, 1993:3). This was an interesting development because at the time, nationalism among the indigenous population had gathered steam. In the 1940s and 1950s, Nyasaland witnessed a rise in nationalists who opposed the British Protectorate (Cohen, A., 2009:114). The locals established the first national organisation in 1944, the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC), to deal with matters concerning Africans. Pachai (1973:234) further notes that to articulate their "nationalism agenda", the organisation had a newspaper named the *Kwacha (Dawn)*, printed in Salisbury, now Harare, in Zimbabwe.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, the nationalism that had gripped Nyasaland had earlier commenced in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa such as Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia as Africans sought ways to free themselves from colonialism (cf. Makungu, 2004; Chuma, 2004; Wilcox, 1975). In 1953, the British augmented their colonial grip by turning Nyasaland and neighbours, Northern and Southern Rhodesia into a federation. Against this background, the colonial government launched a newspaper, *Bwalo pa Nyasaland*, which was to represent "African interests" (Kalengamaliro, 1993:3). Kalengamaliro posits that *Bwalo pa Nyasaland* carried more articles on African social, political and economic interests than the earlier papers and that one of its stated objectives was to act as a "mouthpiece" of the country. It must be noted that *Kwacha*, a native-owned newspaper, folded

in 1956 (Kalengamaliro, 1993:3). Nevertheless, in 1959, another newspaper called *Mtendere pa Ntchito* (*Peace at Work*) was launched by a nationalist, Aleke Banda (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:8; Chipangula, 2003:21; Pachai, 1973:234). It must be observed that Aleke Banda was later to be the founder of the *Weekend Nation*, the focus of this research study. Pachai further asserts that the objective of *Mtendere pa Ntchito* was to keep the “political agitation” alive. This “political agitation”, as further pointed out by Pachai, eventually led to the birth of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). The MCP also launched a militant monthly journal, *Tsopano*, (*Now*) which was a militant mouthpiece of a determined mass movement, Pachai further observes. In December, 1959, *Malawi News*, edited by Aleke Banda, made its first appearance as an official organ of the party, setting a precedent for future journalists in the first few years of the political party's formation (Pachai, 1973:234). Lwanda (2002:5) notes that the *Malawi News* was used by the MCP and its leader, Kamuzu Banda, between 1960 and independence in 1964 to “see off” the threat posed by political opponents.

Malawi attained independence in 1964 with Kamuzu Banda as its president. The new leadership adopted the name Malawi at independence which means “people of the flames of fire” to refer to early inhabitants of the country who lived in the south of Lake Malawi, then also called the “Maravi” (Kalinga, 2012:270). According to Kalinga (1998:540), the euphoria of independence was short-lived because most of the politicians who had helped Kamuzu Banda build the MCP into a formidable organisation fled the country after falling out of favour with the president in a 1964 cabinet crisis. In August-September 1964, some cabinet ministers opposed Kamuzu Banda's autocratic style of leadership but were defeated. Those who replaced them became increasingly sycophantic towards Kamuzu Banda elevating him to the position of a demi-god, an image that was further promoted by the MCP through their newspaper, the *Malawi News*, then edited by Aleke Banda (Lwanda, 2009:138; Kalinga, 1998:540). During this period, Aleke Banda remained very loyal to Kamuzu Banda and was elevated within the then governing MCP hierarchy including being appointed the Minister for Development (Kayuni & Tambulasi, 2010:414). But as it will be noted later in this chapter, Aleke Banda was dismissed from all positions within the party for “allegedly informing journalists in Zambia that he was likely to succeed Dr. [Kamuzu] Banda” (Kayuni & Tambulasi, 2010:415)

Kamuzu Banda realised quite early in his political career that the control of information was crucial to political control (Lwanda, 2009b:222). For example, it was through the *Malawi News* that Kamuzu Banda's MCP published articles that were critical of the Christian Democratic Party (CDP), a Roman Catholic Church-supported party led by Chester Katsonga, a Malawian (Lwanda, 2009:225). In the view of Lwanda, the MCP leader saw Katsonga as a stooge of the Catholic Church, thereby used the

Malawi News to castigate the CDP. This type of news media model continued well into independence. For Lwanda (2002:5), the *Malawi News* and the *Nyasaland Times* continued as propaganda avenues for the MCP government and its development initiatives. Such monopolistic tendencies, according to Lwanda, saw Kamuzu Banda acquire the white-owned *Nyasaland Times*, in independent Malawi, merging it with the *Malawi News*, with the former turning into a daily publication now called the *Daily Times*. The *Nyasaland Times* was published by Blantyre Print and Publishing Company (BP&P) during the colonial times with majority shareholding owned by UK's Thomson Group but when Malawi gained independence, Kamuzu Banda acquired majority stake in the publishing firm in 1972 (Times Media, About us: n.d online). Currently, the newspapers are owned by BP&P, now called the Times Media Group, with majority shareholding held by the Kamuzu Banda family through the Chayamba Trust. Kamuzu Banda died in 1997, three years after Malawi became a democratic state.

As noted in the foregoing, the present day *Daily Times* newspaper's genesis is traced to the *Central African Planter* from the colonial period. Kamuzu Banda's owning Malawi's major media organisation, BP&P (now Times Media Group) is a significant landmark in the evolution of the news media in the country, and that forms the base of the next discussion.

2.6 Post-colonial press in Malawi one-party state (1964-1992)

In 1966, two years after Malawi gained independence, the government established the Malawi News Agency (MANA) whose function was to act as an additional source of information for the two Kamuzu Banda-owned pro-MCP newspapers, the *Daily Times* and *Malawi News*, as well as the state-funded Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) (Chipangula, 2003:21). Chipangula further observes that with such a precedence at the initial stages of the post-colonial period, it was difficult for media audiences to distinguish between the government and the party because the media under the monopoly of Kamuzu Banda was pro-government, and, therefore, pro-MCP. Senior journalists joining the *Daily Times* and *Malawi News* were told by management that the editorial policy of the publications was "to speak well of Dr. Banda, the party and the government" and to ensure that the president's friends, particularly foreign diplomats were not "put in bad light" in any local stories or those emanating from news wires (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:9).

Malawi's one party regime extended its monopoly of the print media through other government-owned publications and these included *Boma Lanthu* (Our Government), a free dominant Chichewa language newspaper that targeted the rural populace, and *This is Malawi*, a low cost subsidised

magazine (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:9). Chitsulo and Mang'anda assert that similar to the commercial newspapers owned by Kamuzu Banda, the themes in the government publications were oriented towards his developmental agendas and MCP propaganda. With Kamuzu Banda and the MCP running the country since independence, strict regulations were also put in place to deter other interested individuals from venturing into the newspaper industry. For instance, besides clearing names of editorial staff with the police, the news media were requested not to publish any information that would bring the country into disrepute, embarrass the MCP or the government (Chipangula, 2003:22). Similarly, Sturges (1998:186) notes that the post-colonial government enacted Public Security Regulations in 1965 which made it a criminal offence to publish anything likely "to undermine the authority of, or public confidence in, the government". Sturges (1998) further points out that in 1968, under the Censorship and Control of Entertainment Act, the Kamuzu Banda regime established the Malawi Censorship Board under whose mandate the press were strictly controlled and journalists were regularly detained without charge for publishing information contrary to the ruling regime in the interests of public safety and public order. In some cases, the autocratic regime would send spies or security agents to track down Kamuzu Banda's critics. For instance, one Malawian journalist, Mkwapatira Mhango, fled to neighbouring Zambia into exile but continued to write articles critical of Kamuzu Banda and ultimately, together with his entire family, perished when their Zambian home in Lusaka was petrol-bombed (Chipangula (2003:16). For this reason, some publishers opted to venture into "politically safer" themes, the example being the *Financial Observer* published by Henry Wandale and *Target*, a sports magazine by Victor Mphande (Chitsulo and Mang'anda (2011:9). Chipangula (2003:21-22) contends that as a result of the censorship policies and low advertising revenue, most private news media ventures folded.

The terrain was deemed difficult for private news media to generate any significant advertising revenue not only because the government, the biggest advertiser, owned the major newspapers, but also due to the fact that Kamuzu Banda owned Press Corporation (Chipangula, 2002:22). Established by Kamuzu Banda following colonial independence in 1964, Press Corporation held huge stakes in farming, retail and wholesale stores, telecommunications, insurance and the banking sectors (Van Donge, 2002:656). At its peak, the corporation controlled 30 per cent of the country's economy, thereby advertising in the monopolistic pro-government press (Chipangula, 2003:22). Such a landscape meant that since independence the British in 1964, Malawians could only get their news from the Kamuzu Banda-owned newspapers, state-owned MBC and a state-owned news agency, MANA (Meldrum, 1994:52). For Sturges (1998:185), the media landscape in Malawi under the one-

party regime underlines the perspective of the political economy of information – ways in which power defines information, delimits it, governs its availability and pre-structures its effects.

However, as Kasoma (2000:32) notes, many African autocratic and military governments started to lose their power with the rise of social movements and end of Cold War towards the end of the 1980s. Such winds of change swept across southern Africa including Malawi and were pivotal in the transformation of the Malawi media landscape as it is discussed in the next section.

2.7 The press from authoritarian to multi-party transition (1992-1994)

Critical political events that unfolded between 1992 and 1993 galvanised underground social movements, local and exiled politicians and other concerned individuals to rise up against the MCP regime which ultimately led to democracy and with it freedom of the press (cf. Mitchell, 2002; Ihonvbere, 1997). According to Ihonvbere (1997:226), at least several factors forced political liberalisation in Malawi in spite of Banda's initial resistance and refusal to acknowledge on-going changes in the world. One factor stemmed from the fact that the Malawi economy was spiralling downwards with inflation at 22 per cent by 1993 and this had been worsened by drought the year before that (Ihonvbere, 1997:226). Coupled with the introduction of the economic structural adjustment programme introduced by the IMF and the World Bank which led to huge unemployment, Ihonvbere further argues, Malawians sought solutions from Banda's opponents. Another factor was that the international community that had been in close diplomatic and economic ties with the MCP regime, more in particular the South African apartheid leadership, began to isolate Kamuzu Banda (Ihonvbere, 1997:226). This, Ihonvbere argues, led to systemic economic failure which was even worsened with the IMF and the World Bank's financial sanctions.

However, the Roman Catholic Church played the most notable political role that spearheaded Malawian change towards democracy and consequently press freedom (Mitchell, 2002:5-6). This is discussed in the following section.

2.7.1 Catholic Church leaders and the Lenten pastoral letter

In March, 1992, the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (a grouping of Roman Catholic Bishops) released a "pastoral letter" to its faithful across the country in the advent of the Easter season, Lent, titled *Living Our Faith* which openly criticised the MCP's one party regime (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:11; Ihonvbere, 1997:226; Chimombo & Chimombo, 1996:25, Cullen, 1994:37). Cullen further observes that the major areas of concern that the Catholic Bishops pointed out were:

- The spread of corruption
- Serious flaws in the education system
- Cut-back in health-care
- Inadequacies in the judicial system
- Denial of basic freedoms/human rights

Notably, on the issue of freedoms, the letter noted that “the monopoly of mass media and censorship prevent the expression of dissenting views” (Ihonvbere, 1997:226, Cullen, 1994:38). Chimombo and Chimombo (1996:25) argue that until the pastoral letter, the Malawi press reported almost nothing of real current affairs in Malawi. The MCP-led government reacted angrily through a press release that declared the Catholic bishops’ letter seditious with the intention of bringing hatred or contempt against the president or the government (Mitchell, 2002:9; Cullen, 1994:41). The MCP government also published an editorial in the *Malawi News* of 14th March, 1992, titled, *No Mercy, Cloaks of Deceit*, which branded the bishops “cowards” while the headlines on the front page of the newspaper titled *Party condemns Catholic bishops*, alleged that the clerics were plotting to disturb peace in the country (Cullen, 1994:43). Cullen further argues that the government’s over-reaction to the letter stemmed from the newspaper’s editorial policy to suppress any criticisms of Kamuzu Banda.

Following the pastoral letter, an exiled trade unionist and politician, Chakufwa Chihana, confronted the MCP threats by returning home only to be arrested upon arrival at the airport for possessing “seditious material” (Chimombo & Chimombo, 1996:25). With pressure from foreign aid donors coupled with local political unrest, Kamuzu Banda and the MCP government called for a referendum on multi-party politics in June, 1993, in which Malawians voted overwhelmingly in favour plural politics, necessitating for the first democratic elections in May, 1994 (Chipangula, 2003:22; Chimombo & Chimombo, 1996:26).

The Catholic bishops’ pastoral letter of 1992 ushered in significant change with respect to media freedom in Malawi, a topic that will be discussed next.

2.7.2 Emergence of the independent press

Amidst the political tension following local and international pressure, a major milestone in the history of the news media in Malawi was reached on 20 August, 1992 when then Minister of State John Tembo, told journalists that there would now be press freedom and anyone interested in

establishing a newspaper was free to do so (Chipangula, 2003:22; Chimombo & Chimombo, 1996:26; Lwanda, 1996:134). Chipangula further observes that following the announcement, about 20 privately-owned publications mushroomed almost overnight “giving the impression that Malawi had suddenly become a vibrant media market place with a vigorous exchange of views and ideas”. However, it must be noted that an independent fortnightly newspaper, the *Financial Post*, appeared in 1991 but it was non-partisan and read mostly by expatriates (Cullen, 1994:20). For Cullen, this had paved the way for a rush of newspapers in the subsequent years.

Following a referendum in June, 1993 when the majority of Malawians voted for a change of political governance from one party-rule to multi-party democracy, the Malawian parliament repealed Article Four of the Malawian Constitution to allow independent publications of political news (Chipangula, 2003:23). According to Chimombo and Chimombo (1996:27), the independent press that blossomed in Malawi during the transition to multi-party politics included privately-owned newspapers and those affiliated to political pressure groups which ultimately turned into fully-fledged political parties. The term “independent press” as mentioned earlier in this chapter means privately-owned newspapers and magazines not politically aligned with government or opposition parties (Campbell, 1998:3; Chimombo and Chimombo (1996:26). However, Chipangula (2003:25) argues that in the Malawian context, this was not a befitting definition but rather “modified” as nearly all publications were politically linked. Opponents to the one-party regime invested their money into newspapers as platforms for their pro-democracy agenda and as such, the editorial independence was compromised, according to Lwanda (1996:136).

The expectation of a vibrant, free media that arrived on the onset of the multiparty politics was not fully achieved for several reasons observed by Lwanda (1996:157). Firstly, Malawian journalists themselves were active participants in the political process as they had the “syndrome” that they had defeated Kamuzu Banda’s dictatorial regime which put into question their objectivity. Secondly, Malawian journalists themselves were divided over political party affiliations which emanated from the ownership structures of the publications who were largely politicians. Table 2.1 below illustrates the media landscape in Malawi as of 1994 at the dawn of democracy in the context of ownership and political party affiliation.

Daily Newspapers	Ownership	Party affiliation
<i>The Daily Times</i>	Kamuzu Banda's Blantyre Print & Publishing Company	Malawi Congress Party
<i>The Nation</i>	Aleke Banda and family	United Democratic Front
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	Clement Stambuli	United Democratic Front
Weekly Newspapers	Ownership	Party affiliation
<i>Malawi News</i>	Kamuzu Banda's Blantyre Print & Publishing	Malawi Congress Party
<i>Malawi Democrat</i>	Mayinga Mkandawire	Alliance for Democracy
<i>The Malawian</i>	Chimwemwe Mputahelo	Malawi Congress Party
<i>The New Voice</i>	Dennis Nkhwazi	Alliance for Democracy
<i>Herald</i>	Bakili Muluzi	United Democratic Front
<i>The Mirror</i>	Brown Mpinganjira	United Democratic Front
<i>The Enquirer</i>	Lucious Chikuni	United Democratic Front
<i>Michiru Sun</i>	Edward Chitsulo	None
<i>Financial Observer</i>	Alaudin Osman	United Democratic Front
<i>New Express</i>	Willie Zingani	None
<i>Weekly News</i>	Ministry of Information	Malawi Government
<i>Business Telegraph</i>	Jerry Jana	None
<i>The Chronicle</i>	Rob Jamieson	None
Bi-weekly newspapers	Ownership	Party affiliation
<i>UDF News</i>	Bakili Muluzi, Aleke Banda, Harry Thomson & Edward Bwanali	United Democratic Front
<i>The Independent</i>	Janet Karim	None

Table 2.1: Print news media ownership in Malawi at the dawn of democracy (Source: Cammack, 2000:4; Chipangula, 2003:25-26)

Linguistically, Malawian newspapers from the onset have been predominantly English although Chichewa is the first language for over 50 per cent of Malawians (Chimombo & Chimombo, 1996:29). However, weekly newspapers *Malawi News* and the *Weekend Nation*, include Chichewa language pull-outs. English is the official medium of government, commerce and education. The next

section discusses factors that facilitated the development of the print news media in Malawi's democratic state.

2.7.3 International support for the development of journalism

During the transition to democracy, some international organisations had a crucial role in the development of the news media profession in the country. These key media developmental partners are noted below.

2.7.3.1 The role of UNESCO in Malawi's journalism education

In 1993, the Malawi National Commission for the United Nations Scientific & Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) organised the first ever training seminar for the independent press (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:15). According to Chitsulo and Mang'anda, this took place at a constituent college of the University of Malawi, the Polytechnic. Chitsulo and Mang'anda further note that in 1994, the Malawi National Commission for UNESCO again organised a seminar titled *The Role of the Press in Democratic Societies*. The objectives were to sensitise journalists on professional ethics, to contribute to the free flow of information and ideas and to contribute to the establishment a strong foundation for the independent press in the democratisation process of Malawi (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:15). Another milestone in the development of the media profession in Malawi was the launch of the first undergraduate degree programme in journalism in the country through the University of Malawi's Polytechnic College in 1995. Chitsulo and Mang'anda (2011:16) contend that UNESCO was a key partner in the provision of technical support in the development of the programme through its International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). The next section looks at the role of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in the development of journalism in Malawi.

2.7.3.2 The International Federation of Journalists

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), with funding from the European Union, organised a workshop for journalists in 1994 which addressed the need for media training, reformation of legislation impeding the growth of press freedom, business and economics of newspaper publishing (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:16). This workshop was significant in that from it came the initiative to establish the Malawi Institute of Journalism (MIJ). MIJ was established in 1995 under the directorship of Chris Kamlongera, a University of Malawi academic who was also a founding member of the Malawi Writers Group (MWG) in the run up to the multi-party politics in the country (Lwanda, 1996:41). In Lwanda's view (1996:41), the MWG, comprising academics, students and the public,

used poetry, plays and other literary genres to subvert the precepts of censorship against the autocratic regime and its secret police. By the end of 1995, MIJ had run dozens of short courses for over 350 journalists in various forms of media, particularly print (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:16). As it is observed next, the new democratic dispensation in Malawi saw the establishment of several news media associations.

2.7.3.3 The establishment of media associations

During the period 1993 to 1994, as the journalism profession developed into democratic practices in Malawi, some key professional media associations, with local and international support, were instrumental in the enhancement of news reporting towards expected standards in a democracy (Chipangula, 2003:26). However, it is pertinent to articulate the political environment which influenced the foundations of these media professional groupings.

When the UDF came to power in 1994, championing press freedom which had been denied under the Kamuzu Banda regime, there was a dichotomy between the new leadership and the MCP as regards to media regulations. As Cammack (2000:5) notes, members of the National Assembly formed a Committee on Mass Media, which was chaired by Hetherwick Ntaba, an MP from the opposition MCP whose members also dominated parliament. Nominally, its aim was to monitor government media policy and the impact of that policy on media, to promote free press, and to ensure that media workers were responsible and acted within a code of ethics (Cammack, 2000:6). In Cammack's view, the Journalists Union of Malawi (JUMA) responded by declaring that they did not recognise the committee considering that that the country had just emerged from 30 years of the MCP media manipulation and censorship. The journalists opted instead to create a press council to formulate their own code of conduct. This development laid the foundations of the Media Council of Malawi (MCM) in 1994 (Chipangula, 2003:27; Cammack, 2000:7). According to Chipangula (2003:27) and Cammack (2003:27), a year after its formation, the council formulated a *Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct* that all media practitioners have to adhere to in their journalistic practices.

Ironically, when the UDF took over the leadership of the Parliamentary Committee on Mass Media from the MCP in 1996, journalists began to realise that media freedom could be threatened by politicians of any party (Cammack, 2000:7). Cammack cites an incident in which the then Parliamentary House Committee leader and UDF MP, Joseph Kubwalo, called for censoring of the *Daily Times* and *Malawi News* – owned by former President Kamuzu Banda of the MCP – because they had misreported the proceedings of the House. The MCP was then an opposition party following

a defeat at the 1994 first democratic elections which were won by the UDF. In a related example, Bakili Muluzi, the first democratically elected president of Malawi, expressed his disappointment about the quality of reporting in the country and that he was not going to sit “idly and let them discredit him or his government” (Cammack, 2000:8). This, Cammack further notes, followed reports from newspapers owned by the opposition about Muluzi building a multi-million dollar mansion in the commercial city of Blantyre.

In 1996, the National Media Institute of Southern Africa (NAMISA) was launched in Malawi (Mulomole, 2009:6). According to Mulomole, NAMISA, which is now called MISA (Malawi), is a local chapter of the southern African regional media watchdog, Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), which has chapters in eleven SADC countries. Mulomole further underlines that MISA advocates for media freedom and freedom of expression in the member countries. Thereafter, journalists based in the commercial city of Blantyre formed the Blantyre Press Club and simultaneously those in the capital launched the Lilongwe Press Club (Chipangula, 2003:27).

The transformation of the media landscape that emanated from the liberalisation of the political system in Malawi resulted into a ‘mixed bag of survival of the fittest’. The irony was that although the terrain was more conducive the media politically, the majority of the pioneer publications collapsed, a discussion which will be tackled next.

2.8 The press in multi-party state (1994-2000s)

Having noted the political context in which Malawi’s post-independence print news media emerged, there were great expectations with regards to freedom of the news media in Malawi in the advent of democracy (Meldrum, 1994:52). Meldrum further observes that the natural expectation was that the coming of multi-party politics would in turn lead to the creation of a vibrant and healthy press. This was partially realised with some newspapers folding up and others wading through multiple challenges, taking over the majority slice in the print news media audiences (Lwanda, 2009, 139). Scholars (Chitsulo & Mang’anda, 2011:12; Chimombo & Chimombo, 1996:33) attribute these developments to several factors, including politics and lack of media management expertise. These are discussed next.

2.8.1 The collapse of the independent press

Chitsulo and Mang’anda (2011:12) observe that most of the newspapers that emerged within the transition to democracy folded for several reasons. Firstly, according to Chitsulo and Mang’anda,

although most of the newspapers were founded by professional journalists, they had little or no business management skills. At the same time banks could not easily trust trading with the upcoming newspapers which were seen as a great risk considering the politically precarious content they dealt with – challenging Kamuzu Banda and the status quo – and that most of the owners could not provide standard collateral for bank loans. Secondly, there were not enough newspaper printing presses in the country in the early 1990s. The only viable one belonged to Blantyre Print and Publishing (BP&P), a company owned by Kamuzu Banda and which published pro-MCP newspapers, the *Daily Times* and *Malawi News*. BP&P is now re-named Times Group. For this reason, even with the ushering in of democracy, independent publishers were not allowed and resorted to lower standard private printers. Thirdly, Chitsulo and Mang'anda further argue that lack of training and adequate experience also played a great role in the death of most of the pioneer democratic era newspapers. Although some newspapers such as the *Financial Post* and the *Michiru Sun* had trained journalists as staff members, others had completely untrained people managing them and this led to ethical dilemmas to the extent that international donors were invited to hold Malawi's first media ethics seminar in August, 1994 (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:13). Fourthly, some newspapers collapsed due to litigation originating from libel suits. For example, the *Democrat* and the *Chronicle* newspapers lost huge pay-outs in defamation or slander cases because with the advent of press freedom, some publications were caught up in sensational journalism that ultimately led to their demise (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:11; Chimombo & Chimombo, 1996:33).

With the collapse of the majority of the private newspapers that emerged with the advent of democracy, only two print news media houses are left in Malawi and they both have political ownership and foundational structures. One is Kamuzu Banda's family's Times Media Group, which publishes the *Daily Times*, *Malawi News* and the *Sunday Times*. The other belongs to the Aleke Banda family's Nation Publications Limited (NPL), which publishes *The Nation*⁴, *Weekend Nation*, *Nation on Sunday* and *Fuko* newspapers. Lwanda (2002:21) argues that the media landscape of the multi-party era mirrors those of the colonial and the post-independence eras when the elite and those connected to the political establishment controlled the media.

As explained in the first chapter, the focus of this study has to do with the *Weekend Nation*. The next sub-section, therefore, explores the history of the newspaper.

⁴Of all four NPL newspaper titles, it is only *The Nation* that bears an article "The" on the masthead. In this respect, this thesis recognises *The Nation* with an uppercase "T" in all references related to this NPL title but it was not the focus of this research study.

2.9 The launch of Nation Publications Limited (NPL)

To have a clear understanding of the context in which the *Weekend Nation* newspaper emerged, it is pertinent to considerably map the publication's ownership historical landscape. However, as a prelude, it is deemed important to look at the brief history of the newspaper's founder, Aleke Banda, and the establishment of the publishing company, the NPL.

2.9.1 A brief history of Aleke Banda (1939-2010)

Born Aleke Kadonaphani Banda in 1939, the founder of the *Weekend Nation*'s interest in the news media can be traced back to the colonial period when Malawi was under the British, then known as Nyasaland (cf. Kalinga, 2012; Englund, 2011; Rotberg, 2002). It was mentioned in section 2.5 that Aleke Banda was one of the indigenous citizens who were part of the nationalist movement aimed at ousting the British colonial government. Aleke Banda grew up in Southern Rhodesia (present day Zimbabwe) where he got involved in student politics while attending the London Missionary Society High School (Rotberg, 2002:46). Due to his political involvement against the British, Aleke Banda was imprisoned in Southern Rhodesia for a few months and it was in jail where he met fellow nationalist detainees from Nyasaland (now Malawi), according to Rotberg. Upon his release in May 1959, the colonial Rhodesian government deported Aleke Banda to Nyasaland where he joined the nationalist struggle.

It was within this struggle that in 1959 he launched *Mtendere pa Nchito* (Peace at Work), a trade unionist newspaper that helped to revitalise nationalism (Rotberg, 2002:46; Pachai, 1973:234). When the nationalists, led by Orton Chirwa, founded the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), Aleke Banda not only became its secretary general but the founding editor of the party's mouthpiece, *Malawi News* (Kalinga, 2012:42). The relationship between *Malawi News* and the MCP has been mentioned in section 2.5. Rotberg (2002:47) observes that Aleke Banda attended journalism training in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States of America before he became the first director general of Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) after it was inaugurated at independence in 1964.

Thereafter, Aleke Banda served in different cabinet portfolios under the MCP leadership following independence in 1964. A few weeks after Malawi gained independence, the country experienced a cabinet crisis which saw the resignation and dismissal of six ministers after a disagreement on domestic and foreign policies with the then Malawian and MCP leader, Kamuzu Banda (Kayuni &

Tambulasi, 2010:410). However, Kayuni and Tambulasi (2010:414) observe that Aleke Banda remained loyal to the Malawian leader and this was evident in many respects; for example, he was the one who suggested that Kamuzu Banda should be declared “Life President” which was duly embraced by the MCP in 1971. Aleke Banda also formed a militant wing of the then governing MCP called the Malawi Young Pioneers and he also founded the League of Malawi Youth under the governing party (ibid). These two “instruments of terror” quelled the attempts of Kamuzu Banda opposition groups from emerging in Malawi and this task was ably handled by Aleke Banda himself (Kayuni & Tambulasi, 2010:414). Nevertheless, despite such loyalty and influence, Kalinga (2012:42) points out that Kamuzu Banda dismissed Aleke Banda from the cabinet in 1973 for “breach of party discipline” only to appoint him in 1978 years to head Press Corporation – a Kamuzu Banda entity. Five years after managing Kamuzu Banda’s Press Corporation, Aleke Banda was fired and sent to prison without trial for harbouring presidential ambitions (Africa Confidential, 2010:12). The founder of the *Weekend Nation* was released in 1991 upon which he joined and became the vice-president of the UDF which was just then a pressure group agitating for democracy in Malawi (Kalinga, 2012:42).

Together with his daughter, Mbumba Achuthan, who is CEO of the NPL and all its titles, including the *Weekend Nation*, Aleke Banda started producing pro-democracy newsletters and leaflets which eventually led to the birth of the *UDF News* (Achuthan, 2014). But when Malawi became a democracy in 1993 following a referendum, Aleke Banda delinked himself from the partisan *UDF News* to launch the NPL, with *The Nation* as its first newspaper title in July, the same year. Following the UDF’s victory in the first democratic elections in 1994, Aleke Banda left the newspaper business in the hands of his daughter and fully devoted his career to politics as UDF’s vice-president and cabinet minister in several portfolios for nearly 10 years. As it will be observed later in this chapter, Aleke Banda also served as the president of an opposition party in Malawi, the Democratic Progressive Movement (PPM) from 2003 to 2008. He died of cancer in a South African hospital in 2010 (Africa Confidential, 2010).

When the NPL was established in 1993, the initial board comprised of Aleke Banda as chairman, his wife Mbumba, his daughter Mbumba Achuthan (presently is the CEO) and her husband Khrishna Achuthan and Ken Lipenga (Cammack, 2000:4). *The Nation* was launched as a bi-weekly newspaper (Mondays and Thursdays) specifically on 26 July, 1993 but became a fully-fledged daily in July 1994 (Achuthan, 2014). At its establishment, the newspaper adopted the slogan: “Freedom of expression, the birthright of all.” The slogan which encompassed all the NPL titles, according to Achuthan, was

to consolidate Malawi's newly embraced democracy. The motto has since changed to "More than just news" as of 2013. The reason for the change of the slogan was that newspapers published by the NPL "not only offer news but provide readers with ideas to think about and make informed choices thereof" (Ntonga, 2013). *The Nation's* first chief editor was Ken Lipenga, an academic who had previously worked at the pro-MCP and Kamuzu Banda's newspapers – the *Daily Times* and *Malawi News* – during the one-party regime. The first chief sub-editor was Alfred Ntonga, who is currently deputy chief executive officer of the NPL and the *Weekend Nation* newspaper. The next discussion pertains to the launch of the *Weekend Nation* newspaper, which is the focus of this study.

2.9.2 The launch of the *Weekend Nation*

In July, 1995 the NPL launched the *Saturday Nation* with its first editor as Jonathan Kuntambira (Achuthan, 2014). In 2002, the *Saturday Nation* was re-branded to the *Weekend Nation* with Steve Nhlane as the editor. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, in 2002, which is the period that the investigation of this study commences, the *Weekend Nation* had a circulation of 36,000 while its competitor, *Malawi News* had 27,000 at the end of the year 2002 (Kondowe, 2008:6). The circulation of the *Weekend Nation* and *Malawi News* have since dwindled to around 24,000 and 22,000 respectively due to several factors pointed in Chapter 1. Both newspapers are distributed nationally on Saturdays and are the most widely circulating newspapers in Malawi. Although the *Weekend Nation* has specific columnists and contributors to the "Opinion and Analysis" pieces, news reporters are not restricted in that their articles may appear across all titles owned by the NPL.

Other newspapers that have since been launched by the NPL include *Nation on Sunday* in 2006 and *Fuko* in 2009. *Fuko* is published in Malawi's dominant Chichewa language and also in Tumbuka, largely spoken in the northern part of the country. *Fuko* is distributed bi-monthly for free in rural areas across Malawi with the financial and technical support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), NGO Total Land Care and Pride (Nation Publications Limited, About us: n.d online). The venture by the NPL to launch a free indigenous African language newspaper mirrors that of the one-party regime under Kamuzu Banda and the MCP whose government published a free Chichewa – Malawi's dominant language – newspaper for the rural communities (Chitsulo & Mang'anda, 2011:9). All the NPL titles, *The Nation*, *Weekend Nation*, *Nation on Sunday* and *Fuko* newspapers, have their own respective editorial teams. The next discussion focuses on political landscape in which the *Weekend Nation* was embedded in between 2002 and 2012.

2.9.3 The *Weekend Nation* and the political landscape

Critical political events that unfolded in the early 2000s and spanned for over ten years when Malawi was governed by three presidents representing different political parties, had a significant impact on the *Weekend Nation*.

During 2001 to 2003, the UDF attempted to secure a constitutional amendment to allow Bakili Muluzi to stand for the third term of office, resulting in a leadership wrangle within the party including the departure from the UDF of the *Weekend Nation* founder, Aleke Banda (Ross: 2004:91). After a failure to amend the Malawian Constitution in his favour, Muluzi appointed Bingu wa Mutharika, a party outsider, to take over the UDF leadership in 2003. As it was mentioned in the preceding chapter (see section 1.1), Aleke Banda, the founder of the *Weekend Nation*, then joined and was elected president of a rather small party – the People’s Progressive Movement (PPM). Following this, Muluzi publicly castigated any critical news, reports and opinion pieces published by the *Weekend Nation* newspaper against the UDF, alleging that its journalists were “sent by Aleke Banda” to undermine the governing party (Nhlane, 2004b:23). Coincidentally, the UDF party’s youth wing members, the Young Democrats, “roughed up” a *Weekend Nation* photo-journalist, Daniel Nyirenda, when he attempted to take photos at the party’s convention ahead of the 2004 elections (Nhlane, 2003:21; *Weekend Nation* Comment, 2003a:2). Mutharika won the presidential elections in 2004 but later formed his own party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Following the 2004 elections, Aleke Banda was not only the president of the PPM, which was an opposition party, but he was also elected as an MP before retiring from politics in 2008.

During the first term of office, Mutharika was praised by the *Weekend Nation* for some of his policies particularly on food security (*Weekend Nation*, Comment, 2006g:2). But it was in the second term that the friction with the newspaper emerged. Following an outright victory in the 2009 elections, Mutharika and the DPP started drafting some “bad laws” (Kayira, 2012:3). As pointed out in the previous chapter, one of the laws which Mutharika and the DPP attempted to amend is enshrined in Section 46 of the Malawian Constitution and relates to press freedom. This was one of the issues that received condemnation from the *Weekend Nation* and is discussed in Chapter 6 (Research Findings) at length. In this regard, in 2010 the DPP leadership ordered all government departments to stop advertising with the NPL, publishers of the *Weekend Nation*, arguing that what was reflected in their news content was negative and unpatriotic (Kanyang’wa & Mhagama, 2011:76). Government advertorials are key to the financial muscle of newspapers in Malawi (Chipangula, 2003:29). Additionally in 2011, the *Weekend Nation* published an article following a leaked cable from the British High Commissioner to Malawi, Fergus Cochrane-Dyett, which criticised Mutharika’s

autocratic tendencies (Wroe, 2012:138-139). Incensed with the *Weekend Nation* article, Mutharika expelled the British envoy from Malawi, ultimately straining diplomatic ties between the two nations for the first time since independence.

The period (2002-2012) however, coincided with some positive significant developments within the NPL and the *Weekend Nation*. For instance, in 2007, the regional media monitoring body, MISA with support from the Southern Africa Trust recognised Aleke Banda, with a “2007 MISA Press Freedom Award” for his contribution in the promotion of pluralistic media in the region (SAT, 2007). Based in Midrand, South Africa, the Southern Africa Trust was established in 2005 to support civil society organisations in southern Africa to participate effectively and with credibility in policy dialogue so that the voices of the poor can have a better impact in the development of public policies (SAT, 2015). As mentioned in the preceding chapter, in 2009, the Media Institute of Southern Africa in Malawi gave the NPL the Print Media House of the Year Award in Malawi with the *Weekend Nation* reporter Frank Namangale receiving the top prize in democracy and good governance reporting.

When Mutharika died in office in April 2012, Joyce Banda repealed the “bad laws” drafted by her predecessor after she ascended to power but just a few months later her People’s Party-led government expressed displeasure with the *Weekend Nation* newspaper when it relentlessly criticised her for extravagance and corruption (Achutan, 2014). During a political gathering, Joyce Banda’s presidential advisor, Irene Chikuni, called for a sweeping government advertising ban on independent critical media houses including the *Weekend Nation*. This was aired in a live-broadcast on the state-run television (MBCTV) and MBC Radio 1. Following the pronouncement, the then editor of the *Weekend Nation*, George Kasakula (2013:5) in his opinion column, *My Diary*, and MISA-Malawi Chairperson, Anthony Kasunda (2013) condemned the PP’s sentiments as retrogressive to democracy and press freedom.

Effectively, the *Weekend Nation* is deemed an independent newspaper, established by a politician who was at the forefront of the fight for democracy in Malawi, served in the first democratic government and left the firm in the hands of his family. But Lwanda (2009:39) argues that the independence of journalists however, just like at independence, remains influenced to a significant extent, by those in political power or the elite owner(s).

2.10 Summary

Historically, the print news media in Malawi has evolved over a span of more than 130 years. This is categorised in three main epochs: The colonial era, the post-colonial dictatorship era and the

democratic phase. However, the colonial era is further segmented into three phases: The missionary press, the colonial government press and the nationalist news media.

It has been noted that missionaries from Great Britain were the first to establish newspapers which largely were to inform about their activities in the country and the region while at the same time to draw the indigenous population into the Christian religion. However, the first commercial newspaper was established by white settlers, ironically who had arrived in Nyasaland as missionaries but later turned into commercial farming. The commercial newspaper has evolved from the colonial times as the *Central African Planter*, and then became *Nyasaland Times* before turning to the *Daily Times* of the present day. It has also been observed that the trend of Malawian newspapers has largely been politically linked and thus is entrenched into the owners' agendas. This is so because from the colonial times, the newspapers were "to give the settlers" a distinct voice. After independence Kamuzu Banda monopolised the press to maintain his stranglehold on power by buying the publications outright. Mirroring the aforementioned, the independent media emerged as what Lwanda (2009:139) calls "actors and reporters" in the fight for democracy, which affected their objectivity even into the emerging democratic phase. It has been noted that because newspapers rely heavily on government advertorials, the *Weekend Nation* has been significantly affected for publishing articles that were deemed critical of ruling governments.

The next chapter reviews the literature within the context of this study.

CHAPTER 3

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Literature review is a process through which a researcher examines previous studies, and draws upon them with the aim of appropriately positioning the project under investigation (Ridley, 2008:2). Bryman (2008:81) notes that a review of literature enables a researcher to explore theories and opinions of other scholars, interpret and use them to support a particular viewpoint. Through an exploration of relevant earlier studies, a researcher is able to further identify research methods and strategies that have been previously employed, and significant controversies and unanswered questions in the area under study (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster, & Prozesky, 2001:565).

An examination of the political role of the print news media in the democratisation of Malawi within the context of the critical political economy of the news media, specifically about the *Weekend Nation*, is a pioneer study. Much scholarship related to the print news media in Malawi has been covered in the previous chapter. Additionally, the University of Malawi's scholar McLan Kanyang'wa (Kanyang'wa, 2003), has looked at "the Impact of power on news coverage in Malawi" by examining two weeklies, which are now defunct, the *Saturday Post* and the *Chronicle* newspapers. Although the study was related to issues of ownership and control, the concept of critical political economy with regards to democracy was not addressed and it was aimed at fulfilling the requirements of a Bachelor's degree programme in Journalism with the University of Malawi. Further electronic searches in peer-reviewed journals and electronic databases have not produced any results that indicate a pioneering research in this area.

In cognisance of the fact that in Malawi, like in many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, democracy was nascent from the 1990s onwards, reviewing the literature on the political role of the media is significant. As Hyden and Leslie (2002:1) observe, the media have been influential in shaping the emerging democratic culture in Africa. In this vein, the review of literature will explore studies that relate to media and democracy.

Since democracy is a political concept, the research will tackle previous studies related to politics and democracy as a way formulating a framework of understanding the relationship between the news media and democracy. In this regard, the review aims not to take or advocate for any scholarly view but rather bring into light the various perspectives with the potential of ultimately positioning the case study under this research. The literature review will also involve an examination of studies that have

dealt with ownership issues in relation to the role of the news media professionals and the enhancement of democratic ideals. However, media ownership and the implications thereof, which fall under the critical political economy theory, are dealt with in great detail in the next chapter – Theoretical Framework.

As observed by Bourgault (1995:xi), whereas the media are deemed to have a central role in the enhancement of democracy, the landscape of mass communications and the way they carry out their political role in African societies differs from that of the West. For instance, Lavrakas and Traugott (2000:vii) point out that since the nineteenth century, election polls have been part and parcel of the news media in the democratic process of the United States of America. In line with Bourgault (1995), Nyamnjoh (2005:2) argues that the media do not have the same potential in every society, nor are they accessible to everyone in the same way or to the same extent. From these scholarly observations it can be noted that there are varied terrains and practices in the way the political role of the media and democracy interplay. In light of the aforementioned observations, this chapter will also look at different media systems and how they operate globally. This view is informed by Hallin and Mancini (2004:2) who argue that in a social investigation of the media, a comparative analysis sensitises a researcher to variations and similarities that underlie the news media in various countries. Such an analysis, Hallin and Mancini further contend, can contribute powerfully to concept formation and helps in clarifying the scope and applicability of the concepts that are employed.

Therefore, this chapter is structured in four major sections. The first section looks at the concepts of politics and democracy as well as related elements and critiques. The second section examines the political role of the media in democracy. The third section explores a critique of the political liberal role of the media. It must be noted that since the study involves the role of the media in an emerging African democracy, considerable attention will entail previous studies from the continental terrain under investigation, that is, Africa. It is for this reason that the final section deals with an Afrocentric perspective of the media and democracy.

Next is a discussion of the significant key terms – politics and democracy – which constitute the major thrust of this research.

3.2 Politics and democracy

Over the years, several scholars (Tansey, 2004:6; Leftwich, 2004:2; Peters, 2004:23; Ponton & Gill, 1993:6) have come up with various ways to define the term “politics”. However, the ultimate conclusion is that there is no precise definition of it. Leftwich (2004:2) is of the view that politics is a highly contested subject, its proper definition and the scope of its subject matter are themselves “political”; thereby, it is unlikely that there will ever be a universal agreement on what politics is. According to Ponton and Gill (1993:4), an understanding of politics depends on emphasis. Ponton and Gill (1993:5-6) define politics as a way in which human beings understand and order their social affairs, more in particular, the allocation of scarce resources and its underlying principles. Thus, politics is an activity concerned with the people’s social and material relationships, expressed in various ways in different places, and continually changing through time (ibid:7).

Peters (2004:23) contends that politics is about governing, and that central to this should be a look at “who gets what, when and how”. Peters further observes that politics is often thought of as an entertaining activity with elections as an illustration that provides a good deal of excitement and entertainment for the media. With an array of approaches to define politics being contestable, nevertheless, Tansey (2004:4) argues that the major characteristic has to do with power. For Tansey, whether one is talking about politics as a human activity or politics as an academic activity, it has to do with the search for the truth on how human beings exercise power or how they seek to exercise that power. According to Miller (1962:157), a political process involves the encountering of a variety of diverse ideas and opinions from a cross-section of a wider society, and the media is a crucial aspect in politics.

Having looked at the complexity of defining politics, it is imperative to define democracy because it is a concept that thematically relates to this research. Tansey (2004:68) holds the view that democracy is a political ideology – a concept that is widely used but with an array of non-precise definitions. Ponton and Gill (1993:36) postulate that an ideology enables people to understand events and to decide their reaction by referring back to its major principles. An ancient Greek notion of democracy influenced the contemporary views as it is derived from the word *demos* to mean “the mob”, and *kracy* meaning “rule” (Crick, 2004:76; Goodwin, 1987:180). According to Goodwin, in classical Greece, democracy denoted a form of government distinct from aristocracy and oligarchy, the rule of the few. Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle’s analysis of democracy was that its ethical principles were based on “liberty” meaning ruling and being ruled in turn (Goodwin, 1987:181). In modern

context, democracy entails sources of authority for government, purposes served by government, and procedures for constituting government (Huntington, 1991:6).

Whelan (1983:14) points out three views defining democracy. First, is to consider democracy as a participatory mode of collective decision-making, one in which all citizens have an opportunity for involvement in public affairs. Second, is to look at democracy as a form of governance where the “majoritarian” principle is the centre stage. Third, is to consider democracy as a government with the consent of the governed. Similarly, Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995:6) define democracy as a government that meets three conditions. The first is that a democratic government must allow meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organised groups such as political parties for all effective positions of power at regular intervals. The second is that there must be an inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies through fair elections. The third is that a democracy must be embedded with civil and political liberties which include the freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the freedom of association to ensure the integrity of political participation and competitiveness.

By and large, the concept of democracy has often been viewed from a Western perspective (Huntington, 1991:47; Macpherson, 1966:35). Some scholars (Beetham, 2000:26; Biryukov & Sergeev, 1994:182, Parekh, 1994:218) argue that there can never be agreed upon indices for measuring a country’s democratic ideals as perceived by many Western theorists. Biryukov and Sergeev (1994:182) argue that because democracy is interpreted differently in different cultures, there cannot be an intuitive model shared by all. This view is shared by Parekh (1994:218) who contends that liberal democratic states need to take into account cultural needs of different societies and adjust the ideas of democracy accordingly. The inconsistencies in the way democracy is perceived indicate that it is an “essentially contestable concept” about whose definition there can be in principle no grounds for agreement, but there are basic core ideas to which many of these definitions justify their principles upon emanating from the Athenian times (Beetham, 2000:26).

Like most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Malawi is a liberal-democratic state (Mpesi, 2011:25). In 1995, a year after the first democratically-elected government under Bakili Muluzi and the UDF came into office, Malawi drafted and adopted a new constitution (Rubin, 2008:51). According to Rubin, the Constitution entails periodic presidential and parliamentary elections, legislative powers vested in the National Assembly, an independent judiciary, and an accountable government in accordance

with the basic premises for a liberal democracy. The next section discusses the concept of liberal democracy.

3.2.1 Liberal democracy

Liberal democracy can be traced back to the 18th century in the Age of the Enlightenment, a movement that challenged traditional beliefs in religion, politics and learning in general for personal autonomy in the name of reason and progress (Heywood, 2012:26). This argument was grounded in the philosophy of individualism – individual rights and individual liberty (Holden, 1988:13). Over time, the liberalism line of thought influenced the present day liberal democracy in that before democracy came to the Western world, there came a society “organised on a principle of freedom of choice” (Macpherson, 1966:6). Early thinkers such as John Locke in the *Second Treatise of Government* (1690) argued that a legitimate government is one that is limited, and John Stuart Mill’s in his essay *On Liberty* (1869) emphasised that the well-being of mankind depends on his mental well-being and that rests on the freedom of opinion and freedom of expression (Mill, 2011:32; Holden, 1988:13). In this respect, a system of government was needed subject to periodic elections with competition coming from different parties, an arrangement that finally led to the introduction of the “democratic franchise in the liberal-state” (Macpherson, 1966:9).

Nevertheless, liberal democracy is defined differently by different scholars as underlined by Pennock (1983:1) who observes that “it is impossible to construct a coherent liberal theory of democracy”. For example, Bollen, (1993:1208) defines liberal democracy as a form of government whose political system allows political liberties and democratic rule. Political liberties, in the view of Bollen, exist when people of a country have the freedom to express a variety of political opinions in any media and the freedom to form or participate in any political group. Democratic rule exists when the government is accountable to its citizens and the general population is allowed to participate in running the affairs either directly or through representatives (Bollen, 1993:1209). This latter view is also shared by Carter and Stokes (2002:1), who underscore that popular choice and government accountability are the basic features of a liberal democracy. Carter and Stokes, however, add that liberal democracy requires strong parliaments that can exercise control over governments and a framework of the rule of law.

According to Foweraker and Krznaric (2000:759), a liberal democratic government may be defined as a political system where multiple political parties compete for control of the government through relatively free and fair elections. This, according to Foweraker and Krznaric, is the minimum

benchmark because beyond that, liberal democratic performances of governments vary widely. Corry and Abraham, 1965:29) emphasise that the basic values of liberal democracy are liberty and equality. If a country is to be regarded as an exemplar of democracy, Parry and Moyser (1994:55) contend, there has to be equality in the participation of the major resources and activities that shape up that particular state.

In the view of Ponton and Gill (1993:52), a liberal democracy is embedded with pluralism. Pluralism in politics is a belief in the diversity and existence of different opinions so that power is widely distributed widely “not just in the hands of the elite” (Heywood, 2012:330). For Russel (1987:170), pluralism is a perspective that emphasises the importance for democracy and liberty of maintaining diverse autonomous political and economic organisations. Russel further observes that for a government to be democratic, there must be institutions through which divergent interests can articulate their views and compete for political power. This is significant in the context of this research study because as Neuman (2002:370) argues, the mass media are part of the democratisation process.

Liberal democracy has been critiqued by some scholars (c.f. Dryzek & Dunleavy, 2009:98; Carter & Stokes, 2000:2; Dryzek, 2000:2; Phillips, 1992:69). For instance, Carter and Stokes (2000:2) argue that despite the benefits, liberal democracies are failing to fulfil their normative ideals such as maintaining liberal values and practices and providing democratic channels for people to have a say in their own collective destiny. One key problem, in Carter and Stokes’ view, is the lack of civic engagement and widespread apathy about national politics. From a Marxist perspective, liberal democracy is a capitalist ideology which worsens social inequalities and class conflict (Dryzek & Dunleavy, 2009:98). Phillips (1992:69) contends that liberal democracy has failed to live up to its core principle of equality, more in particular by not creating an enabling environment for women to participate in political leadership roles. Phillips further observes that while liberal democracy promotes equality in voting and standing for elections, women have unequal access to knowledge, information and skills which renders equality ineffective. According to Nyamnjoh (2005:3), liberal democracy – with its emphasis on the autonomous individual – is an illusion in the African context where ethnicity and the sense of belonging remain active forces on the political scene. Nyamnjoh (2005:21) notes:

Since liberal democracy appears uncomfortable with salient relationships, community and creative diversity, Africans who subscribe to its rhetoric as leaders and as journalists or media practitioners find themselves reduced to a Jekyll – and – Hyde democracy: tolerant in principle but stifling in practice.

Nyamnjoh (2005:2) also contends that for the media in Africa to excel in their role as mediators depends on the indicators of democracy used and also on how sensitive to the predicaments of ordinary Africans those indicators are, like the sense the traditions and values of belonging over individualism are entrenched in a liberal democracy. Effective democracy, Nyamnjoh (2005:23) posits, requires the media to enhance the public's participation in concerns that matter to them. However, this may be problematic in Africa because communities on the continent face unequal access to education, wealth and power and as such they are marginalised in the mass media realm which then renders them susceptible to manipulation by the literate elites who "pretend to know their best interests" (Nyamnjoh, 2005:23).

Against the background of challenges for liberal democracy, other propositions with regard to democracy have emerged and these are examined next, beginning with participatory democracy.

3.2.2 Participatory democracy

Participatory democracy is a democratic process in which citizens have adequate and equal opportunity for expressing their preferences as to the final outcome towards the effective running of their country rather than through a representative (Dahl, 1989:109). According to Bevir (2010:1019), participatory democracy seeks to promote self-rule and self-determination, with individuals actively making the decisions that determine the laws by which they are governed. Mueller (2004:79) notes that major tenets of participatory democracy include empowering of the people at grassroots, encompassing a group-centred leadership and engaging direct action to oppose government bureaucracy.

Another theory that is suggestive of tenets beyond liberal democracy is that of deliberative democracy and this is the basis of the following discussion.

3.2.3 Deliberative democracy

Deliberative democracy is a form of democracy in which people collectively reason together towards decision-making on matters of common concern (Cohen, J., 2009:7). It is based on the premise that democracy should be understood as the exchange of ideas rather than merely a confrontation of contending interests and also that the justification of policies in a liberal democracy should be more democratic (Weinstock & Kahane, 2010:1). Deliberative democrats' perception of liberal democracy is that it is driven by elites and that citizens only engage in the democratic process by applying pressure on the elites rather than by themselves engaging in the decision-making process, according

to Weinstock and Kahane (2010:2) who further note that through efforts like active citizenship, there is reciprocal engagement in the entire democratic process.

Stokes (2002:23) argues that there is a growing disillusionment with electoral politics in many liberal democratic states as a result of the failure of governments to deliver the citizens' demands. Stokes further suggests that deliberative democracy has the potential to provide a more comprehensive response to the challenges of participation, inclusion and critique confronting liberal democracy and citizenship. Deliberation induces individuals to give due consideration to their judgments, so that they know what they want, understand what others want, and can justify judgments to others as well as to themselves (Warren, 2002:173).

As noted earlier, democracy is perceived to be a Western concept and it is against this background, some scholars (Adejumobi, 2000:59; Bellamy, 1993:43; Beckman, 1989:86) propose liberal socialist democratic theory, discussed next, as plausible for African governments.

3.2.4 Liberal socialist democracy

Liberal socialist democracy is a political ideology which places emphasis on a welfare state and government intervention in the market economy in pursuit of an equal society (Giddens, 1998:10). Proponents of the socialist view of liberal democracy draw liberal values of liberty and equality with a concern for social justice (Bellamy, 1993:43; 96). The socialist perspective of liberal democracy is based on the fact that the liberal conception takes for granted the separation of the political from the economic realm and therefore, in effect, protects and legitimises the huge inequalities to which the market economy inevitably leads (Fotopoulos, 2006:60). This also relates to Africa. According to Beckman (1989:86), the ideals of democracies are not actually realised in Africa because what is practised on the continent is "bourgeois democracy". In the view of Beckman, a bourgeois democracy is a political system where the scope of effective popular participation and control over effective positions of government is very restricted. Even if elections are not rigged – as it is the case in many African states – the outcome rarely qualifies as a meaningful "will of the people", a fundamental principle of liberal democracy (Beckman, 1989:86).

Agreeing with Beckman (1989), Adejumobi (2000:59) argues that elections constitute an important element in a liberal democracy but in most African states they appear to be a shadow of democracy due to rigging and ethnic clashes. Sandbrook (1988:243) holds the view that liberal-socialist democracy in Africa, more specifically in the sub-Saharan region, is ideal not just because of the

diverse ethnic relations but that there are vast social inequalities. For Sandbrook, liberal socialist democracy allows gradual access to social welfare for the under-privileged and also extends democratic control not only in the “political sense” but in “economic and social spheres”. The foregoing discussions attest to Betham’s assertion that democracy is a contestable concept and with no universal agreement on which theory befits the governing and development of a country. However, democracy in its various forms is geared towards sustainable peace and development of a country and for this to take place, good governance must be in place (Moyo, 2008:45)

As mentioned in Chapter 1, good governance was one the key themes identified to have dominated the political news media in Malawi between 2002 and 2012 and, in this respect, it is the focus of the next discussion.

3.2.5 Good governance and democracy

While governance is synonymously ascribed to mean government, this is not the case (Dryzek & Dunleavy, 2009:140; Graham, Amos, & Plumptre, 2003:1; Leftwich, 2000:118). In the view of Graham *et al.*, a public policy issue where the heart of the matter is a problem of “governance” becomes defined implicitly as a problem of “government”, with the conclusion that the responsibility for fixing it rests with the government. However, according to Dryzek and Dunleavy (2009:140), governance is about the production of collective outcomes – in the context of public problems – that is not controlled by centralised authority. Thus governance is a process whereby societies and organisations make their important decisions, determine whom they involve in the process and how accountability is rendered (Graham *et al.*, 2003:1). Such a view of governance is perceived by multilateral organisations – the World Bank and the United Nations (UN) – as the manner in which political leaders’ use or abuse power, whether to promote social and economic development or to pursue agendas that undermine such goals (Olowu, 2003:4). According to Olowu “good governance” then is conceived from the postulate of emphasising the rule of law, accountability, participation, transparency, and the enjoyment of human and civil rights. The underlying concept of good governance in democratic states is the development context (Leftwich, 2000:117). Put it another way, people are at the center as stakeholders of development and the participation in the decision-making process.

According to Graham *et al.* (2003:2), there are four areas in which the concept of governance is particularly applied. These are: *global governance* – which deals with international relations; *national*

governance – which is concerned with affairs within a state; *organisational governance* – which relates to undertakings within an organisation; and *community governance* – which is about activities at a local level community. In the context of this research, the focus of the discussion is based on national governance. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) coins this “democratic governance” (UNDP, 2012:1). This means, according to Guhan (1998:185), aspects of good governance may be economic, for example, accountability and transparency, or non-economic such as electoral democracy or the protection of human rights among others. Nevertheless, in its very essence “governance is a political issue” (Guhan, 1998:185).

Having looked at politics, democracy and good governance, the following section examines how these concepts relate to the news media.

3.3 The role of the media in democracy

There is nearly a universal agreement that the media play a crucial and defining role in democracy in countries where it exists (Nisbet, 2008:454; Dennis & Snyder, 1998:xv). Against that assertion, it is imperative to look at the relationship between the news media and politics in order to lay the foundation for the discussion on the political role of journalists in democracy.

3.3.1 The media and politics

The power of the media in shaping politics or politicians and the powerful influencing the media on the other hand remains an arena for scholarly debate. Croteau and Hoynes (2003:15) note that for most of their knowledge about the government, the public relies on news accounts and in turn, this affects how they relate to politics, and, on the other hand, politicians rely heavily on the media to communicate their messages to the public. By the same token, O’Neil (1998:1) postulates that for democracies to function, the civil society requires access to information to make informed political choices whereas politicians need the media to relay their views. Thus, journalism is a fundamental conflicting but also unifying profession in a political community because democratic ideas are entrenched with plurality of views in the social world, notes Muhlmann (2010:10) who further observes that it is in journalism where democracy lives and grows. For Berner (2007:17), journalists create a base upon which diversities can co-exist without destroying each other. Van Deth (2002:xvii) urges scholars to recognise the position and significance of political journalism “not only in the political process” but also to examine the roles and functions in the democratic decision-making.

Cook (1998:2) repositions the news media as political institutions. Cook asserts that because of the way in which the work of newsmen is intertwined with government officials, the news itself performs a government task, thereby becoming a “political institution”. A news reporter is a key participant in decision and policy-making and, as such, the news media are a central political force in government (Cook, 1998:3). As for Wolfsfeld (2011:1), the fact that politicians compete over access to media, indicates that journalists have an “extremely important” role in politics. To further illuminate the symbiotic relationship of the media, politics and democracy (Deuze, 2005:447) argues that journalists provide a public service. Journalists share a sense of doing it for the public, of working the same kind of representative “watchdog” of the status quo in the name of the people who vote with their wallets for their services like buying a newspaper for instance (*ibid.*). This view is shared by Kaul (2012:53) who postulates that where there is an independent pluralistic media system, journalists can expose corruption and poor governance, thereby making a great contribution to the development of democracy. This is because critical surveillance of the government is clearly an important aspect of the democratic function of the media (Curran, 1991:86). Lipmann (1994:43) describes the media as “an organ of direct democracy” charged on a wider scale, and from day to day with the function attributed to a “referendum or recall” of those in political power. McQuail (2005:4) asserts that the mass media provide an arena for debate and a set of making policies, candidates, relevant factors and ideas more widely known as well as providing politicians and interest groups with a means of publicity and influence.

Nevertheless, it is important to understand how the media is recognised or positioned in more established democracies, notably in Western countries such as the United States of America and Great Britain. Randall (1998:2) points out that there are variations in the political role of the media in the aforementioned Western countries as to those in the emerging democratic landscape such as in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa. Street (2001:252) similarly points out that the fact that there are many definitions of democracy, as there are many democratic theorists, even generates very different positions on the role of the media in a democracy.

Against this background, the following section examines scholarship on the perceived role of the media, the liberal democratic version, which according to Street (2001:252), fits most closely with the established Western democratic states.

3.3.2 The political role of the media: Western perspectives

Before proceeding with this section, it is essential to note that the term “Western” is derived from a perspective advanced by Curran and Park (2000:3) to mean the philosophical and political viewpoints of the news media rooted in theorists from North America and Western Europe. For Hallin and Mancini (2004:6), the media models that prevail in North America and Western Europe tend to be the dominant ones globally. Therefore, understanding their logic and evolution is important to scholars of other regions not only as an example of how to conduct comparative research but also because these models have influenced the development of other systems.

The liberal role of the media in sustaining or enhancing democracies has long been recognised in scholarly debates since the passing of the First Amendment Act in 1791 of the United States constitution, which among the Bill of Rights prohibits any government laws abridging freedom of the press (Street, 2001:250; Rubin, 1977:4). This, according to Schudson (2005:217), is the backbone of American journalism. Schudson’s assertion is drawn from the early writings of Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville in the publication, *Democracy in America* (1835).

Through the eighteen chapter book, de Tocqueville, who had left France to study in the US, focuses on the democratic ideals of America in comparison to the “aristocratic” rule of France. Of relative importance is chapter eleven – Liberty of the Press in the United States – where de Tocqueville (2007:147) posits that the influence of the liberty of the press does not affect political opinions alone but extends to all the “opinions of men” and modifies customs and laws. The power of the American press impels the circulation of political life through the country and its eye is constantly open to detect the “secret springs of political designs” and summon all political leaders to the “bar of public opinion” (Tocqueville, 2007:152). Similar laws were also enacted in Europe because according to Neveu (2002:27), legal and fiscal barriers against the press in Great Britain were removed in mid-nineteenth century and in France in 1881 with the abolition of state taxes on knowledge and the passing of the Press Act respectively.

For Plattner (2012:67), in the US, the link between political parties, the media and the civil society is that one cannot function without the other as they provide channels through which the opinions of the people are formed and transmitted. Sparrow (1999: xvii) views the role of the American media as that of “private actors” who represent a “slice” of the American public. Sparrow further contends that just like other pressure groups, the US media operate free from constitutional checks imposed on formal

institutions of government and are highly concerned with the stability of the political and economic system.

One notable variant on the political role of the media in the West, particularly in the US, is the concentration on electioneering and politically related opinion polls. Castells (1997:318) points out that the turning point of the relationship between the media, polls, and politics was John F. Kennedy's campaign in 1960. Not only did Kennedy base for the first time his campaign on polling and television strategy, but his victory was largely credited to his televised debate with Nixon which he dominated (Castells,1997:318). Castells further observes that the role of the media has since become that of intermediary between candidates and the public, influencing presidential primaries, congressional and gubernatorial elections.

But Swanson and Mancini (1996:11) argue that in such technologically advanced countries, the media are no longer a subsystem through which political parties can spread their messages but are rather autonomous power centres which have implications for modern politics – they can choose topics to be covered, select and shape the portrayal of the leaders. According to Mervin (1998:7), if the media have an important role in any democratic polity, then its significance is infinitely greater in the United States than anywhere else. Mervin attributes this to two reasons. The first is that since the American political system is decentralised, there is a greater scope for the press to scrutinise politics and the politicians than in more centralised systems. The second reason is that the American political parties have no control of the electoral process in the manner of other countries where politicians select their leaders. Mervin further observes that through the use of primaries, the American media plays a leading role in the selection process.

According to Lavrakas and Traugott (2000:4), when the media gather and report poll-based election information, they make news that contributes to democracy within which the media operate. When the polls are accurate, and news organisations take full advantage of the polls provided, in the view of Lavrakas and Traugott (2000:333), democracy is the winner because they make the public think carefully about their election choices. The press in other countries is hampered by stringent libel laws and cultural norms that allow politicians to enjoy freedom from media scrutiny and make it possible for them “to cloak their activities in secrecy” (Mervin, 1998:1; 21). Mervin further contends that the American media's role in democracy is thus distinct from that of Great Britain, for instance, because the US media's regular opinion poll coverage reflects government performance and public confidence.

However, Hallin and Mancini (2004:11) point out that although the British and American media systems are quite distinct in some ways, their political role is that of a liberal model. Curran (2002:239) and Rowbottom (2010:174) mention three functions under this liberal model. First is the “public watchdog” function, which in the case of Europe, is enshrined in the European Court of Human Rights – to check and investigate government activities. The second function is to facilitate debate by imparting diverse information and ideas to ensure an informed citizenry. The third function is the deliberative role in democratic politics – inclusive of different views and perspectives to ensure that each group gets a hearing. The liberal model is elaborated in details in the next chapter of this research study – Theoretical Frameworks.

The media in other parts of Europe play modified political roles to that of what Hallin and Mancini (2004:11) refer to as the “Anglo-American liberal model”. Hallin and Mancini (2004:141) identify the “Polarised-pluralist” and the “Democratic-corporatist” models which will be explored next.

3.3.2.1 Polarised-pluralist model

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004:141), the Polarised-pluralist model of the media is pervasive in southern European countries of Italy, Spain and France. Under this type of model, the media aligns itself in a partisan function to the political system. This results in a public sphere that is structured quite differently from the liberal one in which the central element of political communication is assumed to be the appeal of political actors to a mass public of individual citizens (Hallin & Mancini, 2004:132). Hallin and Mancini further observe that in the polarised-pluralist model, more in particular French and Spanish media, there are differences rooted in different journalistic cultures and different relations of the media to political institutions. The polarised-pluralist media model tends to focus on ideological positions and political party sources whereas the Anglo-American model focuses on neutral sources. This, according to Hallin and Mancini, contributes to the unevenness of readership manifested in socio-cultural differences.

The northern and central parts of Europe, however, are identified with a model that is rooted in religion as it is observed next.

3.3.2.2 Democratic corporatist model

Hallin and Mancini (2004:143) point out that the news media model that prevails largely in north and central European countries of Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Scandinavia is Democratic corporatist. This model has its roots in religious propaganda that emanates from Martin Luther's challenge against the established Roman Catholic Church, coupled with the emergence of the print media in the sixteenth century, which created a public sphere deeply rooted in political and religious sub-cultures (Hallin & Mancini, 2004:144). This, according to Hallin and Mancini, resulted into three strands of news media with particular political roles. The first is the "advocacy press" which, like the polarised-pluralist media, expresses political partisanship. The second characteristic is that the media have a high degree of consensus on professional standards of conduct, commitment to a common public interest, and share a great degree of autonomy from other social powers – similar to the Anglo-American model. The third characteristic involves the role of the state. Whereas there is a strong tradition of the limits of state power, the countries are entrenched with strong welfare state policies and these are manifested in important forms of public sector involvement in the media (Hallin & Mancini, 2004:145).

As noted above, although the news media are presumed to take a Western liberal approach in the enhancement or sustenance of democracy, the political role has been varied. The next section briefly examines some studies as regards to the relationship of the news media and democracy in Latin America discussed next.

3.3.3 The role of the media in democracy in Latin America

According to Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002:177), most newspapers in Latin American countries, such as Colombia, Brazil and Mexico, have a strong tendency towards advocacy journalism. In contrast with the Anglo-American model of professional neutrality, journalism in these countries tends to emphasise commentary and opinion from a distinct political perspective (ibid). According to Fox (1998:21), the news media in most Latin American countries media have been largely privately owned since inception. However, there is a strong tendency of for the media to be controlled and used by their owners for their own political ends (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002:177). For example, in Brazil the case of media "instrumentalisation" is more evident because their owners, who are oligarchs, use them to solidify their political control in their respective regions (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002:178). In the case of Colombia, the print media ownership is dominated by families with strong affiliations to the major political parties in the country, the Liberals and the Conservatives (ibid). Although a number of countries such as Brazil, Peru, and Argentina

went through military dictatorships, their political leaders rarely took over domestic radio and television, even though sometimes they routinely shut down newspapers (Fox, 1998:21). Fox further observes that the state-media relations culminated in today's monopolistic and largely unregulated domestic media giants.

Waisbord (1998:42) notes that the Argentine press has been influenced largely by the Western media trend of conglomeration. Commercial interests, over serving the public, largely prevail in Argentina because they have faced just few legal hurdles and regulatory proposals (Waisbord, 1998:80). There is neither anti-trust legislation nor vibrant civic movement to harness runaway concentration and redress power imbalances. For this reason, Waisbord questions the classic and contemporary debates on the role of the media in democracy bearing in mind that markets treat citizens as consumers, rather than members of a political community.

Fox (1998:23) argues that liberalisation and trans-nationalisation of the media, facilitated by Latin American military dictatorships and the economic reforms of the 1970s and the 1980s, contributed to monopolistic media trends. For Latin American societies, the challenge is to organise the domestic communication systems that would democratically accommodate different domestic actors (Fox, 1998:36).

Having briefly examined the media's role in the democratisation process in Latin America, the next section looks at similar developments in Asia.

3.3.4 The role of the media in democracy in Asia

The media trend in relationship to democracy, which scholars (Waisbord, 1998:42; Fox, 1998:23) in the foregoing discussion notice in Latin American nations, appears to replicate in Asia. According to Lent (1998:168), instead of serving the public interest, the majority of the Asian media have been transformed into domestic conglomerates, some with transnational connections in the interest of profit margins and not necessarily democratisation as their goal.

For example, Lent (1998:161) points out that in the 1990s while government authorities in countries like Sri-Lanka, Thailand, China and India were pre-occupied with curbing the domestic media's role in the respective local politics and democratic prospects, they did not shut out foreign news channels. As a result, threats of media and cultural imperialism continued in much of Asia (*ibid.*). In the view

of Rodan (1998:150), the political significance of expanding the media and other markets in the Far East and southeastern Asia is much more complex and hitherto not recognised. This is so, according to Rodan, because in some countries like Singapore and Malaysia, the emergence of capitalism has not necessarily meant it is to be associated with liberal institutions and specifically the liberal media as it would be the case in the West. Contrary to such expectations, Rodan further notes, the media in these countries engage in self-censorship on contentious political issues and in some cases, in direct cooperation with the governments in order to safeguard their profitable commercial interests.

In like manner, Lent (1998:165) underscores that unlike in Latin America, a number of Asian governments interfere in the affairs of the press. Lent observes that one of the ways in which Asian governments control the news media is by sending unclear signals regarding the degree of freedom allowed which keeps editors “off-balance” and producing articles of self-censorship. Youm (1998:172) notes that in South Korea, for example, the press regularly suffers enormous political pressure on what to publish although the government is deemed to be democratic. Furthermore, South Korean journalists do not pay much attention to ethical issues as there are high tendencies of plagiarism within newspaper organisations and acceptance of bribes, which Youm (1998:189) calls “envelope journalism”. This has serious implications for the democratisation process.

In China, the media landscape is even more complex because according to Kit-Wai Ma (2000:24) the country retains tight control over the press especially in the political discourse but in other forms of “entertaining” print media, usually found in cities, the terrain is market-oriented. As a result, the role of the media has been an issue of continuous debate more in particular due to the dual role as commodities in a liberalised market, but also as “ideological state apparatuses” of the government (*ibid.*).

The aforementioned observations underscore what O’Neil (1998:1) posits that as much as that there is a common understanding of the link between the media and democracy, the variables across the globe throw the liberal theory of the media into question. Rodan (1998:150) cautions against a blind liberal optimism about the international press in Asia’s changing position in the global political economy in generating alliances from both the “West” and “East” – further pondering as to whether the growth of market capitalism requires free press.

It is against this background that the next section looks at literature that takes this question further.

3.4 Critiques of the Western liberal model

This section reviews scholarship that critiques the perceived role of the media in enhancing democratic ideals, more in particular those articulated through the Western perspective. It is worth noting, however that the next chapter – Theoretical Frameworks – contains a detailed theoretical examination of the liberal-pluralist model of the media. Although the Anglo-American media are presumed to be the guardians against the abuses of authoritative power or the provision of a market place of ideas, it is a landscape dominated by a few giant corporations that may undermine democracy (O’Neil, 1998:1; Sparrow, 1999:8; Gurevitch & Blumler, 1994:25). According to Sparrow (1999:8), the news media in America are in an awkward position because their political roles are compromised by advertisers and politicians rather than them serving the public interest. This raises the question about the role of the mass media in the American economy and politics, because instead of mediating among the forces of society, they have become an integral part of one of those forces (Bagdikian, 2000:151). Gurevitch and Blumler (1994:25) take this point further to posit that due to this media landscape, there are disparities between the presumed democratic ideals that the mass media are supposed to serve and the “practices that actually prevail”.

Curran, Iyengar, Lund and Salovaara-Moring (2009:7) are of the view that the American media are essentially entrepreneurial actors striving to satisfy consumer demand at the expense of social responsibility journalism. For Scheuer (2008:156), journalism and democracy in America are decaying because of media conglomeration, which due to the interest in the profit margin, impacts the quality and diversity of news. The deeper social loss of conglomeration in the media is not in its unfair advantage in profits and power – the gravest loss is in the self-serving censorship of political and social ideas, in news, magazine articles, books, broadcasting and movies (Bagdikian, 2000:45).

Some scholars (Armstrong 2004:12; Bagdikian, 2000:xii; Gurevitch & Blumler, 1994:35) are of the view that the political role of the Western media, more in particular in America, to concentrate largely on electioneering and opinion polls is not in the best of interest of democracy and good governance. For instance, Armstrong (2004:12) observes that the political role of the American media revolves around electioneering “yet it is a two part process: getting elected and governance”. In this case, journalists are interested in the horse-race polling and not examining and exposing limitations of the campaigning politicians (Armstrong, 2004:16). According to Gurevitch and Blumler (1994:35), the tendency of the American media leaves the audience to neglect other important political issues because they are preoccupied with numbers – the statistical aggregates – to the extent that the only thing the voters want to know is “who is going to win”. This is why Bagdikian (2000:xii) contends

that political narrowness in the media reportage and commentary inevitably lead to a narrow range of genuine choices at elections, and since meaningful voter choices is vital to sustain a democracy, to that extent, the contemporary mass media's constricted politics weaken the foundation of the democratic process. Curran (2002:239) also notes that a flaw in the liberal approach is that it does not live up to the watchdog, informative, deliberative and representative ideals. In Curran's view, a democratic media system should enable underprivileged groups rather than the elites to question prevailing ideological representations, explore where their own interests lie and be able to present alternative perspectives. In this regard, Curran further proposes a "working model for a democratic media system" which aims at destabilising the link of the powerful to the media and instead promotes social integration by allocating resources to subordinate groups.

This model, according to Curran (2002:240) is derived from the media practices across Europe which place public service television at the centre and four other surrounding sectors. It has civic media to facilitate the expression of dissenting and minority views comprising media ownership by organised groups. Then it has the social market sector, supported by the state but to promote media pluralism and diversity of ownership. The model also has the professional media sector owned by media professionals but with maximum freedom practices. Curran also proposes a private media sector which is responsive to popular pleasures in a pluralist media system. The principle feature of this model is that it seeks to create a media system which is controlled neither by the market nor the state and it is a public service approach (Curran, 2002:247). Keane (1991:127) shares the view that the news media should be for public use and enjoyment for all citizens and not for the private gain or profit of political rulers or businesses, thereby supporting the "public service model". In essence, the public service approach serves the needs of democracy, generates content that has cultural value and promotes social inclusion (Curran & Seaton, 2003:401).

In addition, Rowbottom (2010:214) postulates that since the Western media are instruments of funders, that is, influenced by those with wealth or in politics, in order to fulfil their democratic role there is need for a polarised media and public service media. The polarised media model, according to Rowbottom (2010:187), is a scenario where media ownership is fragmented so as to reduce the political influence that may be exerted in a single-ownership pattern. Although with varied categorisations, Rowbottom's suggestions are similar to those advocated by Curran and Keane above. Rowbottom further asserts that limiting media concentration may lead to diverse media content and would ensure a wider distribution of the media as a political resource. Additionally, a system combining controls of ownership, conducting and promoting the public service element may help

move away from the threat associated with media power, steering closer to those democratic functions which justify its privilege place in political life (Rowbottom, 2010:215).

It is critical to understand the way the media are linked to democracy through the liberal media theory of the West because as Randall (1998:1) argues, the media landscape differs from that of emerging democracies. In a similar vein, Kit-wai Ma (2000:32) holds the view that Western media theories take for granted capitalistic democracy as a static backdrop for media dynamics because the ways they may be applied in a country like China, for instance – which is moving rapidly from planned socialism to market socialism – are unique. It is a market-based economy yet the media are controlled by the state. Such observations compel Hallin and Mancini (2004:2) to point out that most literature on the media is highly ethnocentric, in the sense that it refers only to the experience of a single country, yet it is written in general terms as though the model that prevails in that country were universal.

The next discussion examines literature embodying the relation between media and democracy in sub-Saharan Africa with the aim of contextualising the concepts in the focus of this research – Malawi. It is worth noting that much as majority of the literature is drawn from sub-Saharan African countries from Kenya to South Africa, other scholarship is drawn from West Africa because the historical and cultural and political media landscape, as will be noticed later, is similar to a large extent.

3.5 The role of the media in the democracy of southern Africa

Much scholarship (Nyamnjoh, 2011:20; Berger, 2002:23; Hyden & Okigbo, 2002:44; Tettey, 2001:7) has raised contesting issues regarding whether there is a better fitting media model that may foster democracy given the types of democracies that have evolved in sub-Saharan Africa from the late 1980s to early 1990s. During this period, most sub-Saharan governments abandoned single-party regimes and embraced the Western style of multi-party democratic politics (Sandbrook, 1996:71). In light of the common understanding that a strong connection exists between the news media and democracy (Wasserman, 2011:5; O'Neil, 1998:1; Kasoma, 1995:1), the quest here is to explore the political role the media played in the democratisation process of Malawi. Essentially, an exploration of studies in the regional context may aid in the understanding of the contemporary media landscape.

Multiple literature (c.f. Wasserman, 2011:8; Nyamnjoh, 2005:27; Berger, 2002:23; Ogundimu, 2002:216; Bourgalt, 1995:173) cautions against sweeping generalisations of the Western liberal media theory across sub-Saharan Africa, for example. Like in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa,

the news media in southern Africa have gone through three phases of development – colonial, post-colonial and multi-party political terrains (Bourgault, 1995:153). In this regard, as much as there has been an influence from the Western theoretical perspectives, the African media have, as Wasserman (2011:8) points out it, “rich textures and complex contradictions characteristic of everyday life in African societies”. To fully appreciate the literature on the relationship of the media and democratisation of southern Africa, it is imperative to look briefly at the historical social-political-cultural perspectives in which they were born.

3.5.1 Historical perspectives

Although the roots of the media in southern Africa can be traced to the colonial times by media scholars (Makungu, 2004:4; Tettey, 2001:6; Bourgault, 1995:2), Shaw (2009:493) however, argues that they emanate from the pre-colonial period. Shaw contends that before the advent of colonialism, a form of journalism existed in much of Africa only that it took place in the form of oral tradition. Journalism then took the form of oral discourse, using communication norms informed by oral tradition and folk culture with communal story-tellers, musicians, poets, and dancers playing the role of the modern day journalist (Shaw, 2009:493). Shaw further asserts that these forms of “public sphere” resonate with present day *ubuntu* (humanness) and sense of belonging in the African culture. *Ubuntu* is a multi-dimensional pan-African concept which represents the core values of African ontologies such as respect for any human being, for human dignity, collective sharedness, interdependence, communalism among others (Kamwangamalu, 1999:25-26). The *ubuntu* African world informs the oral discourse style of journalism unique to pre-colonial Africa (Shaw, 2004:493).

Bourgault (1995:40) postulates that a number of Africans who were educated by missionaries, herein described as “elites”, alienated themselves from their initial societal and cultural values associated with Africanism such as communal empathy, traditional religions and oral communication and instead became individualistic and greedy. While the aim of the missionaries was for literacy and spreading Christianity, this detachment from the traditional group-based ethics, coupled with western elements would consequently be reflected in the news media, according to Bourgault. As Chuma (2004:122) observes, the print media in southern Africa were largely created by British settlers with the aim of promoting the cause of their colonialist expansion and business interests. This was evidenced by the media conglomeration of several newspapers from South Africa into Southern and Northern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe and Zambia – all controlled by the *Cape Argus* group under Cecil John Rhodes, a British settler with huge stakes in mining across the region (Chuma, 2004:122; Bourgault, 1995:160). According to Wilcox (1975:2), the British-controlled newspapers were used

by the colonial officials to promote mass literacy, rural development and more importantly, counter nationalist activity.

However, Africans used similar vehicles to rally and galvanise themselves against colonial rule (Ziegler & Asante, 1992:12). For example, nationalists who opposed the British Protectorate in Kenya started a *Kikuyu* language newspaper in the 1920s called *Muguithania* meaning “Work and Prayer” and became the official organ of the Kenya Central Association edited by Jomo Kenyatta, who was later to become the first president of the country after independence (Wilcox, 1975:12). Similar publications were launched in Northern Rhodesia now Zambia, Tanganyika now Tanzania, Southern Rhodesia now Zimbabwe and Nyasaland, present day Malawi (Makungu, 2004:4; Chuma, 2004:122). A detailed exploration of the Malawian media history has been covered in the previous chapter. The role of the press in political communication is perhaps the first and most lasting lesson that aspiring leaders learned (Wilcox, 1975:12).

Wilcox’s comment is of great interest in the shaping up of the political role of the media because as Bourgault (1995:163) and Chuma (2004:120) observe, when most countries in the region became independent in the 1960s, and in Zimbabwe in 1980, the governments took over the colonial press, turning them largely into official voices of the ruling party elites. Wilcox (1975:29) outlines four themes that African leaders purported as the role of the media: harnessing the press for nation-building, the media as an instrument of national unity, the need for constructive criticism, and finally the press as an agent of mass education.

Thus, the political role of the media was largely to promote the ruling hierarchies’ development agenda which had been entrenched in the colonialist media policies (Chuma, 2004:124; Bourgault, 1995:162). One notable example is that of Zambia where under the one-party rule of former President Kenneth Kaunda after independence, the government owned the press and as such journalists had to publish stories of state interest (Makungu, 2004:6). Bourgault (1995:173) postulates that the Zambian example was replicated in much of sub-Saharan Africa after independence, when the news media were used for state propaganda but under guise of development journalism. According to Bourgault, development journalism is derived from American ideologies notably by Daniel Lerner, Wilbur Schramm and Everett Rodgers, whose notion was that the mass media should be harnessed as the engine of social and economic development. Thus, the role of the press as a government watchdog is overshadowed by its role as a “public cheerleader” for government development efforts – an ideological device used by African governments to exert control over the press (Bourgault, 1995:173).

Numerous journalists during the second phase, as Makungu (2004:19) points out, were persecuted or killed for not adhering to the agendas of the one party dictatorial regime that took over power from colonialists.

However, with the advent of democracy since the 1990s in sub-Saharan Africa, media development has since become an arena of scholarly contest. Democracy has seen a rise in independent press which Hyden and Leslie (2002:12) argue that this is pertinent to the region in two ways. The first is that the independent press would probe government policies, making the political officials accountable to the citizens. Secondly, the media, as denoted in the Western liberal media theory, would foster rational debate that would consequently steer the development of democracy. Tetey (2001:10) acknowledges that the media have been very active in exposing activities within the state that would not have otherwise been known to the citizenry. In addition, Tetey notes that the media have also taken the lead in setting the agenda for various investigative bodies to take up cases of corruption and power abuse within the “state-apparatus”. An example of the political role of independent media in exposing corruption among the state-apparatuses is a 1988 “Willowgate” scandal in Zimbabwe (Rønning & Kupe, 2000:164). In this case, editor for the government-owned *Chronicle* newspaper, Geoff Nyarota, exposed how government officials abused their power to buy vehicles at an assembly plant in Willowvale, Harare and resold them for profit. This exposure of corruption may serve as an exemplary tale of how professional journalism may contribute both to the democratic process and to an increased awareness of professional standards among journalists (Rønning & Kupe, 2000:164).

However, state-media relations in most sub-Saharan African states continue to hamper the role of the press in the democratisation process. As mentioned in the previous chapter regarding the Malawian terrain, numerous media practitioners in the region face state intimidation and the self-censorship reminiscent of the colonial and post-colonial legacies. Tetey (2001:12) asserts that in the circumstances of a lot of African democracies, the parameters of freedom of expression and the press continue to be determined by how well the contents of that particular print or electronic medium portray power brokers in a positive light.

For Kasoma (1995:538) besides the factors of intimidation from government officials, the role of the independent media as regards to living up to the liberal model – entailing objectivity and being representatives of the public – is thrown into question because some of the publications are editorially controlled by the owners. Kasoma (1995:539) argues that there is a link between freedom of the press

and democratic ideals in that if the media are not free to disseminate any information they want, then they cannot provide the people with all the information they require in order to make informed democratic decisions, thereby unable to act as watchdogs of the government. However, as noted in section 3.4, assertions by the Western liberal model for realising democratic ideals are even questioned by scholars within the Anglo-American context because as Wilcox (1975:ii) observes, the social, political and press institutions at work in every country are as diverse as the geography of the peoples of Africa. In this regard, Berger (2002:22) questions the suitability of liberal media theory paradigm to Africa. If much of African media has historically played a political propagandist role or a development role, it does not serve any explanatory purpose to hold up a watchdog model and measure Africa's historic deficit (Berger, 2002:22).

Bearing this in mind, the next section examines the Afrocentric view of the role of the media in democracy.

3.5.2 The role of the media in democracy: Afrocentric perspectives

Before discussing the "Afrocentric" view of the news media, it is noteworthy that "Afrocentricity" is often confused with "Afrocentrism" (Gordon, 2008:106). The confusion, Gordon further observes, emerges from the fact that proponents of "Afrocentricity" refer to themselves as "Afrocentric" which is then sometimes erroneously viewed in the same lines as "Afrocentrism". Afrocentrism, however, is a term frequently used as the African version of the opposite of the hegemonic European ideology known as "Eurocentrism" (Gray, 2001:45). Eurocentrism is a way of thinking that presumes that Western societies are superior economically, politically, culturally and that the whole world should be developed on the Western European model (Lindner, 2010:29; Chukwuokolo, 2009:31). In this respect, "Afrocentrism" is perceived to be the counter of "Eurocentrism" thereby being confused with "Afrocentricity". Such confusion is noticed in Hoskins (1992:253) where he argues that "Afrocentrism/Afrocentricity" represents a potent challenge to the European power structure embedded in Eurocentrism, which places Europe at the hierarchy of global civilisation. Thus, it is noticed that for Hoskins, "Afrocentrism" is synonymous with "Afrocentricity" when it is not. With regards to the news media, Omojola (2008:178) commits a similar error by utilising "Afrocentrism" and "Afrocentricity" interchangeably to argue that "it is a counterproductive philosophy". Omojola further argues that "Afrocentricity" is seemingly a protest philosophy that strives for elimination by substitution and promotes local interests to the detriment of the globalising world.

Nevertheless, “Afrocentricity” is defined as the quality of thought and practice rooted in the cultural image and interests of African people (Gray, 2001:46). “Afrocentricity” is the construction of a new African identity and an interpretation of the world from an African psychological, spiritual and cultural frame of reference (Akinyela & Aldridge, 2003:65). It is an African-centred approach in thinking, learning and living and is attributed to African-American philosopher Molefi Kete Asante. Gordon (2008:106) points out that some ideas that underlie “Afrocentricity” have been mentioned by a variety of historians and social theorists such as Harold Cruse, Kwame Ture, Maulana Karenga, among others before Asante’s piece. Similarly, Gray (2001:21) points out that scholars such as John Henrik Clarke, J.A. Rodgers, Roy Morrison and Chinweizu all utilised the term “Afrocentric” in their respective works regarding the struggles of African and African-American people in the 1970s. But Gray (2001:21), underscores that it was only Asante, however, “who sets forth the term, self-consciously defines the term and begins building a practical far-reaching, functional, usable theoretical, philosophical system”.

In the literary piece, *Afrocentricity: The theory of social change*, Asante (1980:1) argues for the profound need of African people to be re-located historically, economically, socially, politically, and philosophically from the European way of thinking to an African’s own identity. This, according to Asante, is because for many years, Africans have been “taken off” of cultural, economic, religious, political and social terms and have existed on the periphery of Europe. Asante (1980:4) further contends that the “Afrocentric” school of thought is the first contemporary movement initiated by African scholars that has currency on a broad scale for “renewal and renaissance” in the cultural context of the African community seeking to assert itself. An “Afrocentric” view depicts the unique worldview of African people and it provides researchers with a tool for examining the intellectual history of African nationalism (Israel, 1992:411). The main tenet of “Afrocentricity” is the centrality of the African experience for the African people (Mazama, 2002:218). Jimada (1992:377) holds the view that “Afrocentricity” allows Africans to frame the world from their own experiences, to define their interests and to reconstruct institutions based on societal characters.

“Afrocentric” standpoints have been employed in various disciplines. For instance, Mazama (2002:218) argues that Christianity has often been the “culprit of white supremacy” by reducing some African cultural beliefs as pagan and detestable superstitions. For this reason, Mazama asserts that Africans need to re-establish themselves by embracing “Afrocentricity” with regards to issues of religion. Dei (1998:200) has looked at how “Afrocentricity” could be incorporated into a multi-centred balanced education curriculum in multi-racial Canadian schools. Afrocentric perspectives in

multiple disciplines are also reflected amongst some scholars of the news media, which is the focus of this research study.

The Western media have a journalistic culture that spans many decades and this culture permeates in the form of what is oftentimes perceived to be “the truth” about Africa (Odine, 2013:218; Smith, 2005:10). In this regard, Israel (1992:412) contends that news accounts that deal with Africa must be written from the perspective of Africans themselves. Thus, the purpose of “Afrocentricity” in the news media of Africa is the welfare of Africa “which means African liberation”, Israel further notes. Jimada (1992:378) argues that journalistic practices in Africa must be from an African cultural and developmental perspective, that is, rediscover traditional culture, create new culture and help folk cultures create and preserve their cultures. In the view of Banda (2008:50), there is need for African journalists to engage in the deconstruction of a Western libertarian journalism and construct a more responsive journalism that resembles the realities of the African context. Banda (2008:51) argues that the deconstruction of the dependency of African journalists on the Western media models must start with the re-defining the curricula in the journalism education which needs to reflect the cultural dimensions of the society. Banda further argues that this has important ramifications in the pursuit of the journalistic principles that enhance democracy.

Africa is a terrain marked by multiple ethnicities, societal and cultural values as well as varied colonial legacies (Obonyo, 2011:2). Some of these cultural and societal values appear to conflict with the presumed liberal role of the media in democracy. Under liberal democracy, the individual is treated as an autonomous agent and primary solidarities and cultural identities are discouraged in favour of national citizenship and culture and this means the media are expected to be balanced, objective and fair in the gathering and dissemination of news (Nyamnjoh, 2005:38). Nyamnjoh further points out that this is far more complex in societies where cultural solidarities are a reality and more in particular where governments purport to pursue liberal democracy in principle, while in reality they continue to be repressive and high-handed to their populations. Although southern African states embrace the Western type of democratic ideals, some political leaders interfere with the practices of critical independent media admonishing them for lack of respect or patriotism (Tettey, 2001:18; Kasoma, 1995:538). In their quest to muzzle the media’s role as watchdogs over governmental improprieties, several governments are now appealing to ethnic and partisan sentiments among individual journalists, in effect calling on them to subordinate their professional ethics and standards to blind and parochial loyalties (Tettey, 2001:18).

In some cases, according to Tettey (2001:20), governments resort to withdrawing advertising from critical independent press for publishing views of political enemies. In addition, Hyden and Okigbo (2002:49) point out that some independent African newspapers, for instance, *The People* of Kenya, are so unabashedly pro-government which, consequently, has a polarising effect on public opinion, one that does not foster the values that are necessary to sustain democratic governance. The issue of concern with the above observations is the query over the liberal role of the media in fostering and sustenance of democratic ideals because, as Hyden and Okigbo (2002:47) argue, the democratisation role appears to be limited with regards to the African terrain. As Berger (2002:23) observes, much as it might be a dominant normative framework, the Western pluralist model is too narrow to be a universal idealistic concept and the elites will utilise it to articulate their interests. The core of this sectional discussion is not to dwell on the constraints of the press in southern Africa but rather debate on approaches which multiple scholars (Shaw, 2009:503; Nyamnjoh, 2005:27; Hochheimer & Kareithi, 2004:2; Hyden & Leslie, 2002:20; Kasoma, 1995:549; Blankenberg, 1999:59; Uche, 1991:9; Mang'anda, 1983:3) perceive to be applicable to the region.

Shaw (2009:503) points out that journalists in Africa face a nightmare of trying to grapple with the interests of liberal democracy while overlooking the alternative ideas of personhood and agency that are in tune with those cultural communities. It is for this reason that Blankenberg (1999:59) argues for the formulation of *ubuntu* as a “liberatory” journalism model with a sense of “Africaness empowerment”. The concept of *ubuntu* has been explored in the preceding section. Blankenberg asserts that *ubuntu*, as a philosophy entrenched in humanism, may enable popular resistance against the profit-driven, purposive-rational ideologies of the Western elites. This, according to Blankenberg, can take in the form of story-telling in media content using symbols and narratives drawn from the legacy of oral culture but could now transcend through multiple-media platforms “to bind people together”.

According to Hyden and Leslie (2002:20), it is imperative to understand the African cultural domain if the media in this context are to foster the democratisation process. As Nyamnjoh (2002:2) posits, culturally the media are victims of an imposed hierarchy of national and world cultures, and also of cultural industries that have opted for “routinisation, standardisation and homogenisation of media content”. Globalisation is creating a cultural dependence on values that contradict those that may have guided African social and political relations to date and this can have a bearing on the role the media plays in the democratisation process (Hyden & Leslie, 2002:21). Along similar lines, Hochheimer and Kareithi (2004:7) observe that communication is a social process that must be culturally situated

and to effect change, it is crucial to know how the culture works – to understand how meanings and identities are constructed within the social organism and how different groups make different senses out of the same media content. Any press, as a societal institution, reflects the values of a given society and only has utility if it fulfils the people's perceived needs (Wilcox, 1975:iii). Sharing this view, Randall (1993:644) observes that the media's role in a democratisation process varies considerably from one country to another, more particularly in the developing world.

However, Uche (1991:9) argues that the media systems of Africa lack articulated policy objectives to guide in decision-making that would reflect national orientations and ideological base. According to Uche, media policy parameters are not only determined within the ideological directives of their society, but are also dependent variables of the larger policies that emanate from the ideology of their society. The formidable force of the normative theories derived through neo-colonialism contribute to the mass media in Africa to be void of national ideological perspectives from which they would formulate policies reflecting matters of culture, politics and the economy, Uche, (1991:8 – 9) observes, further noting that

This is an indication of the need to have the African media practitioner well-educated and versed in the basic theories relating to the sociology, politics, economy, mass communication, history, civilisation, arts, and sciences.

For Uche, it is an interplay of all these that will give ideological directive to policies on the types of media messages befitting African audiences. If the media are to flourish in their “national cultural environments”, Uche (1991:11) further proposes a problem identification and solution ideological paradigm of communication which may lead to a mutual working relationship between theory and practice in the conceptualisation, development and implementation of national communication policies in various African media systems. Uche's propositions intertwine with those of Croteau and Hoynes (2003:19) who argue that the media serve as a powerful socialising agent – acting as a bridge between people's private and their relations to the world. Croteau and Hoynes further observe that the media reflect the identities of divergent cultures. Similarly, this is a view held by University of Malawi academic, Grey Mang'anda (1983:iii) who asserts that there is need to make the African mass media more responsive to the needs and requirements of their African audiences. Mang'anda further argues that by emphasising those issues that are of great importance to their audiences, the media will be very useful tools in economic, political and cultural development of their audiences.

In engaging with this issue, Hochheimer and Kareithi (2004:2) are of the view that the news media which serve the purpose of democracy-building, must also play the roles either to promote diversity, tolerance and respect, or to explore long-standing deeply rooted mistrust and rivalries and hatred. The role of the media in divergent societies, Hochheimer and Kareithi further assert, is tasked with mediating the differences across cultures because a democracy is at its best when different peoples, having different cultural frames, with different experiences and expectations, feel the freedom and support to actively engage each other in the dialogues about the issues of their time. However, Hochheimer and Kareithi (2004:2) hold the view that the political reformists and multilateral aid donors to emerging democracies like those of southern Africa, often emphasise the narrow sense of the Western approach of democracy such as “free speech”, “freedom of association”. Hochheimer and Kareithi further argue that these fall short of addressing the diverse cultures to create solid, stable democracies. Ojo (2003:825) similarly notes that to consolidate democracy, it requires the capacity of the polity to nurture and sustain it over a long period with little or no threat to the nascent democratic experiment of all ramifications. In emerging democracies and diverse societies like those in southern Africa, the mass media are even more necessary for a congruent political culture to evolve (Ojo, 2003:828). This, according to Hochheimer and Kareithi (2004:2), is when journalism has its most critical roles to play in the reconciliation of cultural differences.

Kasoma (1995:549) holds the view that Africa has a better chance of preserving democracy if the independent media, in particular, brought all ideas of the market place for open and intelligent discussions even with sensitive issues like “tribal quarrels” so that the public can voice their opinions. What this means, as Croteau and Hoynes (2003:24) note, is that the role of the media must be aware of the relationship with the public and the audience and the potential implications of the audiences over the media content. If democracy is to be harnessed and enjoyed by southern African citizens, then there are many challenges that need to be addressed. Democracies are political systems that allow for the dispersal of power and public access to it, notes O’Neil (1998:1), adding that institutional checks and balances within the state structure are highlighted as necessary firewalls against abuse of authority and the media are valued in this area. But the prevailing patterns of media ownership in southern Africa, probably in the other parts of the continent throw the democratisation process further into conflict. An example is a South African case pointed out by Wasserman and de Beer (2005:39).

According to Tomaselli (2002:137), two issues pertain to corporate control of South Africa’s media in the post-apartheid era, given the distribution of power within the nation’s political economy. The first concern, Tomaselli (*ibid*) points out, is the role of key allocative controllers. Allocative control

consists of the power to define the overall goals and scope of the corporation and determine the general way it deploys its productive resources (Murdock, 2005:118). The second concern, according to Tomaselli (2002:137) is about structural questions that determine the role of economic and political factors in constraining both allocative and operational controllers. Unlike allocative control, operational control works at the lower and is “confined to decisions about resources already decided upon at the allocative level” (Murdock, 2005, 118). In the view of Murdock (ibid), it is important to distinguish between allocative and operational controllers because it enables researchers to understand who really owns the media and in whose interest they actually serve. “When we are talking about the relationship between control and ownership, we are talking first and foremost about the connections between allocative control and economic ownership” (Murdock, 2005:119). With regards to economic ownership of large media corporations, it represents shareholders who have the majority of the voting shares (ibid). Following the end of apartheid, four white press groups which had links with the wider web of South Africa’s monopoly capital – the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), Argus Holdings, Times Media Limited (TML) and the Afrikaner-owned Perskor and Nasionale Pers started re-organising their ownership arrangements to the interests of the allocative controllers such as the Anglo-American and the Johannesburg Consolidated Investments (JCI) (Tomaselli, 2002:137). The companies commenced the unbundling of the their press conglomerates in response to the structurally-determined local political, and global economic changes and this was done selectively by redeploying the companies in “allocative control” of black empowerment groups (ibid). For example, Tomaselli (ibid) notes that the first phase of the unbundling came with the Argus’s sale of 52 percent of the black-targeted *The Sowetan*, then South Africa’s largest daily newspaper. In another example, the diversification of the news media ownership into black ownership hands saw a consortium aligned to the African National Congress (ANC) directing overall company policy at Times Media although “it was not involved at the operational level” (Tomaselli, 2002:143). However, Tomaselli (2002:144) argues that the post-apartheid restructuring of the media from previously dominated white and Afrikaner capital into black ownership did not solve the problem of structural inequality in the South African press. This stemmed from the fact that the legacy of apartheid had consigned people into particular imposed social conditions and spatial boundaries and these communities retained different “interests, ideologies and communication preferences” (Tomaselli, 2002:145).

In this case, the pressures to cater for diverse racial groups, notably black and coloured communities in post-apartheid South Africa, has led to intense circulation wars and “tabloidisation” of the print media. Whereas in post-apartheid South Africa, the mainstream print media, according to Wasserman

and de Beer, the functional and market structural composition of the print media still targets the lucrative white populace, the tabloid press on the other hand targets the black/coloured race.

Jacobs (2003:244) similarly observes that despite the fact that South Africa adopted a liberal democratic framework in 1994, whites continue to shape the consumption of the news media which even emanates from the editorial, organisational, ownership and control structures. Tomaselli (2002:145) argues that while by 1999 control and ownership of the media had been significantly fractured, in terms of both editorial and , to a lesser extent, management positions, the kinds of class forces unleashed by liberation had yet to work their way through the transforming society.

Owners of capital, whether black or white, use media organisations to further their own class interests to secure and enhance their personal strategic positions in the socio-economic order (ibid).

For Jacobs (2003:286), the poor are excluded and caricatured in the debates on matters that concern them. While during the apartheid era, the English press for example protected the English-dominated capital in general, and the mining capital in particular, its new ownership structures simply demanded profits in the context of global capital but did not broaden their readership in the short term, Tomaselli (2002:150-152) notes, further arguing that this ultimately led to less diversity in the content of the press. This raises the question whether the media have significantly broadened the public sphere in their political role to encourage a more participatory, democratic exchange of perspectives, according to Wasserman and de Beer (2005:39; 40), bearing in mind the landscape of the press in a post-apartheid society. For citizens to legitimately take part in the democratic process, it is imperative that they have access to knowledge which could serve as a basis for informed participation (Tettey, 2001:24).

Along similar lines, Shaw (2009:505) posits that to advance the cause of democracy on the continent, there is need to rethink the models that are based on African historical experiences such as the “oral discourse” type of journalism which may be entrenched within the civil society concept, not the way it is understood in the West but reflecting African cultural life. However, Nyamnjoh (2005:21; 79) argues that African journalists themselves must acquire and live within the virtues of professionalism and tolerance to enhance the democratisation process because a more responsible, professional and ethical approach to journalism strengthens the African case. In addition, Kasoma (1995:547) observes that the African independent press sometimes conducts unethical biased reporting in disguise of the

normative “watchdog” role but rather “based on hatred of those in power”. In this regard, Hyden and Okigbo (2002:49) argue that the news media may not necessarily contribute to the formation of democracy because they have a particular agenda or act as mouthpieces of the owners rather than serve the public interest. In some instances, libel suits are brought against journalists and publishers because of media contents that cannot be substantiated (Tettey, 2001:23). Tettey, further cites a 1998 Ghanaian example where a number of journalists were held liable for stories that accused senior government official of drug-related crimes. The result, Tettey further notes, is that the media begins to lose the attention of the audience as the credibility becomes eroded.

The aforementioned notwithstanding, Nyamnjoh (2005:27) calls for a closer look at the histories, cultures and sociologies of African societies rather than assuming that the way the liberal democratic model about the media work in the West would similarly be applied to the continent. In similar vein, Kotze (1986:419) argues that it is unlikely that the political role of the media in the socialisation process can effect radical change in the political orientations of most people in a relatively short period.

3.6 Summary

This chapter sought to examine the political role and the functioning of the news media in liberal democracies. In this context, concepts related to the relationship between the news media, politics and democracy were examined. The concepts of politics and democracy vary in the way they are theorised and applied across the globe although liberal democracy in itself, is rooted in a Western sense. The political role of the news media in the democratic process varies and, therefore, cannot be wholesomely “uprooted” from the West to other continental terrains. In the African context, the chapter has looked into how complex it is to theorise a unique model regarding the role of the media in democracy bearing in mind the multiple historical, cultural landscapes that shape the continent. If the media are to play a critical role to make democracy meaningful in Africa, scholars have emphasised the need to pay attention to the cultural, historical dimensions while also symbiotically working alongside civil society. The media industry is characterised by discursive struggles over power and instruments that mediate that power and this is entrenched in the political economy, which has a bearing on the democratisation process (Tomaselli, 2002:151).

The next chapter explores the theoretical framework employed in this study. In doing that, other related theoretical concepts will also be examined.

CHAPTER 4

Theoretical Framework

4.1 Introduction

To examine the political role of the *Weekend Nation* within the context of ownership of the media in Malawi between 2002 and 2012, the research employed the critical political economy theoretical framework of the media. The critical political economy theory was chosen because it looks at how media ownership impacts news content – how ownership of the media and control may translate into controls over the message, among other issues (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott, 1982:8). This research examined the role defined by the *Weekend Nation* for its journalists considering its ownership by a Malawian politician, Aleke Banda. The newspaper was launched in 1995 by Aleke Banda, then vice-president of the United Democratic Front (UDF), as a sister publication to *The Nation*, which had been established as a daily newspaper a year earlier (Lwanda, 2002:12). As mentioned in Chapter 1, the UDF under the leadership of Bakili Muluzi took over power from Kamuzu Banda's Malawi Congress Party (MCP) to become Malawi's first democratically elected ruling party in 1994 (Muluzi, Juwayeyi, Makhambera & Phiri, 1999:179). In 2003, the *Weekend Nation* founder (Aleke Banda) left the UDF to join and become the president of a newly formed political party then, the People's Progressive Movement (PPM), after he had a fall out with the then president, Bakili Muluzi, who had attempted to seek an amendment to Malawi's Constitution to run for a third presidential term. In the view of the *Weekend Nation's* foundational, organisational and financial structure, the critical political economy theory was deemed appropriate for the investigation on the political role of its journalists and the impact of ownership in executing those tasks.

This chapter looks at the critical political economy theory and further expounds on its relationship with the news media. However, to better embrace the rationale for the theoretical framework employed in this research, one needs to explore the liberal-pluralism theory, against which the critical political economy emerged as a critique.

4.2 Liberal-pluralism and the media

The liberal-pluralism theory emanates from the 1956 publication of Fredrick Siebert, Theodore Paterson and Wilbur Schramm – *Four Theories of the Press* (McQuail, 2005:176; Berry, Braman, Christians, Guback, Helle, Liebovich, Nerone & Rotzoll, 1995:1). It was Siebert, influenced by classical thinkers such as John Milton from the seventeenth century, Thomas Jefferson from the eighteenth, and John Stuart Mill from the nineteenth, who constructed the “libertarian” theory (Berry

et al. 1995:42). According to McQuail (2005:177), the libertarian – free press theory – has its roots in the World War II and its aftermath, the Cold War era, when the United States was trying to export the idea of liberalism and free-enterprise ideology against fascism and autocracy to southern and eastern European countries such as Italy and Germany and the Soviet Union. Freedom of the press was a key issue. The libertarian theory assumes that in the absence of state control, the media are free, that deregulation coincides with liberty, and that the state is the only possible source of obstruction to media operation (Berry *et al.*, 1995:24).

McQuail (2005:177) points out that the liberal theory of the media is grounded in press freedom to denote the ownership of the means of publication away from state intervention, neglecting economic barriers to access and the monopolistic publishing power. Berry *et al.* (1995:25) posit that in classical liberal thought, the notion that was underlined by Siebert in *Four Theories*, was that the press must completely be free from control or domination by the government. Curran and Park (2000:4) note that the 1950s' *Four Theories* tradition saw the universe only through Western eyes and that the world's communication system could be laid bare by studying the thought of Siebert *et al.* (1956). Curran and Park further argue that the publication established a landmark study for the next forty years such as Dennis McQuail's *Mass Communication Theory* in 1983, and Charles Wright's *Mass Communication* in 1959. Nevertheless, the *Four Theories* established a convention that one should not theorise generally about the global media if there is lack of knowledge about other systems (Curran & Park, 2000:4). However, since the publication of the *Four Theories*, liberal theory has had tremendous impact on the theorising on the media and freedom of the press in that it spells out the “normative function” that pertains to mass media, that they ought to be organised or behave in a certain way for the good of society (McQuail, 2005:162; Berry *et al.*, 1995:4). McQuail further argues that the normative theory of the media covers both internally chosen purposes and claims from the outside about how the media should conduct themselves.

According to McQuail (2005:166-168), in contemporary thought, there have been several conceptions associated with libertarianism such as “the media as a market place of ideas” and as “The fourth estate”. The next section tackles the perspective of the media as the market place of ideas.

4.2.1 The media as the market place of ideas

In the liberal-pluralistic perspective, one of the key tenets is the notion of “the market place of ideas” where interested parties are supposed to advance arguments for their positions, and rational individuals are expected to choose from among competing arguments those that best suit their

interests, the outcome of which is for the common good (Berry *et al.*, 1995:43). Curran and Seaton (2003:347) note that this free-market model argues that the press is a representative institution in that its nature and shape is determined by its readers – newspapers and magazines must respond to the concerns of its readers if they are to stay in business. Cammaerts and Carpentier (2007:10-11) further point out that the acceptance of pluralism is a key defining feature of modern liberal democracies and from a liberal perspective. Pluralism and conflict are seen as fruitful and necessary conditions for human progress.

Pluralists see society as a complex of competing groups and interest, with none dominating the other (Gurevitch, Bennett, Curran & Woollacott, 1982:1). Media organisations are seen as bounded organisational systems, enjoying an important degree of autonomy from the state, political parties and institutionalised pressure groups. In this vein, control of the media is said to be in the hands of an autonomous managerial elite who allow a considerable degree of flexibility to media professionals (Gurevitch *et al.*, 1982:1). Bennett (1982:40 – 41) observes that the field of communications provides a rich field for examining claims of democratic diversity within a nation. Bennett further points out that from a liberal-pluralist perspective, the clash and diversity of the viewpoints contained within the media contribute to the free and open circulation of ideas, thereby enabling them to play the role of the “fourth estate” through which the governing elites could be pressurised and reminded of their dependence on majority opinion. The next section undertakes a reflection on the concept of the “fourth estate” for a better understanding of its relationship with the liberal-pluralist theory.

4.2.2 The media as the fourth estate

Classical liberal theory views the press as a defender of the public interest and a “watchdog” (Franklin, Hamer, Hanna, Kinsey & Richardson, 2005:84). In this context, the term “fourth estate” originated in the 17th century Great Britain when Edmund Burke referred to the press gallery in parliament as another important estate (Franklin *et al.*, 2005:84). As Schultz (1998:2) observes, the “fourth estate” concept has changed overtime and in the media, it is connected to scrutinising those in position of power. It is grounded in the notion that among checks and balances that ensure that the powerful are held accountable, the media – the fourth estate – have an essential and highly political role to play through the process of finding, distilling and analysing information (Schultz, 1998:2). In traditional liberal thought, as Curran (1991:84) posits, the primary democratic role of the media is to act as a public watchdog overseeing the state, and this is defined as revealing abuses by state authorities, facilitating the general debate on the functioning of the government, among other “watchdog” roles. According to the liberal-pluralist theory, the watchdog role overrides all other

functions of the media and by anchoring the media in a free-market, it is possible to ensure the media's complete independence from government (Curran, 1991:84). Liberal-pluralist theorists argue that the constitutional role of the press is to supervise government on behalf of the people as the "fourth estate", scrutinising the actions of the executive and relaying public opinion to lawmakers (Curran & Seaton, 2003:21).

According to Carpentier (2007:161), the liberal-pluralist theory affirms the independent media, by putting information at people's disposal to enable citizens to formally and informally control the state. The media's watchdog function, Carpentier further argues, offers critical information to ordinary citizens, which is an important media task. Schultz (1998:15) notes that the eighteenth century claim that the press was entitled to its own independent standing in the political system, as the "fourth estate", has become an ideal which continues to influence the attitudes of those working in the contemporary news media, as well as politicians and citizens.

According to Schultz (1998:122), a key principle embedded within the ideal of the media as the "fourth estate" is that of objectivity. The next section will concentrate on this concept.

4.2.3 Objectivity in media performance

From a liberal-pluralist perspective, objectivity is the most important professional norm for journalists in the sense that it springs out more specific aspects of news professionalism such as news judgement, the selection of sources and the structure of news beats (Soloski, 1997:143). Maras (2013:8) is quick to point out that defining objectivity in journalism is not straightforward because it all depends on a different concept of what objectivity is and how it should operate. For University of Missouri (The Missouri Group) journalism scholars Brooks, Kennedy, Moen and Ranly (2011:15), objectivity is about the rules that mainstream journalists follow in attempting to arrive at the best attainable version of the truth in order to report accurately, fairly and without bias. Objectivity refers to the prevailing ideology of news gathering and reporting that emphasises fairness, corroboration of facts with multiple sources and balance (Mencher, 2008:50; Rajsekhar, 2007:15). In the view of Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney and Wise (2006:346), objectivity means that the news media do not take "overt political positions of their own" and that "news itself becomes less politically coloured". These aforementioned definitions underline that objectivity is about accuracy, fairness and balance in journalistic practices.

However, objectivity tends to be an ambiguous concept with some claiming that journalism is not objective, other critics arguing that it cannot be objective and even others that it should not be objective (Rajsekhar, 2007:15; Lichtenberg, 1991:216). Some critics argue that objectivity is a kind of deception, obscuring cultural, capitalistic or national bias behind talk of a neutral point of view, promoting faith in an external truth or ideal, or an individualistic viewing position that does not exist (Maras, 2013:1). Hersey (2006:152-153) contends that “there is no such a thing as absolute objectivity” because it is not possible to present a story without some bias. For Ettema and Glasser (1998:9), objectivity in its “purest usage” has faltered, “if it ever really existed in journalism”. The issue of objectivity, according to Ettema and Glassler (1998:23, 65) is even more complex with regards to investigative journalism where journalists engage in methods that are rather “subjective” in nature in stories that they [journalists] have particular vested interests in.

Streckfuss (1990:973), however, cautions that when journalistic objectivity is attacked today as evidenced in the preceding scholarly observations, it is because such critics have not thoroughly investigated the history of the original concept. Objectivity emerged in the 1920s “not on a naïve idea that humans could be objective but that they could NOT”⁵ (Streckfuss, 1990:974). Streckfuss further observes that today, objectivity is equated with neutrality yet “going back to the 1920s, objectivity meant much more than neutrality”.

According to Schultz (1998:130), objectivity in journalism dates back to the 19th century Europe when there were efforts to raise standards of the profession by education and recruitment. This was followed by attempts to bolster institutional authority with claims to scientific objectivity in the selection and presentation of news, argues Schultz (1998:130), who further observes that by the early twentieth century, objectivity had irrevocably changed the journalistic practice and became a defining professional characteristic and continues to provide the bedrock of claims of professional standing. Streckfuss (1990:975) points out that in its original sense, objectivity meant journalists finding the truth through a rigorous methodology of a scientist. Applying the scientific method to human affairs, according to Streckfuss, was after the realisation that “propagandists were manipulating facts” and thereby tainting public opinion through the news media, which then threatened democracy. In this respect, journalists started to explain their objectivity in terms of recording events, as they are, devoid of the reporter’s interpretation, values or perspective (Ward, 2004:262). But over time, objectivity has shrunk from “a methodology needed to preserve democracy to a practical posture of day to day production” (Streckfuss, 1990:984).

⁵ “NOT” in upper-case is as cited from source.

Nevertheless, Soloski (1997:143) observes that objectivity does not mean that the media are impartial observers of events but rather that they seek out facts and report them in a fairly and balanced manner possible. McQuail (1991:75) postulates that objectivity is a particular form of media practice and also a particular attitude to the task of information collection, processing and dissemination of information. Ward (2004:264) underscores that “objectivity is acutely aware of, and allows for human feelings”. Objectivity is not about journalists being passive as it was advanced in the 19th century but it is about making holistic judgements, self-conscious evaluation and being interpretive in searching for the truth (Ward, 2004:300).

In the view of Lichtenberg (1991:216), objectivity is deeply entrenched in the journalistic culture, more in particular where news is “objectively” sought rather than “opinion”. Lichtenberg further argues that objectivity is a cornerstone of the professional ideology of journalists in liberal democracies and it is intertwined with truth, fairness, balance, neutrality and the absence of value judgements.

However, Schultz (1998:135) holds that the liberal-pluralist philosophy of objectivity and claims to representing public interest are just tools used by journalists seeking increased autonomy. Claims to professionalism are limited by organisational factors, restricted operational autonomy and journalists’ disdainful attitudes towards the public – this simply suggests that the claims by journalists as the “Fourth Estate” may simply mask a quest for power (Schultz, 1998:135). The liberal-pluralist approach, with an emphasis towards a free-market economy for wide consumer choices, receives a critical view in media research. Critical political economy, among other issues, argues that the media serve to reproduce social order by favouring certain interests over others. Next is a detailed exploration of the political economy approach.

4.3 The political economy theory

In order to understand the critical political economy approach and its application to news media research, it is necessary to look at the historical foundations of the chosen theoretical framework itself by first looking at the concept of “political economy”.

4.3.1 Historical foundations

According to Albarran (2004:291), the field of economics-related media research has continued to develop over the years and involves the application of economic theories, concepts, and principles to

study the macroeconomic and microeconomic aspects of mass media companies and industries. Albarran further observes that scholarship on media ownership – concomitant with the increasing consolidation and concentration – continues to be an important area for academicians, policy makers and industry analysts. The political economy theory is rooted in economics (Albarran, 2004:292). The word “economy” dates back to Aristotle who used it to mean the science of the principles of household management, argues Lange (1963:13), further observing that the term “political economy” was first used by Frenchman Antoine de Montchretien in the 17th century in his work – *Treatise on Political Economy* – challenging Aristotle’s position on the independence of economics from other aspects of social life such as politics. Lange further observes that from then on “political economy” began to be widely used to denote research on problems of social economy.

One of the first synthesised articles of economic thought is credited to philosopher Adam Smith’s 1776 work, *The Wealth of Nations* (Albarran, 2004:202). For Smith (2009:1), skilled labour and land are critical to the growth in the wealth of a nation. Smith however, argues that policies among nations with skilled labour and wealth are not favourable to other segments within the respective countries. With particular reference to Europe, Smith (2009:4) observes that since the fall of the Roman Empire, the policy of the continent gave priority towards manufacturing, arts, and commerce, “the industry of towns”, instead of agriculture, the industry of the country. In Smith’s view, prejudices and private interests of “particular orders of men” without any foresight of the consequences upon the general welfare of the society led to different theories of “political economy” of which some magnify the importance of industries in towns than “what is carried in the country”. Smith (2009:623) considers political economy as a branch of science of a legislator or “statesman” which looks at ensuring plenty supply of revenue to enrich both the politician and the common citizenry. As Albarran (2004:292) notes, Smith’s view of political economy at the time of his writings in the eighteenth century are dissimilar to the contemporary theory as it will be seen later in this chapter.

In the context of Smith and other subsequent scholars of the eighteenth century like David Ricardo, political economy is the study of economic issues with particular focus on the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of wealth and the consequences for the welfare of individuals and society (Wasko, 2004:309). This view is underlined by Walker (c1894:1) as he defines political economy: “Political economy, or economics, is the name of that body of knowledge which relates to wealth.” Walker further maintains that political economy has to do with no other subject, whatsoever, other than wealth. According to Albarran (2004:292), following Smith’s writings, theoretical contributions related to land, rent and distribution of income formed the classical

period of political economy. Albarran further notes that some of these classical thinkers such as Thomas Malthus and John Stuart Mill, believed that the price of commodities was determined by the costs of production whereas others rooted their theories in Marxism, built on the writings of Karl Marx in the 19th century, that price was controlled by the ruling class.

Marx (1976:11) postulates that the capitalist industry is obsessed with profit through the ruthless and irresistible impulse to growth. Marx further identifies labour as the source of all production and he rejects the market system that allows the capitalists, the owners of the factories and necessary machinery, to exploit the working class and deny them a fair share of goods produced. For Marx (1976:11), as the capitalist industry spreads all over the world for material worth, so too has the polarisation of society between fewer and fewer owners of capital, and more and more workers using their labour and intellect. In essence, Marx (1976:931) argues that the concentration of wealth and power in a small number of giant industrial and financial corporations has brought with it an increasing universal struggle between capital and labour and his analogy is that political economy is a form of colonisation which rests on the “exploitation” of the labour of others. According to Albarran (2004:202), this saw the emergence of the Marxist school of thought.

The 20th century saw the field of economics being theorised under the field of macroeconomics with an array of refined areas including welfare economics, taxation, inflation, employment, and more importantly, for this study, political economy (Albarran, 2004:293). Mosco (1996:27) identifies three features of the political economy. The first is the historical approach that emerged as a response to the classical political economy of Adam Smith and his followers, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill and others who focused on the individual as the primary unit of analysis with the market as principal structure – the capitalist revolution. The second strand emerged to replace individualism with a collective Marxian perspective which put labour at the centre of political economy. The third was the formulations that have built upon the conservative, socialist, Marxian thought to constitute an array of contemporary thought such as institutional political economy – that institutional and technological constraints shape markets to the advantage of corporations or governments with power to control them. Wasko (2004:310) contends that the “critical” or Marxian approach deals with social relations, more in particular power, which mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources. It is from this “critical” or Marxian approach of political economy that this researcher’s study on the political role of the *Weekend Nation* (2002-2012) is examined.

According to Mosco (1996:29), from a social philosophical point of view, political economy is not just another approach but is a guide to understanding the relationships that prevail among many aspects of social life. Mosco further argues that political economists who work in the institutional, socialist and the Marxian traditions are also concerned with the identification of the links between society's political economy and the wider social cultural field. However, research in media and economics began to emerge in the 1950s due to the rise of mass media with scholars focusing on economic concepts linked to the communications industry, advertising, media competition, and, as Albarran (2004:294) argues, ownership structures. As Boyd-Barrett (1997:186) observes, in media research the theory looks at "the processes of consolidation, diversification, commercialisation, internalisation, the working of the profit motive in the hunt for audiences and the subsequent consequences for media practices and content", whereas in orthodox economics, the trajectory is aimed at explaining the relationship between individuals and markets in broad isolation from the socio-political contexts.

In view of the foregoing, the critical political economy theory is applied to study ownership and control through the documentation and analyses of power relations or class while also looking at the contradictions, and suggests strategies for resistance and intervention (Wasko, 2004:311). Wasko further observes that the "critical approach" theory, which includes both economic and political analysis, is the one that is traditionally represented when one refers to the political economy of communication. Against this historical background, the next discussion focuses on the "critical" political economy theory and the media.

4.3.2 The critical political economy theory and the media

Before proceeding with the discussion on critical political economy of the media, it is essential to understand that "critical" theory addresses phenomena and problems not in terms of absolute ideas and predetermined societal development, but in terms of resource distribution and social struggles (Fuchs, 2009:70). Put it another way, reality is seen in terms that address ownership, private property, resource distribution, social struggles, power, resource control, exploitation and domination, according to Fuchs. Max Horkheimer (1972:219) underlines that critical theory is concerned with the differences in the social structures that shape society and seeks to bring about change. Critical studies, thus, is an umbrella term used to describe an array of theoretical perspectives that are united by their sceptical attitude, humanistic approach, political assessment, and activist orientation (Ott & Mack, 2010:14). This then sets the premise of the critical political economy of the media approach which is employed in this researcher's study.

Golding and Murdock (1991:17-18) distinguish critical political economy from conventional economics in that “critical political economy” is holistic, historical, centrally concerned with the balance between capitalist enterprise and public intervention and goes beyond technical issues of efficiency but propelled by the moral debate of justice, equity and the public good. Golding and Murdock further underline that critical political economy is interested in the interplay between economic organisation and political, social and cultural life. In orthodox economics, the economy is viewed as a separate and specialised domain (Golding & Murdock, 1991:18). Whereas liberal political economists focus on free market economy and consumer choices, Golding and Murdock further observe that critical political economists take the Marxist perspective, shifting attention from the realm of exchange to the organisation of property and production.

According to Ott and Mack (2010:14), in critical media research, one examines media industries and their practices of production, with close scrutiny to the economic, corporate and governmental structures that enable and constrain how mass media operate. The critical political economy, drawn from a Marxist theoretical perspective is applied to illuminate ways that capitalism, profit-motives and politics influence working patterns and the content of mass media industries, as Ott and Mack (2010:16) argue. According to Mosco (1996:12), the rise of media industries in the twentieth century led business to take a close look at the economics of communication, and the growth of a critical political economy was built in part in an effort to understand this process critically such as connecting mass marketing to wider economic and social processes and criticising them from a range of humanistic values. Croteau and Hoynes (2003:122) contend that economic forces identify the goals and shape the terrain of the decision-making process. For Wasko (2004:310), critical political economy not only analyses the economic system, but also discusses policy problems and moral issues that arise from it. Critical political economy is further oriented towards social change and practice (Wasko, 2004:310). The critical political economy theory, according to Golding and Murdock (1991:22), could be employed to analyse three strands of the media and communications: First, an examination concerned with the production of cultural goods; secondly an examination of the political economy of texts to illustrate ways in which the representations in the media products are related to the realities of production and consumption, and finally an assessment of the political economy of cultural consumption to illustrate the relationship between material and cultural inequality which political economy seeks to address. In the context of this study, the examination is largely concerned with the implications of the political ownership of the *Weekend Nation* on the editorial independence of its journalists specifically with regards to the enhancement of Malawi’s democracy.

In media research, the critical political economy theory searches for answers to the question of the power of the media in the analysis of their structures of ownership and control (Boyd-Barrett, 1997:186; Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott, 1982:16). According to Curran *et al.* (1982:18), this approach, drawn from a Marxist perspective, posits that contents of the media and the meanings carried by their messages are primarily determined by the economic base of the organisations in which they are produced. For Boyd-Barrett (1997:186), critical political economy is “the study of the social relations particularly the power relations that constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources, including communication resources”.

Herman and Chomsky (1994:xi) argue that media owners serve as primary definers of news and play a key role in fixing basic principles and the dominant ideologies. The critical political economy theory investigates the assertions as those put forward by Herman and Chomsky (1994:xii) that the actual performance of the media is guided by governments, leaders of the corporate community, top media owners and executives and other assorted individuals who have the power to take constructive initiatives. Owners are able to regulate the output of the media institutions either by intervening in the day-to-day operations, or by establishing general goals and understandings and appointing managerial and editorial staff to implement them within the constraints set by the overall allocation of resources (Murdock, 2000:147). The scholarly observations just mentioned illuminate how some news media in Africa have over the years been entangled in a complex of power and the political economy. Prior to most countries in sub-Saharan Africa embracing democracy in the 1990s, the media were almost exclusively owned by the state and this ownership was tantamount to total control (Hyden & Leslie, 2002:18). However, although democracy is perceived to have brought with it press freedom and multiplicity of private news publications, some governments, as in the case of Zambia, continue to stifle and control the media (Ogbondah, 2002:64). According to Ogbondah, under a parliamentary Act of the Zambian constitution, journalists can be taken to court if they accuse ministers or MPs of conduct that the latter find abusive whereas there is no similar provision for journalists to complain to the courts for any abusive utterances from lawmakers.

A Kenyan case presents another particular interesting political-economic terrain. According to Ogola (2011:84), the Nation Media Group (NMG), owned by wealthy businessman, Agha Khan, publishes *The Daily Nation* and *The Sunday Nation*. Although independent and oppositional, these publications exercise their criticism within certain bounds. Ogola notes that while one of the reasons is fear of state intimidation, the major underlying factor is the close relationship between the NMG’s corporate

shareholders (NMG is listed on the Kenyan Stock Exchange) and the state which affects the newspapers' independence. For instance, during the former president Daniel Arap Moi's regime, Agha Khan benefitted from business opportunities, some of which are co-owned with members of the government, ranging from hospitals to schools (Ogola, 2011:84). As Herman and Chomsky (1994:1) argue, in countries where the levers of power are in the hands of state bureaucracy, the monopolistic control over the media is evident through censorship.

Jones and Holmes (2011:17) argue that as a critique to capitalism, the Marxian approach looks at how humans solve problems of basic needs, conceiving that capitalism is exploitative both economically and culturally – social relations of production are organised into economic social classes. The critical political economy theory is also applied to international communication research and the potential of dominant industrialised nations' media to manipulate consumer demand for their culture from weaker nations for their culture aimed at profit maximisation (Boyd-Barrett, 1997:187). According to Schiller (1997:194), advertising provides the backbone of the communications media of super-powers such as the United States and as a result, they have been moving towards the international commercialisation of broadcasting. The continuing and pressing requirements of U.S. manufacturers to reach annually higher output levels to sustain and increase profit margins turns on the process that is relentlessly enveloping communications in the name of commercialisation (Schiller, 1997:194). The direct intrusion of such influence, Schiller further argues, has a consequential bearing in the developments of the affected nations. To underline this point, Schiller (1997:195) points out how American communication and advertising agencies have besieged the developing world to open up markets for the west through partnerships that have eventually led to the commercialisation of some state-controlled broadcasters, further influencing the quality of life in those weaker nations.

The trans-national acceleration and commercialisation of the media is entrenched in two dimensions (Boyd-Barrett, 1997:188). Firstly, it is the need of capital for expansion beyond domestic markets in order to maintain sales growth. Secondly, it is the vital role of advertising in facilitating the penetration of overseas markets, reflected in the power of the advertiser which may directly or indirectly affect the regulations of the respective national media systems and programme content.

Whitney, Sumpter and McQuail (2004:394) emphasise that the primary purpose of studying the media is to understand why media organisations produce the kind of content they do. The next section explores this notion.

4.3.3 Critical political economy and professional practices

Critical political economy asserts that contents of the media and the meanings carried by their messages are determined by the economic base of the organisations in which they are produced (Curran *et al.*, 1982:18). Curran *et al.* (1982:18-19) posit that studies of the critical political economy of media organisations must be closely related to, and supplemented by analyses of the professional ideologies and practices found in these organisations because links between the economic determinants of the media and their contents are best sought in the professional ideologies and work practices of media professionals as they are the only channel through which organisational controls can be brought to bear on the output of the media. Whitney *et al.* (2004:399-400) contend that over the years, the study of media institutions and related work practices and content has taken a sociological perspective. At its most basic level of analysis, the production of mass-mediated symbol systems is the work of individuals or small groups but at a higher level, it reflects the legal, economic and other institutional arrangements of industry systems (Whitney *et al.*, 2004:399).

According to Ott and Mack (2010:306), professional culture is a set of norms, customs, artefacts, values and assumptions that emerge as a consequence of formal training and allows the “professional” to accomplish the distinctive tasks of their positions. Media professionals exhibit conventional work practices that are unique to a particular organisation and the critical political economy approach illuminates the organisational cultures, such as hierarchical managerial practices that may influence the character of the products produced and the quality of the employees’ lives (Ott & Mack, 2010:51). Owners of news media organisations set news policies and they are followed by members of staff (Breed, 1997:107). According to Breed, policy may be defined as the consistent orientation shown by a newspaper, for instance, not only in its editorial but in its news columns and headlines as well, concerning selected issues and events. Whereas executives or owners do not personally gather and write news themselves, there are some mechanisms that are set for staffers to conform to policy (Breed, 1997:109). For example, the “socialisation” of the news staff with regards to the norms of his job could be a process through which the staffer self-discovers the rights and obligations of the job. Breed further argues that certain editorial actions by older staffers such as reprimanding by a junior member over a policy violation also serve as controlling guidelines.

For Schudson (1991:155), the “routines” of journalists are not only social, emerging out of interactions among officials, reporters, and editors, but emerging out of interactions of writers with literary traditions. Schudson further argues that journalists at work operate not only to maintain and repair their social relations with sources and colleagues, but their cultural image as journalists in the

wider world, employing visual and verbal techniques to transform a cultural value to an occupational practice. The reality is that journalists manufacture not only a version and vision of “the world” but of “journalism itself” (Schudson, 1991:155). Oates (2008:24) emphasises that it is impossible to separate news from culture in that what journalists produce is not information but rather what is recognised and accepted as public knowledge given certain political structures and traditions. Oates further underlines this notion that journalistic output is shaped by a series of factors that give rise to particular news content that people see, hear or read around. This view is further underlined by Croteau and Hoynes (2003:16) in that professional norms, institutional premises and organisational structures shape the day-to-day work of media producers. Media professionals are active participants in the construction and re-construction of production routines which conversely are shaped by economic, political and organisational forces in each sector of the media industry (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003:156).

In the view of Herman and Chomsky (1994:xi), the work practices within media institutions are to the interest of the owners who fix the premises of discourse, to decide what the general populace is allowed to see, hear and to “manage” public opinion by regular propaganda campaigns. This notion is held by Whitney *et al.* (2004:403) who expound on the idea of news as a manufactured product. News is seen as a “construction of reality” rather than a picture of reality (Whitney *et al.*, 2004:402). But such conclusions can only be arrived at through an investigation of the working practices of the media professionals. Curran *et al.* (1982:19) argue that the attributes of professionalism are the laid down guidelines for accepted and proper professional behaviour and serve to legitimate the profession’s sources of control and the insistence on the right to regulate and control it. Curran *et al.* further reveal two opposing views towards scholarly discussions entrenched in media professionalism studies. The first is the pluralistic interpretation which asserts that media professionals are objective, autonomous, and impartial and are accountable to their conduct. The ultimate control of the production process in the media is viewed as resting in the hands of the professionals. The second is a Marxian perspective which argues that media professional practices are limited, confined and constrained within the boundaries of a dominant ideology. Curran *et al.* further argue that “the meanings are primarily determined elsewhere within the dominant culture”. But Golding and Murdock (1991:26) contend that within the media are men and women working within a range of codes and professional ideologies, and with an array of aspirations but that their autonomy is a matter of substantial interest to political economists.

4.3.4 Critical political economy and the enhancement of democracy

In the preceding discussion, it was postulated that the critical political economy researchers search for the answers to the question of power of the media in the analysis of their structures of ownership and control. According to Hyden and Leslie (2002:17) ownership of the means of communication is an important aspect of what happens in the political domain. The assertion put forward by Hyden and Leslie is critical with respect to this researcher's study which specifically deals with the political ownership of the *Weekend Nation* and the democratisation of Malawi.

McChesney and Schiller (2003:1) note that in politics, the media are cornerstones of modern societies in that they may serve to enhance democracy, or to deny it, or "some combination of the two". In this light, it is imperative to assess the relationship of the media as private entities to the broader and necessary social and political duties that they perform and policies that may better preserve and promote democratic values (McChesney & Schiller, 2003:1). The economic aspects of the media play an important role in assessing what contribution they can make in the enhancement of democracy (Tomaselli, 2002:129). According to Tomaselli (2002:153), there is a need to closely scrutinise Africa's democratisation process in relation to the critical political economy of the media. Due to most media facing challenges of the lack of material resources and infrastructure, the most significant aspect of the sector is the dominance of corporate capital (Tomaselli, 2002:120).

There is a common understanding that a strong connection exists between mass communication and democracy with the media being viewed as the conduit of the relations between the state and the society (O'Neil, 1998:1). According to O'Neil (1998:2), the media provide links between the ruler and the ruled but also provide information that can constrain the centralisation of power and the obfuscation of unethical state function. For example, in Kenya the print media are dominated by two conglomerates – the Nation Media Group (NMG) and the Standard Group (Ogola, 2011:91). This, according to Ogola, leaves the media in a complex position because much as they are perceived to be vibrant, the owners are connected to largely powerful politicians who may "narrow the parameters of public discourse" in the enhancement of the democratisation process. This underlines the assertion advanced by Murdock (2005:118) that "allocative controllers" or the major shareholders set the general goals and objectives of the media corporations. Along similar lines, Tomaselli (2002:145) argues that owners of capital, like those mentioned in the Kenyan case above, use media organisations to further their own class interests to secure and enhance their personal strategic positions in the socio-economic order. However, Breed (1997:120) posits that the political economy of news media organisations may affect the political domain of a country. According to Breed, the publishers' policy, for instance, when established in a given subject area, is followed because the journalist's source of

rewards is not from the readers who are the ideal clients, but from the superiors. Therefore, the cultural patterns of the newsroom produce results insufficient for wider democratic needs (Breed, 1997:120). A study of organisational culture involves generating material that permits identifying meanings and expectations of culture, consequently revealing the world in which the newspapers live and their interpretations of it (Bantz, 1997:126).

In view of the foregoing, Berger (2002:26) proposes that there is need not just to examine the role of the media in the democratisation role in southern Africa but rather acknowledging the civil society as well. This is so because according to Berger, the civil society and the news media are interdependent – they are an important alternative power centre in society because if applied properly they may foster the democratic process. For example, in some rural populations of Africa, access to the news media is abysmal and civic organisations and social movements through various discourses such as drama or communal singing, may aid in the democratic dispensation across larger communities (Berger, 2002:29).

4.4 Summary

This chapter has defined and positioned the critical political economy theory in media research. This research seeks to examine the political role of the *Weekend Nation* between 2002 and 2012 within the context of the political ownership by the Malawian elite. To carry out that task, this researcher chose the critical political economy theory. However, prior to a detailed exploration of critical political economy, it was deemed appropriate to look into the liberal-pluralist approach – another key theory in media research that is critiqued by advocates of the theory employed in this study. To define critical political economy and denote its relevance to this study, the chapter looked at the historical foundations and explained that it is rooted in economics. The term “political economy” has been used by a number of scholars since the 17th century but its meaning varies to contemporary thought. Early scholars used political economy to mean wealth whereas contemporary political economists approach it from either institutional research that deals with markets or Marxian approach – a “critical” approach that looks into power relations.

In the next chapter, this researcher presents the research design and methodology employed in this study.

CHAPTER 5

Research Design and Methodology

5.1 Introduction

In this study, the central research question is: What was the political role of the *Weekend Nation* in the democratisation of Malawi within the context of ownership a top politician in the country? In search of the answers to the prime inquiry, the content from the editorials and opinion columns were analysed to investigate the implications of the political ownership of the newspaper on its coverage of the major political issues in Malawi (2002-2012), namely: good governance, floor-crossing (Section 65) and the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP). Additionally, the following questions, also attached as Addendum A, were posed to the research participants to help generate comprehensible responses:

- What was the role that the *Weekend Nation* defined for itself since inception?
- Bearing in mind that the newspaper was founded by a politician, how did that impact the political role of the *Weekend Nation*'s journalists?
- How did the journalists relate to the *Weekend Nation*'s inaugural slogan: "*Freedom of expression, the birth-right of all*"?
- On good governance, the civil society, opposition political parties and the international community condemned former President Bakili Muluzi's administration as well as the later stages of the late President Bingu wa Mutharika's government. What was the *Weekend Nation*'s position on that issue?
- What was the position of the *Weekend Nation* on the issue of Section 65 "floor-crossing"?
- The food security policy – Farm Input Subsidy Program (FISP – launched by the late president Mutharika in 2005 albeit opposition from multilateral donors such as the IMF and the World Bank, has been in the media domain to this day. What was the position of the *Weekend Nation* during the period under investigation?

Having looked at the research questions entailed in this study, the following section addresses the design of the investigation.

5.2 Research design: Case study

A research design is defined as a plan or blueprint of how the researcher intends to conduct the study, and offers as a guide that directs the research action (Sarantakos, 2005:106; Babbie, Mouton, Vorster

& Prozesky, 2001:74). This investigation employed a case study research design. Defining a case study is not an unexact task because of the great variation in the scope of the research (Yin, 2009:19; Punch, 1998:152). Punch further contends that these variations stem from the fact that some could be single case studies – where the focus is within the case, or could involve multiple cases – where the focus is both within and across cases or comparative.

According to the *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology*, a case study is a research design that takes as its subject a single case or a few selected examples of social entity and employs a “variety of methods” to study them (Marshall, 1994:41). For Wimmer and Dominick (2006:136), a case study is an approach that uses many data sources to systematically investigate an individual, group or organisation. Simons (2009:28) and Yin (2009:2) point out that a case study is a unit of analysis that enables the best exploration of a research problem, particularly when questions of why and how are posed. Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin (1993:2) postulate that it is an approach driven by the desire to reconstruct and analyse a case from a sociological perspective with an array of objectives which vary according to the theoretical perspectives operating within the field, including – but not limited to – individual interactions, common patterns of behaviour, and social structures. Priest (1996:238) asserts that such an approach sheds light on general processes but the results are not generalisable in the statistical sense. The issue of “generalisability” draws some critics of case study research in that it is not perceived to be representative of a sample of a population (Punch, 1998:155; Silverman, 2005:126). However, Punch argues that a case study can contribute potentially to generalisable findings, for instance when the researcher focuses on elements that are common with other cases. Additionally, Punch contends that even if the case being studied might be unique, it can provide an understanding of the important aspects of a new or persistently problematic research area. Stake (2003:136) argues that a case study is about a specific, unique, bounded system and could be in three facets:

- *An intrinsic case study*: The study is undertaken because the researcher wants better understanding of this particular case due to its particularity and ordinariness.
- *An instrumental case study*: The study is undertaken in-depth but to facilitate an understanding of something else.
- *A collective case study*: A researcher jointly studies a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition.

The uniqueness of a case study is established through the collection of features and the sequence of happenings by people close at hand and through experiential accounts (Stake, 2010:31). Thus, examining the political role of the *Weekend Nation* newspaper in the democratisation of Malawi between 2002 and 2012 was deemed an appropriate “intrinsic case study” because in addition to the foregoing scholarly assertions, Wimmer and Dominick (2006:137) underscore that documents, historical artefacts, systematic interviews and direct observations can all be incorporated into a case study. To undertake the *Weekend Nation* case study, the researcher used qualitative data gathering methodology, which forms part of the next discussion.

5.3 Methodology

In social science research, the methodology for collecting, analysing, interpreting or reporting data could be quantitative, qualitative or a mixture of both (Creswell & Clark, 2011:54). In a quantitative approach, the researcher assigns numerical representations and manipulations of observations to describe and explain phenomena whereas in a qualitative approach the primary aim is the in-depth description and understanding of social action in a specific context (Babbie *et al.*, 2001:270, 646). In respect of quantitative research, specifically, Punch (1998:58) identifies counting and scaling – sequencing – as key to the measurement and comparing of variables in data collection and analysis. Thus, the correlation between variables is central to quantitative research (Silverman, 2005:9; Punch, 1998:58). One key aspect of quantitative research methodology is that “reality” is perceived to be objective, simple and fixed – objects generate the same meanings and people see and name them the same way (Sarantakos, 2005:32). Sarantakos further points out that a quantitative researcher perceives social research in an instrumental way. In quantitative data analysis, data is converted to a numerical format that can be read and manipulated by computers or similar machines (Babbie, 2013:414).

On the other hand, in qualitative research, detail is found in individuals’ understandings and interactions of the world (Silverman, 2005:9; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:4). Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings that people bring to them (Stake, 2010:31; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:5). Nachmias and Nachmias (1987:287) observe that qualitative researchers attempt to understand behaviour and institutions by getting to know well the persons involved in their values, rituals and symbols, beliefs and their emotions. In the view of Burns (2000:3), a qualitative research methodology is “naturalistic” in that social reality is regarded as a creation of individual consciousness, with “meaning and evaluation of events” seen as a personal and subjective construction. In other words, it is a method

that Strauss and Corbin (1998:11) refer to as a way to elicit the “lived in experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings” as well as about the functioning of an organisation from the research participants’ genuine realities in their natural settings.

Goode and Hatt (1952:313) argue that modern social science research must reject as a false dichotomy the separation between the “statistical” and the “non-statistical” approach. Goode and Hatt further contend that the application of mathematics to sociology does not ensure rigor of proof any more than the use of “insight” guarantees the significance of research. The fundamental issue, according to Goode and Hatt, rests with the precision, reliability and relevance of data and their analysis. In this regard, the qualitative research methodology would be appropriate to undertake the *Weekend Nation* newspaper as a case study. Even more so, Simons (2009:34) emphasises that in a social science study, it is important to select a method for the potential to inform your research questions. In this respect, in asking the *Weekend Nation* case study participants what the role of the newspaper was, this researcher attempted to evoke the journalists’ perceptions in how they made sense of their professional practice during the nascent years of Malawi’s democracy. Similarly, in asking how they related to the maiden slogan: “*Freedom of expression, the birth-right of all,*” this researcher aimed to elicit the individual interpretations of the motto from the journalists with regards to their professional practice at a private but politically-linked newspaper. Furthermore, in asking the journalists on the impact of political ownership on their editorial independence, this researcher aimed at establishing the research participants’ individual interpretations and meanings in relation to their perceived and expected roles in a new democratic dispensation at a private newspaper owned by a politician.

To examine the implications of political ownership on political role of the *Weekend Nation* newspaper in the democratisation of Malawi between 2002 and 2012, it was considered that the study be investigated through a qualitative research methodology using two qualitative research techniques discussed below in the following order: content analysis and personal interviews.

5.3.1 Content analysis

From the onset, it is important to note that there are multiple definitions of content analysis. This stems from the fact that there are two basic types of content analysis, namely: quantitative and qualitative (Wigston, 2009:4). For example, Berelson (1952:18) asserts that content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. Silverman (2011:467) defines content analysis as a method in social science inquiry that involves establishing categories, systematic linkages between them and “counting” the

number of instances when those categories are used in a particular item of text. In the view of Berger (1991:92), content analysis is a research technique based upon “measuring the amount” of something, such as violence, percentage of race or women, in a random sampling of some forms of communication. It is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts or other meaningful matter to the contexts of their use (Krippendorff, 2004:18). Babbie (2013:330) defines content analysis as the study of recorded human communications which may include newspapers, magazines, books, magazines, speeches, the internet, constitutions or any collections thereof.

The variations in the above definitions point to the assertions advanced by Bauer (2000:132) that some scholars are rooted in the classical content analyses that culminate into numerical (in other words, quantitative) classifications – frequencies – of communication content, whereas over the years some have tended to give considerable thought to the “kinds, qualities, and distinctions” in the texts. Holsti (1969:5) notes that the “quantity/quality” issue has been a polarising matter among researchers in respect of content analysis. Holsti further observes that the quantitative requirement has often been cited as essential to content analysis by its proponents who praise it as a more scientific method of analysing documents than qualitative content analysis. But Holsti cautions that restricting content analysis to enumeration presents a theoretical and practical problem because the researcher is pre-occupied with frequencies as the valid index of concern. Such focus tends to ignore other attributes and meanings embedded within the content which require “qualitative judgement about the entire document without tabulating the frequency with which any content attribute appears” (Holsti, 1969:7). Regardless of the approach, content analysis is both a data collection method and an analytical technique (Du Plooy, 2009:89, Schnell, Hill & Esser in Flick, 2008:134).

It is against this background that Sarantakos (2005:299) asserts that content analysis is a documentary method that can be used to analyse forms of visual, verbal, or written communication qualitatively, quantitatively or both. Sarantakos further underlines that the quantitative approach “measures objectively” specific attributes of texts’ contents whereas the qualitative focuses on “meanings and interpretations in text”. This view is also echoed by Burns (2000:432) who notes that content analysis is used to identify themes, concepts and meaning, and that these elements could be counted in numerical terms as well as “examined for meaning”. Analysing research data through this approach is done by coding (Babbie, 2013:335; Sarantakos, 2005:304; Burns, 2000:43; Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987:332).

According to Babbie *et al.* (2001:388), coding is the process of reducing a wide variety of distinctive items of information to a more limited set of attributes composing variables and the researcher refines and observes the relationship between codes and the conceptual framework. Burns (2000:432) observes that coding involves classifying data into themes, topics, concepts, issues or propositions. Marshal (1994:87) points out that coding reduces freely-occurring text to a much smaller summary or representation of its meaning. The qualitative/quantitative debate also leads to the variances in coding which are in two strands: manifest and latent (Babbie, 2013:335; Sarantakos, 2005:300; Holsti, 1969:13). Sarantakos distinguishes these strands thus:

- *Manifest content* refers to the visible, surface text, and the analysis involves straightforward counting of frequencies of appearance of each research unit.
- *Latent content* is the underlying meaning conveyed through the document; the task in this type of analysis is to deconstruct and reconstruct such messages, to identify the real meaning and the impact the context has on the construction of meanings and the underlying justification.

Holsti (1969:15) points out that due to the immense diversity of analysing data, it is of profound importance to utilise methods that best relate to your research.

Content analysis; however, has some strengths and weaknesses. Among the strengths, Berger (1991:92) points that:

- It is inexpensive
- It is usually relatively easy to get material
- It can deal with current or past events or both.

But Berger further notes some of the drawbacks are that:

- It is hard to be certain that the sample studied is representative.
- It is not easy to find a measurable unit.
- It is not possible to prove that the inferences made on the basis of content analysis are correct.

However, as it was mentioned earlier, the issue of sample representativeness in this study was not central. Secondly, the case study approach was utilised qualitatively by analysing and interpreting the insights of editorials and opinion columns. Therefore, the focus was not to “measure” frequencies of attributes within the content. In other words, the study employed latent content analysis to ascertain

the underlying meanings in the editorials and opinion columns. Thirdly, this researcher conducted personal interviews with the journalists who worked on the political beat for the *Weekend Nation* between 2002 and 2012 as an attempt to interlink the inferences made in the editorials and opinion columns. This was in line with the assertion that qualitative researchers ought to deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:5). Berger (1991:2) underscores that implicit in content analysis is that an investigation of messages of communication gives insights into the people behind the communication. That notwithstanding, a quantitative element was incorporated in the study in that counting involved the number of newspaper editorials and opinion columns that were examined during the period under investigation: 2002 to 2012.

By opinion columns, this researcher was informed by the view advanced by Berry (1976:12) to refer to personal opinions expressed by section editors but appearing in columns. These are specifically presented in Chapter 6 which presents research findings. The editorials and opinion columns that this researcher examined were classified according to pre-identified political dimensions, namely: good governance, floor-crossing and the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP). These were identified to have been the major political issues at stake during the period under study (Chirwa & Dorward, 2013:1; Chinsinga, 2012b:5; Dulani, 2012:5; Mayaya, 2012:21; Wroe, 2012:135). According to Hansen, Cottle, Negrine and Newbold (1998:106), the text characteristics which are singled out for analysis should relate directly to the overall research questions which prompted the choice of content analysis in the first place. For this reason, this researcher further categorised good governance into sub-themes for data analysis, namely: “Accountability and transparency,” “corruption”, and “human rights”. This was so because these were recurring themes when this researcher examined the editorials and opinion columns in reference to the issue of good governance. Thematic analysis involves categorising themes which consist of descriptions of the main idea in the message (Du Plooy, 2009:228). On the issue of Section 65, this researcher classified it into recurring themes of “disrespect for the Constitution” by all the former three presidents Malawi had between 2002 and 2012 – Bakili Muluzi, the late Bingu wa Mutharika and Joyce Banda – and “self-aggrandisement” by the MPs who crossed the floor in the National Assembly to align themselves with the governing party of the day. On the issue of the FISP, the main themes identified were “food security” and “politics”.

The content analysed was selected from editorials and opinion columns of the *Weekend Nation* from Saturday, January 5, 2002 to Saturday, December 29, 2012. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the *Weekend Nation* is a Saturday newspaper. This researcher consulted each weekly copy that contained editorials and opinion columns that dealt with issues related to good governance, Section

65 and the FISP. The editorials and opinion pieces were scanned and stored in a storage device and are available from this researcher. In this regard, the research sampled 520 *Weekend Nation* newspaper copies and this sets the premise for the following discussion.

5.3.1.1. Content analysis of editorials and opinion columns

Editorials which were analysed – and relevant to the study – were 38. Editorials analysed on the category of good governance amounted to 22, on the matter of Section 65 there were 7 and on the FISP, 9. With regards to opinion columns, a total of 58 were analysed. Under the category of good governance, opinion columns analysed amounted to 32, on the issue of Section 65 there were 19 and those focusing on the FISP were 7.

These were specifically as follows:

- On good governance, editorials under sub-theme, accountability and transparency: *Weekend Nation* comments, 2012a:2; 2009a:2; 2009b:2; 2005a:2; 2004a:2; 2004b:2; 2002a:2.
- On good governance, opinion columns under sub-theme, accountability and transparency: Ntonga, 2012a:16; Ntonga, 2012b:16; Munthali, 2012:11; Chitsulo, 2012:18; Kasakula, 2012a:19; Kasakula, 2012b:15; Kasakula, 2010a:15; Kasakula, 2009:19; Ntonga, 2009a:29; Nhlane, 2004a:23; Nhlane, 2004b:23; Nhlane, 2004c:23; Ntonga, 2002a:22.
- On good governance, editorials under sub-theme, corruption: *Weekend Nation* Comments, 2004b:2; 2004c:2, 2006a:2; 2006b:2, 2006c:2; 2009c:2.
- On good governance, opinion columns under the sub-theme, corruption: Ntonga, 2012a:16; Ntonga, 2009b:16; Nhlane, 2004d:27; Ntonga, 2004:28; Nhlane; 2002b:19; Nhlane, 2002a:21; Ntonga, 2002b:7.
- On good governance, editorials under sub-theme, human rights: *Weekend Nation* comments, 2002b:2; 2002c:2; 2003a:2; 2011a:2; 2011b:2; 2011c:2; 2011d:2; 2011e:2; 2012b:2.
- On good governance, opinion columns under the sub-theme, human rights: Chitsulo, 2011:16; Kasakula, 2011f:15; Kasakula, 2011e:15; Kasakula, 2011d:17; Kasakula, 2011c:17; Kasakula, 2011b:19; Kasakula, 2011a:15; Munthali, 2011:13; Chitsulo, 2010; Kasakula, 2010b:16; Kasakula, 2010c:17; Nhlane, 2003:21.
- Editorials on the category of Section 65: *Weekend Nation* Comments, 2002d:2; 2003b:2; 2006d: 2; 2006e: 2; 2006f:2; 2012c:2; 2012d:2.
- Opinion columns on Section 65: Kasakula, 2012c:15; Kasakula, 2008a:7; Kasakula, 2008b:7; Ntonga, 2008a:6; Ntonga, 2008b:6; Ntonga, 2008c:6; Kasakula, 2007a:7; Kasakula, 2007b:7; Ntonga, 2007a:6; Ntonga, 2007b:6; Ntonga, 2007c:6; Nhlane, 2007:7; Nhlane, 2006a:11;

Nhlane, 2006b:11; Nhlane, 2006c:11; Ntonga, 2006:10; Nhlane, 2005:11; Ntonga, 2002c:22; Nhlane, 2002c:21.

- Editorials on the category of the FISP: *Weekend Nation* Comments, 2005b:2; 2005c:2; 2006g:2; 2006h:2; 2007a:2; 2007b:2; 2008:2; 2010:2; 2012e:2.
- Opinion columns on the FISP: Ntonga, 2012c:26; Ntonga, 2008d:6; Ntonga, 2008e:6; Ntonga, 2007d:6; Nhlane, 2006d:11; Ntonga, 2005b:28; Ntonga, 2005a:28.

According to Silverman (1993:9), in qualitative research there are a variety of techniques that are employed to gather data. Thus, text or documents may be analysed in combination with interviews. Silverman further observes that this is aimed at gathering an “authentic” understanding of the research subjects’ experiences. Similarly, Babbie (2013:117) posits that it is imperative to combine methods of inquiry because they all have strengths and weaknesses. Babbie describes this as *triangulation* – the use several different methods of inquiry – such as content analysis and interviewing, within the same topic of research study. Triangulation can be applied in all aspects of the research process and allows the researcher to view a particular point in research from more than one perspective “to enrich knowledge and/ or test validity” (Sarantakos, 2005:145).

Triangulation has its own strengths and weaknesses. The major strength is that it generally leads to more valid results because the weaknesses of one research method will be compensated by another, argues Jick (1979:604), further observing that for that reason, researchers are more confident of their results. However, a major limitation with respect to triangulation is that “it may not be suitable for all research purposes as it is time consuming” (Jick, 1979:610). Jick also points out that triangulation is exceedingly difficult to replicate especially in qualitative research. With the foregoing observations in mind, this researcher employed interviews as an additional data gathering technique to content analysis.

5.3.2 Interviews

In qualitative research, an interview is defined as a data-collection encounter in which the interviewer asks questions of the respondents (interviewees) designed to obtain answers pertinent to the study (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987:236). The interview is a good way of accessing people’s perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and construction of reality (Punch, 2005:168). It is important to note, however, that in qualitative research, interviews take a variety of forms based on the research purposes (Punch, 2005:169; Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987:236). There are several types of interviews in qualitative research and the next section discusses them.

5.3.2.1 Types of interviews

Scholars (Punch, 2005:169; Burns, 2000:423; Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987:236) identify three types of interviews, namely: Structured interviews, focused or semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. The authors note that:

- In **structured interviews**, the interviewer has pre-established questions for all the respondents in the same order with little room for variation. Burns (2000:424) further notes that these are predominantly used in surveys and opinion polls with consequent quantitative analysis.
- In **semi-structured (focused) interviews**, although the encounter between the interviewer and the respondents is structured and the major aspects of the study explicated, respondents are given considerable liberty in expressing their definition of a situation presented to them. Some key characteristics within this type of interview are that: First, it takes place with respondents known to have been involved in a particular experience and secondly that it proceeds on the basis of an interview guide specifying topics related to the study (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987:237; Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1956:3).
- In an **unstructured interview**, no pre-specified questions are employed; the most traditional type of this form is the in-depth, non-standardised, open interview, sometimes called ethnographic interview (Punch, 2005:172).

Additionally, Punch (2005:171) reveals another technique of gathering data which involves interviewing a group of people – focus group interviewing. According to Punch, interviewing focus groups can be through unstructured, semi-structured or highly structured techniques.

In the view of the foregoing, this researcher employed the semi-structured (focused) interview technique. This was further informed by the assertions put forward by Nachmias and Nachmias (1987:237) that among other characteristics, such a technique involves respondents known to have been involved in a particular experience and the interviewer follows an interview guide that set the areas of inquiry. In addition, Merton *et al.* (1956:3) note that this type of interview is focused on the subjective experiences of the persons exposed to the pre-analysed situation in an effort to ascertain their definitions of the situation. In this respect, research participants in this study worked as journalists for the *Weekend Nation* newspaper's political beat at some point during the period 2002 to 2012. This researcher was of the view that semi-structured interviews would be best suited to ascertain the implications of the newspaper's political ownership on the journalists' political role in the democratisation of Malawi, specifically to investigate their editorial independence. This is also in

line with Burns' (2000:424) argument that a semi-structured interview permits greater flexibility than a structured interview and elicits valid responses from the informant's perception of reality. The interview questions are attached as Addendum A and were posed to the research participants through an interview guide.

According to Bryman (2001:315), an interview guide is a brief list of "memory prompts of areas" to be covered during a qualitative unstructured or semi-structured interview. Such a guide features an order of topics that the interviewer expects to be answered pertaining to the research questions, Bryman further observes, adding that it also provides room for further probing. An interview guide does not only provide a logical and plausible progression though the focal areas under discussion, but it also acts as a preliminary scheme for the analysis of transcripts (Gaskell, 2000:40).

5.3.2.1.1 Sampling procedures

In both qualitative and quantitative research, sampling is a process which involves the identification and selection of data sources that are expected to be analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2013:55; Mason, 2006:120). As Boeije (2010:35) points out, the approach to sampling in quantitative research differs to that of a qualitative study and this is explained below.

In quantitative research, sampling provides the sound basis for generalisation because the sample has to be representative and mirror the characteristics of the target population (Hall & Hall, 1996:107). Population is referred to as the group of individuals who fit into the category of the research problem (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987:180). Thus, sampling involves taking a portion of a population, making observations on the smaller group and then generalising the findings to the large population (Burns, 2000:82). In quantitative research, a sample is the subset of the population from which the data is collected with the aim of making generalisations on the whole (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987:180). As it will be explained later in this section, in the context of qualitative research, the generalisations of a sample are not paramount but rather the sample "is intentionally selected according to the needs of the study" (Boeije, 2010:35). In the view of De Vaus (2001:184), the best way in quantitative research to achieve representative samples and making generalisations of the data is through probability sampling. Having explained the variances in sampling approaches between quantitative and qualitative research, it must be noted that there are two types of sampling methods – probability and non-probability (Babbie, 2010:191).

Probability sampling entails the selection of a sample that statistically would equal or precisely be representative of the population (De Vaus, 2001:184; Punch, 2005:102; Babbie *et al.*, 2001:175.). According to Nachmias and Nachmias (1987:185), a probability sample design ensures that if the researcher were to repeat the study on a number of different samples drawn from a given population, the findings would not differ from the true population figures by a specified amount. In order to draw representative samples from which valid generalisations can be made, Burns (2000:85) identifies six probability sampling techniques utilised in social research, namely: random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling, stage sampling and opportunity sampling. The distinguishing characteristic of probability sampling is that one can specify for each sampling unit of the population the probability that it will be included in the sample (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987:184).

On the other hand, whereas quantitative research uses probability sampling, qualitative research employs non-probability sampling (Burns, 2000:389). Babbie (2010:192) defines non-probability sampling as a technique in which samples are not selected randomly or by chance. Mason (2006:120) points out that the logic of probability is rarely employed in qualitative inquiry because the sample is expected to provide useful and meaningful “empirical contexts, illustrations and scenarios”. Mason further points out that what is useful and meaningful should be able to allow the researcher to advance his/her understandings to address the research questions. The *Weekend Nation* case study involved non-probability sampling and this was informed by Gaskell (2000:41) who underlines that the real purpose of qualitative research is not counting opinions or people but rather exploring the range of opinions, the different representations of the issue.

Babbie *et al.* (2001:166) and Nachmias and Nachmias (1987:185) identify the following types of non-probability sampling techniques:

- Convenience sampling: A researcher selects whatever sampling units are conveniently available. For example, this could be done by stopping people in the streets.
- Purposive sampling: This is based on the researcher’s knowledge of the population, its elements and the nature of the aims of the research. The chance that a particular sampling unit will be selected depends upon the subjective judgement of the researcher.
- Snowball sampling: This technique is applied when members of a special population are difficult to locate. The researcher identifies a few members of the target population and then asks them to locate other potential individuals befitting the sampling unit.

- Quota sampling: With this technique, the researcher selects a sample that is as similar as possible to the sampling population. It addresses the issue of representatives, but unlike probability sampling, researchers collect data from people having all characteristics of a given group such as age or gender. The groups are then weighted against the total population with the aim of generating a reasonable representation of the population.

For the *Weekend Nation* case study, the sampling frame was single-staged, drawn from journalists who were identified for having been involved in the political beat of the newspaper between 2002 and 2012. A sampling frame is the list of units that are considered for selection (Bauer & Aarts, 2000:21). A single-stage sampling procedure is one in which the researcher has access to names in the population or sampling unit and can sample them directly (Cresswell, 2009:148). This is defined as purposive sampling in that it is not representative of a sample of population but has specific characteristics befitting the criteria to address the central research question (Du Plooy, 2009:123; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006:92). In this context, it was an investigation into the political role of the *Weekend Nation* newspaper bearing in mind the implications of its ownership by a top politician. As Silverman (2005:129) observes, purposive sampling should have some features or process that the researcher is interested in. As mentioned in the foregoing, the interview sample for this research had the relevant features.

Preliminary arrangements were made with 17 research participants by e-mail and telephone. For ethical considerations, the interviewees were informed well in advance of the study. Consent forms, attached as Addendum B, and the research questions were e-mailed to the participants ahead of the interviews which were then signed after their participation. These are available from this researcher. The University of Stellenbosch Ethics Committee (Addendum C) gave this researcher permission to undertake this study. Additionally, this researcher, through the University of Stellenbosch Ethics committee, sought permission from the *Weekend Nation* authorities (Addendum D) to access their staff and documents. This was granted.

The interviews took place for a period of four months in Malawi. The first interview took place in December, 2013 while the last one was in March, 2014. Questions posed to all the respondents were similar except for a few that related to the historical foundations of the newspaper and which only were posed to the co-founder, Mbumba Achuthan (Achuthan, 2014). All the interviews were conducted face to face. Some of them were conducted in the respondents' offices and others took place at hotel lounges. This researcher used two digital devices to record the interviews and this

followed an initial request to do so from the respondents, all of whom consented. This was done to allow a smooth flow of the discussion without many interruptions while at the same time ensuring that there was back-up recorded data. However, the researcher took a few notes, more in particular those that related to dates and unique spellings. Recordings and transcripts are available from this researcher.

The names of the respondents (real names) and reasons for their selection are listed as follows:

- Mbumba Achuthan – She co-founded the NPL, publishers of the *Weekend Nation*, in 1993, and became its Chief Executive Officer. She is the daughter to the newspaper's founder and politician, Aleke Banda.
- Mabvuto Banda – He first worked for the *Weekend Nation* from 1999 to 2004 as the Head of the Investigations desk. He returned to the newspaper as Bureau Chief for the capital city – Lilongwe from 2007 to July, 2013 when he left to establish a media research and public relations company – MediaCorp.
- McDonald Chapalapata – He joined the *Weekend Nation* in 2002 as a General Assignments Reporter before concentrating on politics and special investigations prior to his departure from the company in 2004.
- Edward Chitsulo – He joined the *Weekend Nation* in 2004 as Managing Editor. He was also a columnist. Chitsulo passed away during the final months of this study.
- George Kasakula – He first worked for the *Weekend Nation* in 2000 as Sub-editor for international news. In 2007, he was appointed the newspaper's Editor until his resignation in 2014. He was also a columnist.
- Anthony Kasunda – He joined the *Weekend Nation* as an Investigative Reporter in 2007 and left in 2014.
- Thom Khanje – He joined the *Weekend Nation* in 1997 as a Business Reporter. In 2002, he was appointed Bureau Chief for Lilongwe before his departure in 2003.
- Aubrey Mchulu – He joined the *Weekend Nation* in 1997 as a general news Reporter. In 2010 he was appointed a Deputy Editor.
- Cheu Mita – She joined the *Weekend Nation* in 2005 as a Reporter and left in 2000. She returned in 2007 as a Section Editor before her departure in 2013.
- Abel Mwanyungwe – He joined the *Weekend Nation* as a business editor in 1998. He also edited investigative news stories before his departure in 2004.
- Frank Namangale – He joined the *Weekend Nation* as a general News Reporter in 2007.

- Steve Nhlane – He joined the *Weekend Nation* in 1998 as Deputy Editor. He was appointed Editor for the *Weekend Nation* in 2002 before leaving the newspaper in 2007. He was also a columnist.
- Mzati Nkolokosa – He joined the *Weekend Nation* as a Reporter in 2003. He was appointed Sub-editor in 2006 before his departure in 2009.
- Alfred Ntonga – He joined in 1993 as the first Chief Sub-editor for NPL newspapers, then only publishers of the *Nation* daily newspaper before the *Weekend Nation* was launched in 1995. He later worked as Chief Editor for the newspaper from 1995 to 2012 when he was appointed deputy chief executive officer. He also heads the Editorial team. He is also a columnist.
- Caroline Somanje. She joined the *Weekend Nation* in 2008 as a Current Affairs Reporter.
- Rebecca Theu. She joined the *Weekend Nation* as a general News Reporter in 2005 and left in 2008. She returned to the newspaper as Section Editor in 2009 and was appointed *Weekend Nation* Editor in 2014.
- Gracian Tukula – He joined the NPL newspapers as a Reporter in 1994, a year before the *Weekend Nation* was launched. He was later appointed Sports Editor before leaving the newspaper in 1998. He returned in 2002 as Deputy Editor, a position he held until 2007 when he was appointed the Editor for the other NPL weekend title – the *Nation on Sunday*. He left in 2014.

It must be noted that 16 of the 17 respondents were all professional journalists who were involved with the political beat of the *Weekend Nation* between 2002 and 2012. It was, however, deemed important to include the CEO, Mbumba Achuthan, in the study for having been involved in the foundational structures and daily managerial operations of the newspaper.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, the research and design methodology of this study was discussed. It was stated that the design of this research is case study. It was also explained that the approach was that of an intrinsic case study because of its uniqueness and ordinariness. It was also discussed that this study employed qualitative research methodology, as among other reasons, it allows the researcher to get to the inner meanings and individual interpretations that would address the research questions. The chapter also presented two data gathering techniques employed in the study – content analysis and interviews – as an attempt to understand the case and address the research problem. It was further explained that this combination of gathering information was also aimed at enriching the data to make it reliable and valid. Furthermore, research participants

involved in this study and reasons for choosing them were also presented in this chapter. The interview questions presented to the research participants were also presented. In addition, ethical issues related to the study were also addressed. The University of Stellenbosch's Research Ethics Committee provided the permission for this research to go ahead. The *Weekend Nation's* management also granted this researcher access the newspaper's archives whereas its present and former staff involved in the political beat gave consent to participate in the study.

The next chapter is about research findings.

CHAPTER 6

Research Findings

6.1 Introduction

The objective of this study was to investigate the political role of the *Weekend Nation* newspaper in the democratisation of Malawi within the context of media ownership by a top politician between 2002 and 2012. This researcher scrutinised the *Weekend Nation's* editorials and its journalists' opinion columns and conducted interviews with journalists who worked on the political beat of the newspaper during the period under investigation. This chapter presents findings from the newspaper's editorials and its journalists' opinion columns published between 2002 and 2012 and from the individual interviews. As explained in the previous chapter, opinion columns in this study refer specifically to the *Weekend Nation's* individual journalists' opinions appearing in columns. In this study, all the columns analysed were authored by the *Weekend Nation's* senior journalists. Major political issues during the period under study were: good governance, floor-crossing (Section 65), and the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP).

This chapter is in two sections which follow the same sequence of activities that the researcher was involved in during the data collection process. The first section covers the details of data published in the *Weekend Nation* from January 1, 2002 to December 31, 2012 as mentioned in the foregoing. The second section is an account of the interviews with the journalists who were involved with the newspaper's political beat during the period under investigation. These two strands are discussed next.

6.2 Section One

Research findings from the *Weekend Nation's* editorials and columns

This section entails findings of the *Weekend Nation's* editorials and opinion columns. Specifically, the newspaper's editorial is referred to as "Comment" and appears on the second page of the *Weekend Nation* without a by-line. The columns, which contain individual journalists' opinions, are manifold within the newspaper and cover a wide range of topics. For the purposes of this study, this researcher examined four political columns namely:

- *The Backbencher* – authored by the newspaper's deputy CEO, Alfred Ntonga – but in itself does not carry a by-line.
- *My Diary* which was initially authored by the first editor for the *Weekend Nation's* Steve Nhlane before being succeeded by George Kasakula until his departure in 2014.

- *Raw Stuff* – authored by the then Managing Editor, Edward Chitsulo. Chitsulo died in the final stages of this study – March, 2015.
- *Cut the Chaff* – authored by Editor Ephraim Munthali

Therefore, the editorials will appear as “Comment” whereas the columns will be presented according to the authors’ real names. The findings will be presented according to the themes linked to the major political issues mentioned in section 6.1. Given that the focus of the data collection was on the themes, the findings below are presented in that order. In other words, data sourced from the *Weekend Nation*’s editorials and opinion columns between 2002 and 2012 is presented together according to themes.

6.2.1 Good governance

In this study, good governance is structured into three areas. The first focuses on accountability and transparency, the second relates specifically to corruption, and the third closely looks at how the issue of human rights was covered in the *Weekend Nation*’s editorials and journalists’ opinion columns.

6.2.1.1 Accountability and transparency

This section presents findings from the *Weekend Nation*’s editorials and its individual journalists’ opinion columns which relate to good governance, specifically on the issue of accountability and transparency.

6.2.1.1.1 The *Weekend Nation* calls for accountability on international donor money

Towards the end of Muluzi’s term of office, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2002a:2) called for a critical evaluation of his tenure in the area of accountability and transparency if Malawi’s economy was to take positive strides. This followed the withdrawal of financial aid from key donors such as the European Union (EU), Denmark and the World Bank, citing poor fiscal discipline and human rights abuses (Resnick, 2012:6; Tenthani, 2002a). In the editorial, the *Weekend Nation* asserted that the suspension of aid money was a strong message to the Muluzi government to put its house in order and not “just assurances” on the economic front. The editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2002a:2) underlined the IMF’s call to the government to reduce over-spending stating:

It is unfortunate that such statements usually sound arrogant when they come from donors, but there is no denying fact compliance on this matter is for our own good.

Correspondingly, then Chief Editor Alfred Ntonga (2002:22) argued that there was lack of political will to empower the institutions to put in place to “safeguard democracy and good governance” thereby deterring multilateral aid partners and investors. Ntonga further noted that

When allegations of corruption, lack of transparency, bad governance and undemocratic tendencies arise, we deny them, saying the Constitution and the democratic institutions that came with the new political dispensation are proof that we are serious on democracy and good governance.

With a month before the 2004 general elections in Malawi, the then *Weekend Nation* editor Steve Nhlane (2004a:23) labelled the governing UDF party “arrogant” for financing electioneering machinery while neglecting attending to delayed salaries for public servants. This is discussed next.

6.2.1.1.2 The *Weekend Nation* against another UDF rule

In April 2004, following the government’s delay to pay civil servants’ salaries in the previous month, Nhlane (2004a:23) cast the blame on the UDF and urged the government employees to seriously take that into consideration when they would be going to the polls the following month. Nhlane further contended that the government had no money to pay the civil servants on time yet they were able to fund the UDF “to woo people to vote for them”. Nhlane (2004a:23) argued that “the choice is yours, civil servants, your families and relations. You know why you are in that mess and how you can get out of it”. A day following the publication of Nhlane’s opinion piece, Muluzi told a public gathering at a political campaign rally that the *Weekend Nation*’s owner, Aleke Banda, who had been one of Muluzi’s top cabinet ministers, and vice-president of the UDF, was behind the content that had been in the *My Diary* column, critical of his [Muluzi’s] government (Nhlane, 2004b:23).

6.2.1.1.3 *Weekend Nation* journalist refutes ownership interference allegations

Incensed by Nhlane’s article which had urged the electorate not to vote for the UDF party, Muluzi told a political campaign rally ahead of May, 2004 elections, that Aleke Banda – owner of the *Weekend Nation* – had influenced the journalist with what to write in the *My Diary* opinion column (Nhlane, 2004b:23). Nhlane (2004b:23), however argued that the allegation was an “insult to my intelligence as a journalist”. Nhlane further contended that it was publicly known that civil servants had not received their March salaries on time and yet the government had money for the president’s local and foreign trips. Nhlane (2004b:23) further pointed out that

All that the *Weekend Nation* newspaper column – which Muluzi castigated – was questioning and drawing people’s attention to, is whether or not the UDF has its priorities right. Obviously the answer is an emphatic no.

An editorial comment (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2004a:2) in the first week of the polling month was clear with an opposing stance against Mutharika, who had been hand-picked by Muluzi to lead the UDF in the 2004 elections. The editorial comment (ibid) argued that Mutharika had a poor economic governance record when he was Secretary General of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) years earlier. The editorial further observed that Mutharika had been fired from COMESA because he was found to have abused the organisation's funds and resources, yet Muluzi had now seen him fit to lead the UDF and the country. The editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2004a:2) argued:

Academic credentials are one thing. Integrity is another. The high office of president requires both and much more. Malawians will only make the mistake of voting him in office at their own peril.

After the UDF won the May 2004 elections, Nhlane (2004c:23) appealed to Mutharika to take stock of the deficiencies of the outgoing leadership on critical issues of accountability and transparency in Malawi's democracy and this is discussed next.

6.2.1.1.4 The *Weekend Nation* cautions Mutharika on accountability and transparency

A week after Mutharika was elected as Malawi's president, Nhlane (2004c:23) hailed his pledge "to appoint a lean cabinet, to improve the economy and fight corruption". But Nhlane (2004c:23) urged the opposition parties, who had won more parliamentary seats than in the previous election to enact the Assets Declaration law observing that such would signify efforts to combat corruption. In Nhlane's view, opposition MPs would be expected to "push" for that in parliament. On the issue of assets declaration, the newspaper's editorial comment (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2004a:2) observed that three months into power, neither the president nor his cabinet ministers had declared their assets as required by law to do so within three months of office. The editorial pointed out that this was in sharp contrast to Mutharika's inaugural speech of zero-tolerance against corruption. The comment was of the view that "any sign of dilly-dallying in this area might make the government of Mutharika appear as casual and indifferent to corruption" like the previous Muluzi's ten year tenure (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2004a:2).

Just a year after the 2004 elections, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2005a:2) reiterated its dissatisfaction with the Mutharika administration on issues of accountability and transparency following revelations by the Auditor General of gross abuse of public funds by government officials. The editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2005a:2) observed that the Mutharika

government “which pledged zero tolerance for corruption, does not seem to behave any different from the Muluzi administration”. But when Mutharika won the 2009 elections with an outright victory, Ntonga (2009a:29) was quick to warn his presidency against power abuse as addressed in the following sub-section. This forms the context of the following discussion.

6.2.1.1.5 *Weekend Nation* journalist cautions on abuse of power

Following Mutharika and the DPP’s outright victory in the 2009 elections, Ntonga (2009a:29) observed that MPs from the governing party, who had now occupied 114 seats in the 193-seat chamber of the National Assembly, voted for Bills willy-nilly, some of which would ultimately be costly for the government. Ntonga pointed out that “in the six weeks that the DPP-dominated National Assembly met for the first time, 16 Bills including the budget itself, were passed with little debate, if any at all”. Ntonga further warned that this was, however, in the wake of an Auditor General’s report that had earlier revealed pilferage of public funds in the government. For Ntonga (2009a:29), this was poor economic governance, yet “all along the Mutharika administration has championed zero-tolerance for corruption”. From this perspective, when the government commenced to construct a private residence for Mutharika at his traditional home, and even more so purchased a presidential jet, the *Weekend Nation* took a critical stance and this is looked at in the next section.

6.2.1.1.6 The *Weekend Nation* calls for transparency on private presidential palace construction

When Mutharika embarked on a construction of a multi-million dollar private palace at his home farm – Ndata – in Thyolo district, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2009a:2) was very critical. In its editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2009a:2), the newspaper pointed out that although the retirement package for the president includes a provision for a government residence, of particular concern was the fact that the project was “shrouded in secrecy” with neither government official nor the presidency taking the responsibility to confirm the development in the public domain. For this reason, the editorial further pointed out that a president who builds a home while in office “is definitely making news” and those entrusted to speak for the president should be more forthcoming with right and correct information instead of denying the existence of something that can be seen from a distance. The issue of accountability and transparency resurfaced when the government of Malawi purchased a presidential jet and this forms the context of the subsequent discussion.

6.2.1.1.7 The *Weekend Nation* urges for openness on presidential jet purchase

Towards the end of 2009, Malawi was gripped by a severe foreign exchange crisis emanating from poor tobacco sales (major foreign exchange earner in Malawi) and decreased international donor assistance (Mpasu, 2012:4; Cammack, 2011:7). The development culminated into, among other things, massive fuel shortages across the country because the government could not service international debts, according to Cammack (2011:7). But despite the crisis, the government of Malawi went ahead to purchase a 14-passenger Dassault Falcon 900EX aircraft from an American firm, Aero Toy Store, for US\$13.26million for presidential use, a development that incensed the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2009b:2). The editorial further expressed dismay that the government had not been forthcoming to tell Malawians of the factors behind the financial crisis the country was facing and “just before the predicament, a new presidential jet had quietly been bought and the citizenry whose money purchased the jet had to learn about the development from the grapevine” (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2009b:2).

By the same token, senior journalist George Kasakula (Kasakula, 2009:19), who had taken over the opinion column, *My Diary*, from Nhlane in April, 2007, argued that the purchase of the jet, which was shrouded in secrecy, was a clear indicator that the Mutharika administration “had lost direction” (Kasakula, 2009:19). Kasakula further contended that the country was already in an economic crisis of high magnitude and could not afford to spend much needed foreign reserves for a private jet. With continued secrecy over the presidential jet carried into the following year, Kasakula (2010:15) candidly described Mutharika and the DPP as “arrogant”. Kasakula further observed that the secrecy was not only undemocratic but insensitive to “openness and accountability which are the hallmarks of democracy” (Kasakula, 2010a:15). In the view of the foregoing, coupled with the withdrawal of international financial aid, Malawi descended into a crisis as noted in the following discussion, and this, as it will be noted in the following section, forced Kasakula to canvass for an early election.

6.2.1.1.8 *Weekend Nation* journalist calls for Mutharika to seek fresh mandate

When Malawi’s multi-lateral aid donors withdrew their budgetary support in 2011, the country plunged into a severe economic crisis, including fuel shortages and increasing commodity prices which incensed Kasakula (2012a:19). In this regard, Kasakula described Mutharika’s government as a “tragedy” for not adhering to principles of good governance, more in particular “transparency and accountability”. Kasakula (2012a:19) reminded Mutharika that the he was empowered with a constitutional mandate to have an element of trust with his citizenry in an open, accountable and transparent manner, further arguing that it was evident that the trust was gone and as such “the

minimum I expect of him is to call for a referendum to ask Malawians whether they want an early election” (Kasakula, 2012a:19). In the wake of the sudden death of Mutharika on April 5, 2012 of cardiac arrest, Joyce Banda ascended to power. Subsequently, senior journalists (Chitsulo, 2012:18; Kasakula, 2012b:15; Ntonga, 2012a:16) recommended the new leadership to consider accountability and transparency as paramount in her government. This is discussed next.

6.2.1.1.9 The *Weekend Nation* urges Joyce Banda to be accountable and transparent

Immediately after Joyce Banda was sworn in as the president, senior journalists (Chitsulo, 2012:18; Kasakula, 2012b:15; Ntonga (2012a:16) suggested that for her government to take the right course on accountability and transparency, there was need to revisit issues that had alienated Malawians from their political leaders. Ntonga additionally acknowledged that, like her predecessors, Banda had pledged good governance in her inaugural speech but that she was expected to repeal some bad laws drafted by the previous regime as a critical step for the enhancement of accountability and transparency. Chitsulo (2012:18) warned the new administration that her presidency would be duly assessed. Chitsulo further advised the new president particularly to take into consideration “the wide-scale rot in public service delivery, fraud and corruption”. Against this background, the *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2012a:2) and senior journalists (Ntonga, 2012b:16; Munthali, 2012:11) took a critical stance vis-à-vis Joyce Banda and her PP-led government. This forms the basis of the subsequent discussion.

6.2.1.1.10 The *Weekend Nation* calls Joyce Banda hypocrite

The *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2012a:2) had observed that the Joyce Banda administration had depleted an entire annual budget for the State House within five months of ascending into power. According to the editorial, this was exacerbated by unnecessary expenditures in foreign travel on the part of the president and her entourage. For this reason, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2012a:2) called the new administration a “hypocritical government”. The editorial further urged the government of Joyce Banda to set the right priorities and embrace accountability. In like manner, senior journalist Ephraim Munthali (2012:11) argued that Joyce Banda’s foreign “public relations” tours could have instead been tasked to the Malawian representatives in the respective countries or cabinet ministers. Taking this point further, Ntonga (2012b:16) reminded Joyce Banda that in the spirit of transparency and accountability, she was required by law to declare her assets, further noting that “power begins to corrupt”. Ntonga, however, observed that despite the Declaration of Assets and Liabilities being a constitutional provision for the

president, cabinet ministers, MPs and senior government officials, there was not much being seen to enforce it.

As noted in the foregoing, the *Weekend Nation* and its journalists argued that the issue of accountability and transparency has strong implications for curbing of corruption, which is the context of the next discussion.

6.2.1.2 Corruption

In this section, this researcher focuses on the issue of corruption as it was addressed by the *Weekend Nation* and its journalists during the period between 2002 and 2012.

6.2.1.2.1 The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) is ineffective: *Weekend Nation* journalists

After seven years of democracy in Malawi, the *Weekend Nation's* senior journalists (Ntonga, 2002b:7; Nhlane, 2002b:21) noted that the government of Muluzi and the UDF had continued to ignore one of the key tenets of democratic governance through its lack of political will to curb corruption. For Ntonga, the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), which was mandated to prosecute those involved in corrupt practices, had failed to flex its muscles over the years due to lack of political will. In Nhlane's (2002a:21) view, the government was expected to give more powers to the ACB for the prosecution of suspects but as it was, the bureau was "merely a smokescreen establishment due to limited powers". This was evident particularly in cases involving cabinet ministers, Nhlane further noted. Correspondingly, Nhlane (2002b:19) rebuked the then Finance Minister, Friday Jumbe, who had attacked the media for exposing corruption scandals, arguing that such reports were "tainting the country's image internationally". Nhlane further argued that it was wrong for the minister to blame the media but rather that he should "put the foot down on dubious deals.

Since the Muluzi leadership had been reluctant to empower the office of the ACB, the *Weekend Nation* reignited the issue when Mutharika ascended to the presidency in May, 2004.

6.2.1.2.2 *Weekend Nation* journalists advise Mutharika to empower the ACB

When Mutharika succeeded Muluzi in May, 2004 as Malawi's second democratically elected president, the *Weekend Nation's* senior journalist, Ntonga (Ntonga, 2004a:28), strongly argued with the new leadership that if they were to be taken seriously on the pledge of "zero-tolerance" against corruption, then the office of the ACB ought to have powers to prosecute offenders without seeking

consent of the chief government prosecutor as had been the case. This was in the wake of a remark by a newly appointed Director of Public Prosecutions, Ishmail Wadi, who had told the press that Malawi's retrogression in economic development was largely due to systemic corruption but pledged his office would review and bring to justice all those involved in corruption scandals (Ntonga, 2004a:28).

But Ntonga cautioned that as much as what Wadi had said sounded impressive, the powers vested in his office would not be that different from the previous office bearer who "had his own sacred cows" to protect from being prosecuted for corruption (Ntonga, 2004a:28). Nhlane (2004c:27) took up the issue of the new prosecutions director further, pointing out that the stance to tackle corruption should not just be window dressing because donors were keenly watching Mutharika closely to see if the president was "himself or just a replica of his mentor [Muluzi] who has dearly cost this country during the past 10 years". Given the stance taken by the *Weekend Nation's* journalists to critically analyse the pledges by the new administration to combat systemic corruption in Malawi, the newspaper praised Mutharika's government for arresting UDF officials on graft during Muluzi's regime. This is discussed next.

6.2.1.2.3 The *Weekend Nation* lauds Mutharika for arresting UDF officials on graft

Within a few months after taking office, six senior UDF party officials were arrested on various charges of corruption, prompting the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2004b:2) to rally behind Mutharika's anti-graft drive. While the arrests intensified a growing rift between Mutharika and his predecessor, the newspaper's editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2004c:2) further cautioned the president not to back-track. The editorial observed that

The party that sponsored him wants him to stop his administration from arresting UDF members suspected of indulging in corruption in the past 10 years . . . Yet relaxing on arresting suspected bad guys in UDF will be relaxing on the zero-tolerance for corruption policy.

The editorial underlined that there should not be any signs of letting up on the anti-corruption drive because that would restore confidence in the international aid partners. It did not take long however, for the newspaper to note that Mutharika's pledge to combat corruption would be an uphill task. The following sub-section deals with this.

6.2.1.2.4 The *Weekend Nation* chides Mutharika for hypocrisy on corruption

When Muluzi was arrested in July, 2006 on corruption charges stemming back to his presidential tenure, Mutharika suspended the ACB Director Gustav Kaliwo and this was followed by the then Public Prosecutions Director, Ishmail Wadi, dropping the charges altogether, a development that was chastised by the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006a:2; 2006b:2; 2006c:2). Considering that Mutharika had minority MPs in parliament after he left the UDF to form his own party – the DPP – the editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006a:2) held the view that the arrest would have likely incensed Muluzi’s sympathisers (majority MPs) who could reciprocate by sabotaging crucial deliberations such as the passing of the national budget. The editorial further observed that suspending the ACB director, Gustav Kaliwo, indicated that there “are limits to zero-tolerance” and further “puts into question the independence of his office and politicises a legitimate arrest of a high profile suspect” (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006a:2). In a subsequent editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006b:2), the newspaper pointed out that the suspension of the ACB Director (who later resigned) was not merited but that rather the president was thinking of the political implications that were to follow. In this vein, the editorial warned that this had set a bad precedent in the fight against corruption and would make the job of the ACB office more difficult. The *Weekend Nation* editorial further observed that president Mutharika’s zero-tolerance on corruption policy would now be a difficult “commodity” to sell. Taking this into cognisance, when Mutharika appointed another ACB Director, Tumaliske Ndovi, to replace Kaliwo, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006c:2) called for assurances through parliament that there would be no political interference in the duties of the graft-fighting body.

Days after Mutharika won the 2009 elections by an outright majority, the newspaper (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2009c:2) highlighted corruption in its first editorial. The editorial further reminded the president that

His [Mutharika’s] first term did not register much success in the fight against corruption. It is our hope that he will take the mandate that Malawians have given him as a springboard for building a lasting legacy for himself and his party.

However, as it will be noted in the next sub-section, the *Weekend Nation*’s senior journalist Ntonga (2009b:16), observed that lack of political will still haunted Mutharika into his second tenure of the presidency.

6.2.1.2.5 The *Weekend Nation* calls for systemic overhaul to fight corruption

A few months into the second presidential term, Ntonga (2009b:16) reiterated earlier observations that the stance taken by Mutharika at his initial inaugural ceremony with a pledge to root out corruption in Malawi was just sheer political rhetoric because it only targeted those in opposition. Ntonga had observed that targeting members of a rival party was the easier part of Mutharika's fight against corruption, but "dealing with the rot within the DPP and the government" was the bigger challenge which did not seem to have an easier solution. Ntonga further observed that some politicians saw corrupt tendencies as a deserving reward for the loyalty they gave to the president and the ruling party. In this vein, Ntonga was of the view that the fight against corruption would require an overhaul of the entire system because the Mutharika government was entrenched with "remnants of a regime that was so corrupt that 30 per cent of the national revenue was going down the drain every year".

When Mutharika died in April, 2012, Ntonga's (2012:16) initial take on his successor, Joyce Banda, was to urge her government to seriously tackle the issue of corruption by declaring their assets and liabilities.

Having looked at economic governance, the next section deals with the *Weekend Nation*'s stance on the issue of political governance, specifically on human rights.

6.2.1.3 Human rights

In this section, the researcher presents the *Weekend Nation*'s journalists' positions on human rights during the period 2002 and 2012.

6.2.1.3.1 The *Weekend Nation* deplores partisan police service

When Muluzi attempted to secure a constitutional amendment to extend his stay in office, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2002b:2) noted that police officers were politically partisan in carrying out their duties. This was after an anti-riot squad had confronted and dispersed a group of anti-Muluzi protesters while leaving the ruling UDF party demonstrators free to demonstrate, which then drew criticism from the editorial comment. The editorial observed that the actions by the law enforcers violated the constitutional rights of holding peaceful demonstrations and even more so illustrated bias towards the pro-governing party supporters.

A few weeks later, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2002c: 2) reiterated the call for the Malawi police to rise above partisan politics and conduct themselves in a manner that does not

throw their professionalism into question after an official of an opposition party blew his car horn as a sign of protest against Muluzi's third term bid. After the courts acquitted the opposition politician, the editorial comment asserted that the court ruling had put a dent on the image of the police whose actions were politically biased and unprofessional.

6.2.1.3.2 *Weekend Nation* journalist blames Muluzi for UDF youth violence

With political violence not relenting, senior journalist Nhlane (2003:21) noted that the UDF had unleashed terror through its youth wing towards those who had dissenting views against the third term bid including the news media. Nhlane's observations followed the brutal beating of the *Weekend Nation*'s photo-journalist, Daniel Nyirenda, by the youth wing called the Young Democrats, while he attempted to take photographs of dignitaries at the start of the party's national convention in July, 2003. The columnist contended that although Muluzi later apologised for the beating of the journalist, "he fell short of admitting that the battering was the work of the UDF Young Democrats". Nhlane further cast the blame on the president, pointing out that "he protects these hoodlums and treats violence with kid gloves". Nhlane further warned that such brutal acts would only dent the image of the UDF party. For this reason, Nhlane further argued that incidences where political leaders seemingly ignored violence and brutal acts were critical for Malawians to reflect on when choosing their next president the following year.

An editorial in the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2003a:2) the following week picked up the issue when the then Information Minister Ken Lipenga acknowledged and apologised to the newspaper over what he termed a "rush job" by UDF's youth wing – the Young Democrats. The editorial, however, observed that the ruling party was being hypocritical in that many opposition members and other people had been beaten up by the Young Democrats in full view of law enforcers knowing well that they would be left scot-free. The editorial held the view that Muluzi was not serious with his public condemnation because, by virtue of also being Commander-in-Chief of the Malawi Police Service, he would have made certain that perpetrators of terror against the opposition and the media were brought to justice. When Mutharika succeeded Muluzi as president, the issue of human rights took the spotlight following the former's overwhelming victory in the 2009 elections. Among the issues included was the drafting of draconian laws as observed in the following sub-section.

6.2.1.3.3 *Weekend Nation* journalist rebukes the Publications Amendment Bill

Section 46 of the Malawi Constitution allows the Minister of Information to prohibit the importation of publications deemed contrary to public interest but Mutharika and the DPP, taking advantage of

the majority in parliament, pushed for an amendment to extend the ban to local publications (Freedom House, 2011). Although the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) attempted to clarify that the ban would only be applied to publications that promoted hatred, terrorism and violence, senior journalist Kasakula (2011a:15) expressed displeasure, noting that

The way the Mutharika administration has run the country arrogantly for the past 20 months, it is impossible for anyone to believe that his government cannot use Section 46 to ban a newspaper. To put it bluntly, it would be suicide and sheer madness for anybody to believe the OPC press release.

Kasakula held the view that the Mutharika-led government wanted to control and regulate the print media for fear of criticism. Kasakula (2011a:15) further called for “Section 46 to be repealed at all costs”. The bill was, however, passed by the DPP-dominated parliament in November, 2010 (Gondwe, 2010).

The Section 46 Bill had followed another proposal by the DPP-led government to amend a law that allowed citizens to seek court injunctions. This discussion is next.

6.2.1.3.4 The *Weekend Nation* opposes bill to amend civil rights law

The civil rights law that was criticised by the *Weekend Nation* was entailed in a Bill – the Civil Procedure Amendment – proposed by DPP MPs early in 2011 to empower the courts to stop anyone from seeking an injunction [court order] against the government (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011a:2). The editorial comment observed that an injunction, which temporarily preserves the status quo through a command or ban of an act that a court regards as essential to justice, is a right that Malawians should not be denied “especially against the government – an institution that is best known for perpetuating injustice against its citizens worldwide” (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011a:2). Taking the point further, the editorial comment argued that the bill was undemocratic and a clear infringement of human rights, further urging Mutharika and governing DPP legislators to desist from proposing dictatorial laws in the future.

Nonetheless, as will be noted next, senior *Weekend Nation* journalists found Mutharika turning into an autocratic leader.

6.2.1.3.5 Mutharika branded dictator

Following the continued drafting of draconian laws, coupled with a litany of human rights abuses, senior journalist (Kasakula, 2011b:19) had no kind words for Mutharika but simply labeled him a “dictator”. Kasakula (2011b:19) argued that “with each passing day, the burden of oppression becomes harder and harder to bear and there is plenty of evidence to show the government’s heavy-handedness”. Kasakula contended, however, that Malawians would fight any steps that would take them back to the dictatorship days of the one party regime. In like manner, Munthali (2011:13) expressed concern that the president had from the onset been projected as a transformative leader, abhorred corruption and won the support of his citizens nationwide through the 2009 elections outright victory. But against the background of human rights abuses, Munthali further argued, the “Mutharika brand” had degenerated into autocracy.

Amidst condemnation from the *Weekend Nation*’s journalists, it will be noted in the subsequent section that the alleged oppressive tendencies of Mutharika were not relenting.

6.2.1.3.6 Mutharika threatens civil society groups

Displeased with the civil society for their condemnation of his alleged human rights violations, Mutharika told a political rally in the eastern Malawi town of Mangochi that the NGO leaders were “liars” whose only interest was to obtain financial support from the international community because “they were unemployable” (Kasakula, 2011c:17). Mutharika singled out Undule Mwakasungula, who was the Director of the Center for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) as leading civil society groups in telling lies to donors on human rights and governance in Malawi (FIDH, 2011:1). According to the Freedom House (FIDH), on the same day, Mwakasungula received an anonymous phone call warning him that he “would be slaughtered” if he was not careful with his work. These threats received condemnation from senior *Weekend Nation* journalists as it will be observed in the next subsection.

6.2.1.3.7 *Weekend Nation* journalists defend civil society

Following the threats noted in the preceding discussion, Kasakula (2011c:11) countered them by arguing that NGOs had a role to play in the development and governance of Malawi, providing an alternative platform for the opinion of the voiceless. Kasakula noted that rather than issuing threats, the president should observe human rights and govern the country according to the will of the people. Kasakula (2011c:11) further argued that

The only way government is going to shut up NGOs about bad governance is to be a good government . . . A government that does not churn out bad laws, which by their very existence perpetrate the culture

of injustice . . . Until the current regime can do these things and improve its governance record, the president will have a hard time convincing anyone that the NGOs are telling us lies

The aforementioned argument resonated with Chitsulo (2011:16) who held the view that Mutharika's statements were manifestations of a leader who had lost direction. Chitsulo further noted that Mwakasungula was an activist who risked his life by "talking to all those who care about the country's worsening human rights record" (2011:16). For Chitsulo, a litany of human rights abuses was there for everyone to see and it was up to the president to come up with reasonable proof that they had just been fabricated. Correspondingly, an editorial comment (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011b:2) pointed out that "threats have no place in democracy". The editorial observed that the threats towards the civil society groups were further ruining the reputation of the country on governance to the international community. The editorial's observations were vindicated when Mutharika ordered the expulsion of UK High Commissioner to Malawi a few months later.

6.2.1.3.8 *Weekend Nation* journalist bemoans Mutharikas's diplomatic row with Britain

In April, 2011, Mutharika ordered the expulsion of the British High Commissioner to Malawi Fergus Cochrane-Dyett, following a leaked cable that was critical of the deterioration of human rights situation in the country, branding the Malawian president as combative and intolerant to criticism (Wroe, 2012:138; Kasakula, 2011d:17). "The communiqué also indicated the willingness of the British government to suspend aid if the current state of affairs persisted" (Wroe, 2012:139). When the cable came to light in April, the government promptly expelled the diplomat from the country and Britain responded by announcing that it would review all of its ongoing financial support of the Malawian government (ibid). According to Kasakula, the British diplomat had raised concerns about the governance situation in Malawi, citing threats to media freedom, freedom of speech and the intimidation of civil society groups. What was disconcerting to Kasakula about the government's decision to deport Cochrane-Dyett was that the issues raised by the diplomat were well known and had been "fermenting in the public domain for several weeks". Kasakula further cautioned Mutharika that "you may have the power to expel diplomats and foreigners who speak the truth, but you may not expel 13 million Malawians". In retaliation, the British government immediately deported Malawi High Commissioner to Britain, Flossie Chidyaonga, and further announced a review of a full range of a wider relationship with Malawi (Kasakula, 2011e:15). Having had historical ties with the British from colonial times, who were also Malawi's major aid donor, Kasakula described the diplomatic row as "tragic" for the Malawian government. Kasakula further argued that Mutharika should have reviewed the governance record which the cable had

condemned and also weighed whether the repercussions of expelling the envoy would be in the best interest of all Malawians.

When Mutharika sent a ministerial delegation to apologise to the British government five months later, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011c:2) felt exonerated. The editorial comment was of the view that if the government had listened to the counsel from various stakeholders when it had declared the British envoy *persona non grata*, it would have averted the myriad problems that came with the suspension of the budgetary support by Britain. The editorial observed that the government had to wait for the wrath of the donor community to realise that it had committed a grave error “especially with countless warnings that were issued by donors, the church, the opposition, media and other stakeholders long in advance” (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011c:2).

The next section looks at the *Weekend Nation*'s handling of protests which Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) organised against the Mutharika-led government.

6.2.1.3.9 The *Weekend Nation* condemns killing of protestors

Concerned with the meltdown of the socio-political and economic governance in the country, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) organised nationwide mass protests on July 20, 2011, which turned violent and 19 protestors were killed by the police (Dionne & Dulani, 2012:115). The *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011d:2) pointed out that it was regrettable that 19 innocent people had to lose their lives because the president had been adamant to change the course on the worsening economic and political governance in the country. The editorial asserted that it expected the protests and the deaths would be a wake-up call for the government to acknowledge that Malawi was in serious problems. Kasakula (2011f:15) underlined that the message that Malawians delivered to Mutharika through the protests was a sign that “they were tired of being taken for a ride and being taken for granted by a government that had become insensitive to their concerns and deaf to their cries”.

In addition to the attacks on Mutharika from a series of human rights abuses, the *Weekend Nation* and its journalists, as it is observed in the following discussion, rallied behind Malawi's Joyce Banda when she was expelled from the governing DPP.

6.2.1.3.10 The *Weekend Nation* and journalists take a stance on Joyce Banda

As Dionne and Dulani (2012:113) postulate, when Mutharika and the DPP won the 2009 elections with 60 per cent seats in parliament, Joyce Banda was his running-mate, thereby Malawi's vice-president. Dionne and Dulani further point out that although Mutharika had pledged to support Banda as the DPP's presidential candidate in the 2014 elections, he reneged and instead began to promote his younger brother, Peter as his successor. When Joyce Banda refused to support the succession plan, she was removed from cabinet and expelled from the DPP in December, 2010, according to Dionne and Dulani. While continuing to serve nominally as vice-president, she formed the People's Party (PP) the following year (Svåsand, 2013: 8). In the wake of an argument put forward by the DPP's Regional Governor for the South, Noel Masangwi, published in the *Weekend Nation* that "Malawi was not yet ready for a female president", Chitsulo (2010:16) condemned the politician's utterances noting that they were retrogressive in a democracy. Chitsulo pointed out that deliberations on the eligibility of the presidency should be based on equality and capabilities rather than on gender. In like manner, Kasakula (2010a:17) branded Masangwi as "ignorant of the Malawian Constitution", further arguing that

Should a sitting president resign, die, is impeached or is declared of holding public office, the Vice-President takes over the reins of State so there is no power vacuum. Should one of the above happen before 2014 – God forbid – Joyce Banda could find herself sitting pretty at the State House.

Kasakula further chastised Masangwi, pointing out that it was disrespectful by members of her own party to launch attacks against a sitting vice-president simply because she was a woman.

After noting that the "chorus" against Joyce Banda was growing, following pro-Peter's [President Mutharika's brother] endorsements by two cabinet ministers, Kasakula (2010b:17) was of the view that Joyce Banda's position in DPP was undoubtedly untenable. Kasakula highlighted that the Malawian Constitution was however clear that the vice-president was elected alongside with the president and the latter had no power to "fire the former".

When Joyce Banda was ultimately fired from the DPP, the Mutharika administration made it possible to cripple her office by reducing funding, security staff and other related resources as well as shunning her from cabinet meetings, drawing criticism from an editorial comment (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011e:2). The editorial comment pointed out that the Office of the Vice-President had a constitutional mandate to support the president regardless of how Mutharika and other DPP officials or supporters felt about her. Given the stance taken by the *Weekend Nation* and its journalists with regards to Joyce

Banda, her ascendancy to presidency following Mutharika's sudden death in April, 2012, was underlined with a positive glimmer of hope.

When Joyce Banda ascended to the presidency, an editorial comment (*Weekend Nation*, Comment, 2012b:2) expressed optimism in her inaugural speech, describing it as “inspiring”. The editorial said the reason was that

Banda addressed some issues that Malawians were uncomfortable with during the DPP era such as the enactment of bad laws, a poor human rights record, sour relations with donors and the infamous zero-deficit budget. She said all this will be a thing of the past.

The editorial further expressed hope in the new presidency as she had committed herself to strict and prudent fiscal management to lessen the suffering that Malawians had been going through.

Having looked at governance, the next issue to be addressed is floor-crossing (Section 65) which was identified as a major political issue at stake between 2002 and 2012.

6.2.2 Floor-crossing (Section 65)

This section is about the position of the *Weekend Nation* on the issue of floor-crossing (Section 65) from 2002 to 2012.

6.2.2.1 The *Weekend Nation* on Section 65 in the Muluzi era

In 2001, three years before the end of Muluzi's presidency, the governing UDF party used its numerical strength in parliament to amend Section 65 of the Malawian Constitution (Chirwa, 2011:409; Matumbi, 2007:248). Matumbi notes that with the amendment, the then Speaker of Parliament, Sam Mpasu, was empowered not only to declare vacant the seats of those who had resigned from the parties that ushered them into the National Assembly and joined other parties within parliament, but to further widen the scope to those who associated with organisations outside parliament deemed “political in nature”. From the onset, the *Weekend Nation* argued that the amendment was designed to promote partisan interests than the enhancement of democracy in Malawi (*Weekend Nation*, Comment, 2002d:2). The editorial comment underlined this position at the back of a ruling by Mpasu, who had just declared vacant the seats of two UDF MPs – Joseph Manduwa and Jan-Jaap Sonke – for associating with a political pressure group, the Forum for the Defence of the Constitution, which opposed Muluzi's third term bid. Mutually, Ntonga (2002c:22) highlighted that the amended Section 65 Bill was seemingly being used by political parties to remove from the House

MPs who disagreed with the partisan interests of their parties. Ntonga's argument emanated from a case in which the Speaker of Parliament had also invoked Section 65 on opposition MCP MPs – Gwanda Chakuamba and Hetherwick Ntaba – for associating with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the Alliance for Democracy Party (AFORD) (Chinsinga, 2003:15). Ironically, Chakuamba and Ntaba had leadership wrangles with the MCP leader in the House, John Tembo, according to Chinsinga.

In the next sub-section, it will be noted that the issue of Section 65 was repealed by the courts, a decision applauded by the *Weekend Nation*.

6.2.2.2 The *Weekend Nation* applauds repealed Section 65

Following the amendment of Section 65 in 2001, the Public Affairs Committee (PAC), a civil society group, immediately asked the High Court to declare the new version, noted in the preceding discussion, invalid (Matumbi, 2007:248). The PAC argue that the amended version violated the fundamental freedom of association, expression, opinion and political rights as enshrined under Sections 32, 33, 35 and 40 of the Constitution (ibid). In 2003 the court ruled in the PAC's favour and in effect, maintaining the original version of Section 65, Matumbi further observed. Relishing at the ruling, the *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2003b:2) pointed out that the judgment had just exonerated earlier arguments from the news media and the civil society that the amended section had only "served the interests of the UDF" further highlighting that it was partisan and unconstitutional to alter it.

The issue of floor-crossing took the political spotlight even more so after 2004 when then newly elected Mutharika left the UDF to form the DPP.

6.2.2.3 The *Weekend Nation* on Section 65 in Mutharika's era

When Mutharika left the UDF to form the DPP in 2005, the political machinations that followed meant that the UDF became a dominant partner of an opposition bloc that held the majority in parliament including the MCP (Von Doepp, 2010:2). Against this backdrop, the *Weekend Nation's* senior journalist Nhlane (2005:11) observed that the DPP needed quite a number of MPs to necessitate the passing of the legislation in its favour and as a result enticed MPs from other political parties to join the new governing party.

6.2.2.4 *Weekend Nation* journalist calls Mutharika “monster in the making” over Section 65

To garner support in the National Assembly, the DPP embarked on a “poaching campaign” to woo members of the opposition to join the governing party (Nhlane, 2005:11). Covertly, Mutharika established a “task-force” comprising some MPs from the UDF and the MCP with the aim of poaching at least two thirds of MPs in the House to defect to the newly formed DPP (Nhlane, 2005:11). This position was substantiated when wrangles over funds and leadership within both the UDF and MCP suddenly brewed, leading to some key opposition members joining the DPP, observed Nhlane (2005:11), further pointing out that

My worry is that there is a monster in the making which will sooner than later start terrorising all of us. And by the time we realise there is a devil among us, it will be too late because it will have grown too powerful to be stopped from devouring anything it deems edible.

Similarly, an editorial comment (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006e:2) a month later rebuked the poaching strategy by Mutharika arguing that it was a betrayal of trust of the constituents who had voted for their MPs through the UDF or MCP and not the DPP. After noting that a considerable number of opposition MPs had defected to the governing DPP, Mutharika approached the Constitutional Court to amend Section 65 of the Malawian Constitution. Through a court injunction (court order), Mutharika specifically wanted the judiciary to determine whether or not declaring seats of MPs who had left their political parties through which they had been elected into parliament was not inconsistent with Malawian Constitution on Section 32 – freedom of association, Section 33 – freedom of conscience, Section 40 – which protects fundamental political rights (Maganga, 2011:20). This meant that MPs who had left their parties to join the DPP remained in parliament until the matter was to be heard by the courts.

The next section looks at how the *Weekend Nation* journalists addressed this issue.

6.2.2.5 *Weekend Nation* journalists urge stakeholders to bolster up Section 65

Following Mutharika’s approach to the Constitutional Court for a judicial review of Section 65 towards the end of 2005, *Weekend Nation* senior journalists (Nhlane, 2006a:11; Ntonga, 2006:10), urged the opposition, the judiciary and civil society to rather fortify existing loopholes on floor-crossing. After noting that Mutharika and the DPP argued to the court that Section 65 impinges on the MPs’ right to the freedom of association as provided by Section 32 of the Malawian Constitution, Ntonga (2006a:10) contended that this was just a ploy by Mutharika to endorse that his party was legitimate. Beyond contending that the courts should not amend Section 65 in the interest of

Mutharika, Ntonga further argued that the law should also be applied to independent MPs. This was so because independents “put themselves on sale to the highest bidding party” for self-interests rather than their constituents (Ntonga, 2006a:10).

Assenting to Ntonga’s observations, Nhlane (2006a:11) argued that by employing the courts, Mutharika had out-manoeuvred the opposition from seeking the ouster of the MPs who had now joined the DPP. With that cushion, according to Nhlane, Mutharika and the DPP would not be keen to push the courts to expedite the review of the Section 65 case. For this reason, Nhlane further contended that it was “now a matter for the opposition, civil society, academicians, chiefs and the public to take special interest in”. With a court injunction safeguarding the seats of 74 MPs who had then crossed the floor from the opposition to Mutharika’s DPP in the House, the MCP and the UDF refused to pass the 2005/6 national budget until the Speaker of the National Assembly had invoked the Section 65 law to guard against floor-crossing (Hussein, 2011:35).

In the next section, it will be observed that the *Weekend Nation* condemned MPs for using the issue of Section 65 to hold the government to ransom with regards to the national budget discussions.

6.2.2.6 The budget impasse: The *Weekend Nation* berates opportunistic MPs

An editorial comment of the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006b:2) had noted that the Section 65 impasse had degenerated into a “tug-of-war” between the opposition parties and the DPP at the expense of the masses. This editorial’s observation followed a demand emanating from the opposition during a budget session of parliament that they would not pass the 2005/6 budget unless they had a 70 per cent pay rise in wages. The editorial chastised the opposition, arguing that it was “indifferent to the negative impact on the economy”. The editorial further contended that using the budget for a political “tug-of-war” was being insensitive to the poor because service delivery was being affected with Section 65 stand-off. On a similar observation, senior journalist Nhlane (2006b:11) condemned opposition MPs saying that they were just being vengeful to the governing DPP forgetting that they were in parliament to represent their constituents and not to “peddle selfish and parochial interests”.

The continuing stand-off over Section 65 reached a critical stage that compelled Nhlane (2006c:11) to call for early elections.

6.2.2.7 *Weekend Nation* journalist calls for early elections

As noted by Nhlane (2006c:11), the stalemate over floor-crossing reached a pivotal stage in November 2006 when the Constitutional Court ruled that Section 65 was after all valid, and not inconsistent with other provisions of the Malawian Constitution, thereby dismissing Mutharika and the DPP's argument noted in the preceding section. Nhlane had further observed that the leader of the MCP – John Tembo – was so enthused with the ruling that he urged Mutharika to call for a crisis convention of parliament. For Nhlane, Tembo's action was deliberate because the ruling, in effect, meant that all MPs who had crossed the floor, would lose their seats. However, Nhlane (2006c:11) pointed out that the onus to call for an emergency session of parliament rested with Mutharika as president and it was unlikely that he would do so because "parliament is where the Speaker can create trouble for government". Nhlane was of the view that by calling parliament to meet, Tembo was just trying to gain political mileage: "The reason is that he wants the government to collapse." Nhlane further suggested that rather than waste money on holding by-elections to elect MPs who will be in office for less than two years, the government should hold general elections. Such an avenue, Nhlane noted, would be to usher in MPs and a government representing the wishes of the ordinary citizens.

But the following week, a *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006c:2) differed with Nhlane's suggestions on dealing with the Section 65 standoff. This follows next.

6.2.2.8 The *Weekend Nation* urges for government of national unity

Concerned with the domino-effect of a political crisis that would emanate from the Speaker's invocation of Section 65, the *Weekend Nation* editorial comment (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006c:2) held the view that a government of national unity "may be a very small price to pay for the sake of peace and tranquillity". The editorial further pointed out that what the opposition leaders were missing, if the Speaker would invoke Section 65, was that it was not only the DPP to be affected but "they too will lose seats". The editorial reasoned that subsequent costs of by-elections that would follow would be unbearable considering the size of Malawi's economy and consequently deter donor and investor confidence. Over and above that, as the stalemate over Section 65 dragged into another year, Nhlane (2007:7) renounced the proposition for a government of national unity.

6.2.2.9 *Weekend Nation* journalist opposes government of national unity

When the civil society took the centre stage to advance the idea of government of national unity to deal with the Section 65 standoff as pointed out by Hussein (2011:35), senior journalist Nhlane

(2007:7) appeared infuriated, arguing that they were “missing the point”. For Nhlane, such a proposal was out of order because it was like “correcting a misdemeanour by committing a felony”. What incensed Nhlane was that civil society groups were expected to be advocates for the safeguarding of the Malawian Constitution which had been violated under Section 65. To further underline his point, Nhlane challenged the proponents of the government of national unity: “Why do we have laws to bend them at any opportunity to please our whims?” Nhlane, however, suggested that the solution would be to wait until the Speaker had actually invoked Section 65 because only after then, modalities on the proposal would be worked out depending on the gravity of the situation.

The issue further took political prominence when a cabinet minister in the Mutharika administration, Yunus Mussa, obtained an injunction restraining the Speaker from invoking Section 65 during the budget session of parliament (Kasakula, 2007a:7; Ntonga, 2007a:6). The following section addresses this issue.

6.2.2.10 *Weekend Nation* journalist calls for “give and take” solution

Following the court order obtained by a DPP Cabinet Minister, Yunus Mussa, restraining the Speaker from invoking Section 65, opposition parties refused to deliberate on the budget unless the issue of floor-crossing was attended to first (Ntonga, 2007a:6). Ntonga observed that both sides of the impasse had canvassed enough sympathy from the ordinary citizens of the country but that in effect had yielded nothing over time. It is for this reason that the *Weekend Nation*'s senior journalist Ntonga, pointed out that “unity and tranquillity prevail when the interests of the various stakeholders in a democracy are considered”. Ntonga suggested to the major political party leaders to consider a “give-and-take” solution to avoid a major political crisis. Ntonga further attempted to reason with the two factions that the budget and floor-crossing issues could be discussed simultaneously. The suggestion was against the background of a continuous cycle of court injunctions which had sustained the affected MPs in the House but stalled the budget. Ntonga contended that the budget was as important for the nation as much as the respect for the Constitution. When the opposition finally approved the budget three months later on humanitarian grounds (Hussein, 2011:36), the *Weekend Nation* journalists, as it will be observed in the next section, reminded the government to address the issue of floor-crossing.

6.2.2.11 *Weekend Nation* journalists condemn Mutharika for proroguing parliament

Following the approval of the budget, Mutharika prorogued (discontinued) the parliamentary session arguing that “there was chaos” and the MPs had to go home than waste tax-payers’ money discussing

trivia (Ntonga, 2007c:6). Ntonga condemned Mutharika arguing that by proroguing parliament, it all confirmed the fears that the opposition had prior to succumbing to discussing the budget first, in that they could not trust the government's side to keep its word. Ntonga pointed out that such lack of trust was not good for future sessions of the National Assembly. Correspondingly, Kasakula (2007b:7) observed that Mutharika was not eager to obey the law on Section 65 because it was against his agenda of governing the country in the short term until the 2009 elections. But Kasakula warned that the law on Section 65 "does not give him a leeway to get away with it after he dumped [the] UDF and eloped with MPs voted on that party's ticket in 2004". After suspending parliamentary discussions in September, 2007, Mutharika called for another session of parliament in April, 2008, a move that received condemnation from the *Weekend Nation* journalists.

6.2.2.12 *Weekend Nation* journalist says Mutharika is naive

Following a lengthy prorogue of parliament, Mutharika called for a convention of the National Assembly in April, 2008 (a year after it had been discontinued), a move Kasakula (2008a:7) described as "naive". Kasakula noted that the main issue for the session was actually to discuss the 2008/9 budget. For this reason, Kasakula argued that having been duped before, it was "fatally naive" for Mutharika and his governing party, the DPP, to think that they could convince the opposition to cooperate in the House. In Kasakula's view, the solution would have been for the government to "reach out" to the opposition before announcing the opening of parliament. Ntonga (2008a:6) agreed with Kasakula's argument, contending that "it would be a waste of time, money and national goodwill unless Bingu wa Mutharika first engages opposition leaders in a dialogue on how to proceed on Section 65". Ntonga further argued that by moving to prorogue parliament soon after the budget was passed, the public had seen Mutharika as acting in bad faith.

But when parliament convened, *Weekend Nation* journalists (Kasakula, 2008b:7; Ntonga, 2008b:6), as it will be observed in the following discussion, re-positioned their stances with regards to Section 65.

6.2.2.13 Let the voters decide: *Weekend Nation* journalists urge

After noting that general elections were just a year away, Ntonga (2008b:6; 2008c:6) urged the opposition to desist from any wrangles on the issue of Section 65 but instead focus on the implications of the budget. Ntonga (2008b:6) pointed out that neither the DPP nor the opposition had a stronger case on the floor-crossing issue bearing in mind that the opposition held ordinary citizens' lives at ransom by refusing to endorse a budget as a weapon against a government that had broken the law.

In this regard, Ntonga argued that at the 2008/9 budget session of parliament, the opposition should not insist on that they would not discuss and pass the budget unless the issue of floor-crossing was tackled. Ntonga (2008b:6) posited that the solution was to “pass the budget and take the case on the government’s failure to uphold the constitution to the electorate”.

Following the preceding sentiments by Ntonga, the opposition approved the 2008/9 budget, a development which Ntonga (2008c:6) observed would put the government in the spotlight into the respect of the rule of law. Ntonga pointed out that a myriad essential services such as drugs in hospitals and public schools would have been threatened had the opposition stuck with Section 65 as a bargaining tool “making them [opposition] look irresponsible” to the electorate. Similarly, Kasakula (2008b:7) rallied up the opposition to go to the electorate and campaign on a platform of rule of law against Mutharika and what they would do on the issue of Section 65 if voted into power. Kasakula believed it was up to voters to decide whether the Section 65 issue had brought to light that Mutharika was a bad leader or he just tried to survive a hostile environment.

The issue of floor-crossing was dormant in the Malawian political domain when Mutharika and the DPP had an outright victory in the 2009 elections. But when Joyce Banda ascended to power in April, 2012, following the sudden death of Mutharika, the issue of Section 65 was resuscitated as it will be observed next.

6.2.2.14 Section 65 during the first year of Joyce Banda’s presidency

Within two weeks of Joyce Banda and the People’s Party’s ascendancy to power, an editorial in the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2012c:2) prompted the new administration to respect Section 65 after noting an exodus of MPs from the DPP to the then governing PP. The editorial further pointed out that the trend was a “testimony that many politicians in the country have no respect for this piece of legislation”. In retrospect, the editorial further noted that the worrisome trend started in 2005 when Mutharika left the UDF to form the DPP, leading to non-compliances with court rulings. The *Weekend Nation* editorial concluded that

From all this, it is evident that our politicians do not want to lead by example by respecting the provisions of the Republican Constitution. No-one, including the politicians, has the freedom to choose which law to respect and which to violate at will.

The *Weekend Nation* reiterated the call to respect the Constitution when members of the DPP, which was now in opposition following the death of Mutharika in April, 2012, ignited the Section 65 debate at the National Assembly two months later by prompting the Speaker of Parliament to uphold the rule of law on floor-crossing. The editorial (*Weekend Nation*, Comment, 2012d:2) pointed out that the final verdict on Section 65 was reached by the Supreme Court in 2007 when it declared that the law was valid and thus, should be adhered to (Matumbi, 2007:248). The editorial additionally admonished DPP MPs, pointing out that it was ironic that they seemed to have now realised that Section 65 was important when they themselves fought hard under Mutharika to repeal it.

In that vein, Kasakula (2012c:15), as it is observed next, asserted that what was needed was to consider the interests of constituents by abiding by the Malawian Constitution.

6.2.2.15 *Weekend Nation* journalist censures Joyce Banda

With a continuing exodus of MPs from opposition parties towards the governing PP, Joyce Banda defended the defectors by saying that should the Speaker of the National Assembly, Henry Chimunthu Banda, declare their seats vacant in line with Section 65 of the Constitution, holding by-elections would be a costly exercise (Kasakula, 2012c:15). But the argument infuriated Kasakula who contended that by taking that position, Joyce Banda was sacrificing her duty to defend the Constitution due to her short-term interests which were to see the survival of her political party until the 2014 elections. It is for this reason that Kasakula was puzzled as to whether Malawi would ever have a president “who fully respects the sacredness of the Constitution when even Joyce Banda, who has ruled for the past three months on the platform of reversing the Bingu wa Mutharika’s madness has now joined the bandwagon of leaders who want laws to serve them and not them to serve the laws”. To bring to the attention of the new leadership, Kasakula further pointed out that it was only for tyrants like her predecessor who only thought laws were “to be made in their image and likeness” but failed.

The next section looks at another political issue that dominated Malawian politics between 2002 and 2012 – the Farm Input Subsidy Program (FISP).

6.2.3 The *Weekend Nation* and the Farm Input Subsidy Program (FISP)

This section looks at the position of the *Weekend Nation* on the political issue of the FISP through the newspaper’s editorials and its journalists’ opinion columns.

6.2.3.1 *Weekend Nation* journalist commends first budget on the FISP

When the new administration under Mutharika and the DPP incorporated the FISP in the 2005/6 budget, Ntonga (2005a:28) praised the modality in which the government planned to address long-standing issues of food insecurity and income among the poor households in the country. Ntonga noted that under that budget, the FISP had particularly targeted very poor farmers who could not otherwise finance the purchase of seeds and fertiliser. Ntonga's remarks were against the backdrop of calls by opposition Leader of Parliament and MCP president, John Tembo, for the government to extend the programme to commercial farmers under a universal subsidy strategy (Ntonga, 2005a:28). Tembo's argument, Ntonga noted, meant that the government would be subsidising production rather than consumption similar to "what governments in the West do". While acknowledging Tembo's argument, Ntonga pointed out that Mutharika's strategy was aimed at alleviating hunger that was prevalent at the time. Ntonga further asserted that the universal subsidy programme that the opposition leader was advocating for would be a costly undertaking for a government considering that its budget was "40 per cent funded by donors".

Ntonga was forced to reiterate his position on Mutharika's FISP policy after noting that during the parliamentary proceedings, UDF MPs had joined the MCP in the demand for a universal subsidy approach as a condition for passing the budget (Ntonga, 2005b:28). Such a demand, according to Ntonga, was being made in "bad faith" because the two parties, who had majority seats in parliament wanted to "turn the budget into a weapon to fight Bingu wa Mutharika" who was then basking in "the glory that should have been theirs". Ntonga rebuked the UDF in particular, arguing that in the 10 years under the Muluzi administration "not once did poor Malawians get universal fertiliser subsidies". What had further raised Ntonga's suspicions was that the opposition had just rejected the appointment of Mary Nangwale as the chief of police earlier. However, Ntonga hailed the DPP for ultimately extending the subsidy to smallholder maize and tobacco farmers in a bid to partially accommodate the opposition demands.

In the next sub-section, it will be noted that the *Weekend Nation* condemned commercial farmers for illegally getting involved in the FISP.

6.2.3.2 The *Weekend Nation* condemns "greedy farmers" on the FISP

Taking advantage of the hunger crisis, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2005b:2) noted that some estate owners and agri-business traders were enticing poor rural farmers with money

for their subsidised fertiliser coupons. Outraged by the revelations, the editorial further pointed out that it was a criminal act “tantamount to stealing from the taxpayer whose hard earned money was used by the government to subsidise the fertiliser”. In trying to instil sanity within the unscrupulous traders, the editorial contended that “cashing in” on the vulnerable in society was counterproductive and would only hamper the government’s efforts to address food insecurity. A month after reprimanding the unscrupulous traders, a *Weekend Nation* editorial comment (*Weekend Nation*, Comment, 2005c:2) suggested that traditional leaders would probably play a critical role in changing the attitudes of their subjects against selling fertiliser coupons. The suggestion was arrived at after the newspaper had noticed the continued sale of fertiliser coupons by beneficiaries in the rural areas to commercial farmers who were not part of the FISP policy. By the same token, a *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation*, Comment, 2006a:2) proposed that the poor rural farmers should “hear from their leaders in vernacular that selling fertiliser coupons means selling their right to feed themselves and inflicting on themselves the burden of being beggars for food”. As it will be observed next, the *Weekend Nation* hailed the FISP policy in its inaugural season following bumper harvests across Malawi.

6.2.2.3 The *Weekend Nation* lauds the FISP’s first season

Following the first farming season, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006g:2) lauded the policy as a success citing surplus maize harvests in most parts of the country despite erratic rains. The editorial hailed the positive results as remarkable “sacrifice made by the taxpayer” through the programmes’ inaugural budget. The editorial, in a preview of an impending budget convention of parliament, did not only express the newspaper’s approval of the FISP but consented to the fact that the government was going to maintain the cost of K950,00 (US\$7.8) for a bag of subsidised fertiliser during the following growing season. In a counsel to the government, the editorial further pointed out that the FISP would even be more successful if the government could do better on logistical planning that had derailed the distribution to some remote areas of the country. The next section looks at the initial concerns raised by the *Weekend Nation* and its journalists with regards to the FISP.

6.2.3.4 Opposition leader’s FISP strategy validated

Concerned with increasing logistical and corrupt malpractices surrounding the FISP, Nhlane (2006d:11) assented to the views of the opposition party, the MCP, that the government should revisit its distribution strategy at the local level. Nhlane further observed that MCP parliamentarians suggested the use of farmers’ clubs as opposed to agricultural extension officers and traditional chiefs who were tasked to distribute fertiliser coupons in the inaugural season. In line with the opposition party’s argument, Nhlane pointed out that the system was marred with gross corruption, nepotism

and “thousands of coupons landed in the hands of people who least deserved them”. A week later, an editorial comment (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006h:2) underlined Nhlane’s observations that the opposition party had made it “loud and clear” that the FISP needed to be assessed. The editorial comment noted that besides widespread corruption amongst the traditional leaders, inadequate coupons and fertiliser shortages had also marred the second phase of the FISP. However, according to the editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006h:2), the government ignored the advice and “behaved like the know-it-all”.

With multiple challenges surrounding the FISP mounting, the *Weekend Nation*, as it will be discussed next, urged all stakeholders for a collective assessment of the policy.

6.2.3.5 The *Weekend Nation* urges against politicising of the FISP

While taking cognisance of the fact that the FISP was facing multiple challenges, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2007a:2) held the view that there needed to be thorough and honest consultations with all stakeholders for an amiable solution. The editorial comment singled out the MCP’s suggestions to abandon engaging traditional leaders for farmers’ clubs as a plausible idea. But the editorial was not pleased with the fact that with the success associated with the whole programme, some politicians were merely seeking to “score cheap political points” by using the weaknesses associated with the FISP to attack the government. It is for this reason that the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2007a:2) reasoned that

It is possible to look at the issues soberly . . . Our leaders owe the people of this nation a fertiliser subsidy programme that minimises the problems of the last seasons while maximising the gains in ensuring sustainable food security in the country.

The newspaper was forced to defend Mutharika again four months later when persistent corruption and poor logistical management surrounding the FISP coupled with a national examination crisis made it a double misery for the Mutharika government (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2007b:2). This was in the wake of a wide-scale leakage of final year secondary school examinations which had forced the Ministry of Education, a portfolio under Mutharika, to re-examine the students. The editorial comment had observed that some politicians and analysts piled the blame on Mutharika for being at “the helm of two big ministries, when he allegedly has no time for them”. The commentary, however argued that the problems were bigger than the president. The editorial further noted:

We would like to believe that it also boils down to the systems. There is need for focused management with shared values and vision so that individuals do not matter, but rather the collective effort should.

What the editorial wanted to underline was that “it does matter whether the President, the Minister or the PS was around or not, the system should deliver”. But, as pointed out below, Ntonga (2007:6) cast the blame on Mutharika for the problems associated with the FISP.

6.2.3.6 *Weekend Nation* journalist faults Mutharika

In contrast to the view from the *Weekend Nation* editorial above, Ntonga (2007:6) did not mince words but argued that Mutharika had to shoulder the blame for the chaos at the two ministries – Agriculture and Education – which he headed. Ntonga contended that there were gross inefficiencies in the running of the agricultural subsidy programme because there was no one to be held accountable. Ntonga further observed that for instance, buoyed by the surplus harvests in the previous season, the government exported maize to “economically better-off countries in the SADC region” which made it difficult for poor households to purchase the commodity when it became scarce after the growers had initially sold it at low prices from harvests. Ntonga also pointed out that poor logistics continued to hamper the coupon distribution system rendering other deserving farmers being left out. Ntonga (2007:6) postulated: “But I hope the Mutharika cheer leaders are able to see the folly in being the president and heading two major portfolios at the same time”. Ntonga further argued that the president would not have enough time to focus thoroughly on ministerial duties and that his deputies would be slow at coming up with initiatives for fear that the president would be held accountable should they fail.

The following year, Ntonga (2008d:6) held the view that the FISP was being politicised and this is tackled next.

6.2.3.7 The FISP is political, argues *Weekend Nation* journalist

In a repeat of the argument posited in the preceding discussion, Ntonga (2008d:6) the following year blamed Mutharika for poor fiscal planning with regards to the FISP after noting that in the 2008/9 budget, the price for a subsidised bag of fertiliser was still pegged at its inaugural cost. For Ntonga, this was not sound economics bearing in mind that since the launch of the FISP, the government had been increasing budgetary allocation to the programme by 70 per cent annually. Ntonga argued that 2008 being a year before elections, the DPP was targeting to win outright. But a caveat by Ntonga was that “ideas made in the run-up to general elections were likely to be politically correct but not

necessarily economically sound”. While acknowledging that the programme had been a success in addressing food insecurity, Ntonga (2008e:6) had a major concern: It’s the pattern of taxpayer’s contribution to the subsidy that worries me . . . Think about this progress five years down the lane. It’s simply unsustainable”.

6.2.3.8 The *Weekend Nation* attacks the FISP gesture to clergy

The political inclinations of fertiliser subsidies, as Ntonga argued above, were further substantiated by the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2008:2) when the governing DPP donated coupons to some key pastors of the regional body of the largest Protestant Church in Malawi – the Blantyre Synod of the C.C.A.P. The then Deputy Minister of Agriculture Frank Mwenefumbo, justified the donation, arguing that they were meant for the leaders to distribute among their “needy” congregants, according to the editorial. But the conjecture that the FISP had now turned into a ploy by the DPP to garner political support in the 2009 elections, the editorial comment noted, lay in the fact that the church leaders were not befitting the criteria for beneficiaries, more so when the reverends themselves were left bemused as “they had not registered for the coupons . . . It is the reverends who are questioning the government’s motive as they only received one coupon each.” (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2008:2). The editorial comment further challenged the government to be accountable to the gesture “meant to woo votes from God’s shepherds” albeit being financed by taxpayers across the country.

In view of the foregoing, the following discussion is about the *Weekend Nation*’s turn-around stance on the issue of the FISP.

6.2.3.9 The *Weekend Nation* calls for an exit strategy

Overall experiences in the design and implementation of the FISP cumulatively, coupled with donor fatigue over the years forced the *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2010:2) to call for an exit strategy from Mutharika’s much touted food security flagship project. The re-positioning of the stance on the FISP by the editorial comment was precipitated by remarks from the scheme’s financial partner – the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) – that it would review its support after noting it had proven not to be sustainable. In view of the remarks, the editorial pointed out that the FISP did not just have a political significance to the country “as evidenced by the number of times parties have exchanged words over its ownership” but that Malawi had assumed a role-model status on the continent by riding on the wave of the success of the strategy to address food insecurity. However, for the editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2010:2):

The budgetary allocation over the programme has been ballooning over the years; hence, sustaining it with taxpayers' money in the absence of donor support would be a tall order . . . We, therefore, urge the government as a matter of urgency to find an exit strategy on the programme to avoid being caught unawares when suddenly the donor taps run dry.

The *Weekend Nation* was unrelenting with its stance on the FISP when Joyce Banda ascended to power following the death of Mutharika. An editorial comment (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2012e:2) observed that her administration had not only inherited the FISP policy wholesale from her predecessor but that the budget allocation to it had even increased, yet the demographics, in respect of the beneficiaries, had not changed.

What the *Weekend Nation* found even more nonsensical about it was that parallel to the extra-funding invested in the FISP, the government was distributing relief-maize to “about 1.9 million” people affected by drought in the previous farming season. This left the editorial to wonder as to who really benefitted from the FISP. The editorial argued that it was paramount for policy makers to re-examine the FISP. The following month, while assenting to the views of the editorial, Ntonga (2012c:26) boldly asserted that the government had to abandon the FISP. Ntonga observed that the Joyce Banda administration, evidenced by the additional funding to the FISP, had venerated the “political” benefits of the policy in view of Mutharika's outright victory in the 2009 polls when the programme had been praised by majority rural electorate. For Ntonga, Malawi would need transformational leadership to “sacrifice cheap popularity now for the larger good of tomorrow”.

The foregoing section has looked at the major political issues at stake in Malawi from 2002 to 2012, namely: good governance, floor-crossing and the FISP as they were handled by the *Weekend Nation* through its editorials and its journalists' individual columns. It was noted that oftentimes the newspaper and its journalists referred to the Malawian Constitution to rationalise their positions on these political issues. It was also noted that in some cases, the views expressed by the individual journalists with respect to some of the political issues differed to the official stances taken by the newspapers through its editorials. The findings are of great interests to the critical political economy theory with regards to the political ownership of the *Weekend Nation* and this is addressed in the next chapter, Data Analysis.

The next section is an account of interviews that this researcher conducted with the *Weekend Nation* journalists who worked for the newspaper's political beat between 2002 and 2012.

6.3 Section Two: Interviews

This section is about the views of journalists who worked on the political beat for the *Weekend Nation* between 2002 and 2012. While one of the respondents – CEO Mbumba Achuthan – is not a professional journalist, it was deemed important to involve her in the study as she had been part of the newspaper’s daily managerial operations from its establishment. These were responses to six research questions outlined in Chapter 5. The questions are attached as Addendum A.

6.3.1 On the political role of the *Weekend Nation*

Following the launch of the English daily publication, the *Nation* in 1993 “to promote and safeguard the democratic culture” that Malawi had just attained, as Achuthan (2014) pointed out, the *Weekend Nation* was established two years later to further “consolidate that role” on a wider scale. This, she asserted, would be achieved by sharing information with a new democratic Malawi citizenry through the inclusion of both English and Chichewa content in the newspaper.

This view was shared by Chitsulo (2013) who further articulated that each title under the NPL newspapers had target audiences who define “the DNA” of each brand. Chitsulo further noted that the *Nation* largely conveyed breaking news for the average and professional urbanites, the *Nation on Sunday* “is for personal and social issues” and the *Weekend Nation* addressed both urbanites and rural town dwellers on socio-political issues:

The *Weekend Nation* plays a critical influential tool because politics mainly takes place in the rural areas where 80 per cent of Malawians are (Chitsulo, 2013).

This role could be identified through the investigative stories and political columns embodied in the *Weekend Nation* newspaper, according to Chitsulo.

By the same token, senior journalists Nhlane (2014), Theu (2014), Tukula (2014), Kasakula (2013) and Ntonga (2013) shared the view that the *Weekend Nation* played a key political role in three ways: (a) Through muckraking investigative stories, (b) on exclusives that other NPL titles had missed and (c) also through opinion column pieces. Tukula (2014) further argued that through the investigative stories, the *Weekend Nation* had exposed the abuse of power and corruption in the government, which in turn has led to notable figures losing their jobs or being incarcerated.

Ntonga (2013), who has been at the helm of the editorial team since the newspaper's launch, asserted that the *Weekend Nation* had an allegiance to the Malawian public. For that reason, Ntonga asserted, the newspaper invested in the “muckraking” strand of journalism:

It is a very risky and expensive role but we are courageous and willing to take them on, follow them and investigate how they exercise the power they are entrusted with (Ntonga, 2013).

In the view of former Editor, Abel Mwanyungwe (2014), “in comparison to other print media houses, the *Weekend Nation* was a true independent watchdog of democracy in Malawi”. Mwanyungwe further argued that most independent newspapers had failed over the years because they did not define their roles at the beginning. Before working for the *Weekend Nation* from 1998 to 2004, Mwanyungwe was the editor of the *Daily Times*, which belonged to the family of Malawi's first president at independence, Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Mwanyungwe underscored that unlike his previous employers – Kamuzu Banda's *Daily Times* – where direct political ownership interference was prevalent, the owners of the *Weekend Nation* and the editorial team drafted an editorial policy from the start. According to Mwanyungwe, this insulated the politician – Aleke Banda – from directly interfering in the editorial decisions of the newspaper. The editorial policy for the NPL, publishers of the *Weekend Nation*, is attached as Addendum E.

Anthony Kasunda (2014), who was part of the investigations team as a news analyst from 2007 until 2014, saw the role of the *Weekend Nation* as that of providing checks and balances by being impartial in exposing bad governance. This was also a view that current affairs reporter, Caroline Somanje (2014) shared, noting that the role of the *Weekend Nation* was to check “the abuse of power” in Malawi's democracy.

Former senior journalists, Nkolokosa (2014), Banda (2014) and Chapalapata (2014) shared the view that the *Weekend Nation* had a role in fostering the new democracy in Malawi. Nkolokosa joined as a reporter for the newspaper in 2003 and left as a sub-editor in 2009. Banda worked as the head of investigations from 2003 until 2007 and became bureau chief for the city of Lilongwe until his resignation 2013. Chapalapata was a reporter from 2002 to 2004. Collectively, these journalists, though, held the view that the role of fostering democracy had its own limitations and their expressions were reignited when asked to respond to issues of ownership, which will be discussed later.

Former Bureau Chief, Thom Khanje (2014), who worked for the newspaper between 2001 and 2003, held the view that the *Weekend Nation* stood “for the interests of the common man”. Likewise, deputy editor Aubrey Mchulu, who joined the newspaper in 2007 as a political reporter, observed that the *Weekend Nation*’s role was to be an independent, non-biased “representative of the people” (Mchulu, 2013). This was also a view held by the newspaper’s former deputy editor, Cheu Mita (2014), from 2007 to 2013, who argued that “we tried to be a voice of the people who otherwise could not be heard”. Mita said this could be identified with the motto of the newspaper at its launch: “Freedom of expression the birthright of all”. When the question regarding the slogan was posed to the research participants, their responses were consistent.

6.3.2 On the *Weekend Nation*’s maiden slogan: Freedom of expression, the birthright of all

Achuthan (2014) who pioneered the newspaper with her father – Aleke Banda – pointed out that the motto the newspaper carried at its launch was “Freedom of expression, the birthright of all”, in that democracy which the country had just attained in 1993 following a referendum, entailed the gathering and sharing of information without an infringement to that “right”. With that respect, the motto meant journalists working for the newspaper had to contribute to the consolidation of a “newly found democracy”, bearing in mind that the public similarly had the fundamental right to be informed and disseminate their opinions, Achuthan further noted. Achuthan further postulated that this was contained in the newspaper’s editorial policy as a guide to its journalistic code of practice.

For Tukula (2014) and Nhlane (2014), “Freedom of expression the birthright of all”, meant a firm commitment by journalists working for the newspaper, the editorial team and the owners towards independence in their profession. Tukula (2014) noted that journalists at the *Weekend Nation* “signed on to an editorial policy and as long as what you write is true and ethical, no problem”. Nhlane believed that the slogan was a clear pronouncement that the newspaper committed itself to promoting democracy in Malawi and affirmed the support for its journalists through the editorial policy.

Somanje (2014) and Mwanyungwe (2014) asserted that the editorial policy was rooted in the slogan itself. Somanje firmly asserted that “Freedom of expression, the birthright of all” meant “the freedom to express oneself without influence from the powers that be and management”. Mwanyungwe postulated that the slogan spoke volumes of the newspaper’s independence. Mwanyungwe further observed that in the time he worked for the *Weekend Nation* as an editor, his decisions were

collectively guided by the editorial policy and an “independent editorial team”. The editorial team was in itself a safeguard of the news content, Mwanyungwe further pointed out.

Responses from Kasunda (2014), Mchulu (2013), Mita (2014), Namangale (2014) and Theu (2014) closely resembled or echoed one another in that they paralleled the motto of the newspaper to their role as journalists playing a watchdog role of democracy without any infringement. Similarly, Chitsulo (2013), Ntonga (2013) and Kasakula, (2013) asserted that the slogan was befitting the role of the newspaper in a new democratic dispensation. According to Chitsulo, it represented a campaign for pluralistic voices in all sectors of the society in a newly democratic Malawi.

However, Nkolokosa (2013), Chapalapata (2014), Banda (2014) and Khanje (2014) shared the view that the slogan “Freedom of expression, the birthright of all” that encased the editorial policy, had limitations even though the newspaper operated in a democracy. Nkolokosa argued that “we had an idea that we are an independent private media with a critical role to play in a democratic Malawi . . . Practically this may not always work”. Nkolokosa further posited that the mantra was just “an illusion of freedom” because during his time, he noticed that their professional expectations were at times impinged by ownership implications. In like manner, Chapalapata (2014) argued:

There was indeed freedom of expression, yes . . . In my time as a reporter there . . . but you had to do some self-censorship in a way because Aleke [Banda] was a cabinet minister . . . His colleagues in the government were accusing him that he was sending his boys to do stories on them!

Chapalapata’s argument had similarities to those of Banda and Khanje who both boldly put it that what they saw in the slogan was impractical, more in particular because of advertising interests which are the major lifeline of the news media industry. Banda (2014) vehemently posited:

Having worked for four newspapers in my career . . . Noooh! There is no 100 per cent freedom of expression . . . It’s a fight for going commercial . . . You find that the editorial is pulling this side and advertising is pulling the other.

Before joining the *Weekend Nation*, Banda pointed out that he had worked for the *Post* in Zambia, the *Malawi Democrat* and the *Daily Times*. The *Daily Times* belongs to the family of the first president of Malawi at independence, Kamuzu Banda.

These observations were echoed when the question of ownership issues arose, which constitutes the next discussion under this section.

6.3.3 On the ownership of the newspaper and the impact on the political role of its journalists in safeguarding democracy (2002-2012)

In Achuthan's (2014) view, the fact that Aleke Banda was a politician and owner of the newspaper did not impact on the journalistic practices at the publication. This was so because he was not just a politician of "credibility" but he involved her [Achuthan] in the daily operations at the newspaper which "made it possible for me to be a like a bridge . . . Perhaps a regular employee would have felt limited in a way." As noted in Chapter 2, Mbumba Achuthan – daughter to Aleke Banda – is NPL CEO, thereby at the top of the hierarchy within the management of the *Weekend Nation* title. Achuthan further posited that through the NPL, publishers of the *Weekend Nation*, she shared a vision with her father to contribute to the consolidation of democracy and run the news media firm as a business and not a "political tool". This was to be a comparatively different media house model to that of "the *Daily Times* of the Kamuzu Banda family and the MCP", Achuthan further contented. Achuthan believed that being closely related to her father and having discussed and shared the publication's vision from the start, it was possible for her to make decisions based on that vision and "not to worry about his politics". Firmly, Achuthan (2014) pointed out, her father "never" worked at the newspaper and "did not influence" its regular editorial operations: "All he insisted to us was to follow the editorial policy". Achuthan (2014), however posited:

The only time we felt his presence was when the newspaper had made a genuine mistake . . . In the interest of the editorial policy, he would ask for an explanation and justification as to what had happened.

In line with Achuthan's assertions, Ntonga (2013) pointed out that Aleke Banda, as a politician, got it right from the early stages by positioning the newspaper as a business entity. To elucidate his point, Ntonga cited an incident when the newspaper once published an article involving the government's purchase of Mercedes Benz vehicles for cabinet ministers when the country had just received hunger relief financial aid from Britain. It was an article that incensed cabinet colleagues of the *Weekend Nation* founder because he [Aleke Banda] was then finance minister, noted Ntonga. But because it was to the "public interest and we stuck to the editorial policy, he understood and told his colleagues that the newspaper was in business" (Ntonga, 2013).

According to Ntonga, some UDF senior party cadres could not believe that Aleke Banda, then vice-president of the party, as well as a top minister, could let his newspaper investigate malpractices in the government. Ntonga further asserted that some of them thought the newspaper was a tool to undermine the ruling government and this thought "lingered on when he [Aleke Banda] left the UDF

to help form the PPM party”. Ntonga revealed that in 1993, he had reservations when he was asked to leave the *Daily Times*, which was the only newspaper in the one party state, to be part of Aleke Banda’s NPL project. Ntonga (2013) noted:

The fact that Aleke Banda was a politician made me hesitant because at the *Daily Times*, journalism was then just plucking what the politicians said and then as an editor, look for space to paste it . . . It was from one political background to another, but I took a gamble.

Ntonga’s belief was that the *Weekend Nation* founder was not just a politician but had a solid background in journalism and “with the editorial policy that we drafted, I knew I could be given space to do my job”. Aleke Banda, as pointed out in Chapter 2, founded a nationalist struggle newspaper – *Mtendere pa Nchito* (Peace at Work) – in the late 1950s. He was also founding editor of the MCP’s *Malawi News* prior to independence and then became the first general manager of government broadcaster Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) at independence besides training with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Radio Deutsche Welle (Ntonga, 2014). Along similar lines, Kasakula (2013) observed that Aleke Banda did not interfere with the editorial independence at the *Weekend Nation* because “he understood what journalism is about and left the company in the hands of professionals”. Kasakula further attributed the failure of all political newspapers that were launched at the dawn of democracy in the early 1990s to the lack of professionalism and independence, which were otherwise instituted from the start at the *Weekend Nation*. The editorial policy was a fundamental tenet that resonated with a number of respondents pertaining to ownership issues and Chitsulo (2013) also acknowledged it: “From the onset, the editorial policy insulated staff from ownership.”

To reinforce his argument, Chitsulo recalled that when the *Weekend Nation* owner – Aleke Banda – was attacked by his UDF party colleagues over an anti-government story, he would always tell them that he was in business and they should contact the editorial management. Just like deputy CEO Ntonga, Chitsulo had also worked for Kamuzu Banda’s *Daily Times* but he was quick to point out that during that time, they could not discharge their duties professionally because it was largely a partisan paper “about President Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party” (Chitsulo, 2013).

The first impression that Nhlane (2014), who was the first editor of the *Weekend Nation* after it had re-branded from *Saturday Nation*, had was that he would be getting orders from the chairman or the shareholders: “But I think the owners were determined to run it as a business and they put politics aside” (Nhlane, 2014). In Nhlane’s view, the strategy instilled confidence in audiences and the

business community – advertisers. Nhlane further endorsed the view that Aleke Banda was very much distanced from the daily work of the newspaper except for some professional advice having been a journalist at the eve of colonial independence during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

As for Mchulu (2013), “there was a level of independence” at the newspaper from the time he joined in 1997 as a political reporter to the time of Aleke Banda’s retirement from politics in 2008 and demise in 2010 because he let it to be run by professionals. This was echoed by Kasunda (2014). Mchulu (2013) noted thus: “I think that’s why it is only us who survive out of the 20 plus newspapers that were launched by politicians in the early 90s”. But the *Weekend Nation* felt a real challenge with the political implications of ownership when Muluzi attempted to amend the Malawian Constitution to run for the third term (Tukula, 2014). Given the fact that Aleke Banda was the UDF vice-president, thereby one of the key potential candidates to succeed Muluzi, this posed an arduous moment for the newspaper, recalled Tukula. Retrospectively, Tukula stated: “That was the time I felt there could have been threats to divert us from our direction”.

Tukula remembered that while the owner felt the newspaper should not publish stories related to the third term debate, the editorial team reasoned with him conclusively that it was an issue in the media domain at the time and that in the interests of his [Aleke Banda’s] business, the *Weekend Nation* could not simply ignore it. Tukula further echoed the preceding observations by other journalists that some members of the UDF felt that Aleke Banda was “not helping the party”. Tukula (2014) pointed out:

A number of them [UDF politicians] had owned newspapers before and could not believe that we could publish stories against the ruling party when he himself would have needed the political mileage, but you only had to work here to believe it.

For Mwanyungwe (2014), cases of editorial interference were “subtle” because stories were safeguarded by an editorial team. According to Mwanyungwe, in “a few cases” that a story had been approved but was not seen in the newspaper the following day, the team members would protest. However, what Mwanyungwe observed during his time at the *Weekend Nation*, was that “while playing the watchdog role, the newspaper created more enemies between the politician Aleke [Banda] and his friends in the UDF party”. Mwanyungwe paralleled observations that any story against the UDF was perceived to have come under instructions from the newspaper’s founder. When Aleke Banda left the UDF to help form the PPM party, it created a “breathing space” for the *Weekend Nation*’s editorial team, and the attention did not focus towards his [Aleke Banda] new party “probably because it was small” (Mwanyungwe, 2014). However, Mita (2014), Namangale (2014),

and Theu (2014) corroborated on an idea that they had to embrace self-censorship in their practice. Mita (2014) argued:

The problematic place is where you have bosses that want to please their master, so some stories were not published because the editors thought they would not please Aleke [Banda] and this trickled down to reporters as well.

In like manner, Namangale (2014) stated: “They are issues that you say to yourself, this will not go down well with the owners”.

Nevertheless, the Muluzi third term debate, as noted by Tukula (2014) earlier, exposed the *Weekend Nation* to political interference. Nkolokosa (2014) asserted that Aleke Banda being an interested party, did not openly support the proposition of Muluzi running for the third term. Nkolokosa recalled that at one political rally, the then UDF Governor, Davis Kapito, made allegations that “someone, in an indirect reference to Aleke Banda” was not supporting the president’s third term bid. Nkolokosa added that this forced Aleke Banda to write a response in his newspaper on *My Turn* column, stating that “Silence does not mean I am not supporting you”. Nkolokosa further contended that it was only until Aleke Banda fell out with the UDF, that the newspaper “started bashing vehemently against the third term issue”. Nkolokosa held the view that “the direction the newspaper took, depended on the political direction of the owner”. Nkolokosa underscored his argument that the political direction of the newspaper could be “vividly” noted through the editorial columns noting that “the columns are authored by editors and they are the gatekeepers and you can see the direction they are taking on a particular issue”.

But Nkolokosa pointed out that to a large extent, editorial interference would always be there for economic rather than political reasons to enable the newspaper to survive. Nkolokosa recalled that as journalists with the *Weekend Nation*, they could not touch on negative stories that involved the Press Corporation, the country’s largest conglomerate with stakes in major banks, retail, agriculture and telecommunications in Malawi because the company contributed to the bulk of the advertising revenue in the news media. This observation was shared by Banda (2014), who prior to joining the *Weekend Nation* had worked for the *Daily Times*, and boldly observed that “The only difference between these two [newspapers] was that there was more interference at the *Daily Times* than at the *Weekend Nation*”. Banda argued that the fact that Aleke [Banda] was a vice-president of the ruling party and a cabinet minister was always at the “back of your mind when working there because although he had given us a go ahead, he would be in trouble”. Banda further asserted that “the trick I started learning was that you publish a story, but you tone it down, you kill the punch out of it”.

Banda (2014) recalled that when the *Weekend Nation* commenced investigations into the construction of the private presidential Ndata Palace, Mutharika was tipped and irked, and “he [Mutharika] contacted our owners”. Ultimately, the story came out but “watered down like any other deservedly retirement home by a president . . . But it was very annoying to us and the sources” (Banda, 2014). What annoyed Banda (2014), who was then the *Weekend Nation*’s head of investigations and bureau chief was that the “real story” was not revealed because it had to do with corruption, in that the constructors behind the palace, Mota-Engil of Portugal, had been awarded all major road construction projects in Malawi by the government, “and we had all the evidence but this was not in the story”. But for Banda, the political ownership was not such a big threat to editorial independence as the “commercial” threat. Banda remembered that oftentimes, he grappled with the owners over stories that were deemed not for the public because they involved the big advertisers such as Airtel Malawi and Press Corporation. Airtel Malawi is part of India-based Bharti Airtel and is Malawi’s leading mobile phone service provider (Kaminjolo, 2013). In Banda’s (2014) view, “the more the newspapers go commercial, the more the editorial independence gets trampled upon”.

Khanje (2014) believed that the newspaper tried to be neutral “generally” but there were some “hot stories” that they could not handle. Khanje noted that the UDF politicians knew that Aleke Banda owned the newspaper but also had a political career to nurture. In the view of Khanje, the involvement of his [Aleke Banda’s] daughter in the daily operations as the newspaper’s CEO was of a great concern towards editorial independence “because she knew which stories would and would not come out the next day”. In like manner, Chapalapata (2014) believed that if [Aleke Banda] had engaged a “completely non-related person to run the newspaper, probably the independence would have been felt more”. Chapalapata attested to the observations that there was “no direct interference” by the owner as it was the case at the *Daily Times*, where he [Chapalapata] had previously worked: “But there were some incidences where you could feel this invisible hand, especially when you asked yourself why some stories were not carried”.

6.3.4 On the position of the *Weekend Nation* on good governance

Achuthan (2014) pointed to the editorial policy as the guiding principle through which the *Weekend Nation* journalists kept multiple areas of democratic governance in check. She observed that it was because the newspaper stuck to that role and the journalists operated within the editorial policy, that the three presidencies between 2002 and 2012 were hostile towards the *Weekend Nation*. During the

later stages of the Muluzi era, Achuthan pointed out, the government had an unofficial advertising ban on the NPL newspapers, further noting that “This was the time that we started talking about the third term and started pushing the anti-third term agenda . . . We felt it was unconstitutional”. Achuthan further observed that the *Weekend Nation* “stuck to the key elements of the constitution” when Muluzi’s successor, Mutharika was embroiled in multiple human rights abuses by enacting bad laws. This also drew the wrath of Mutharika and the DPP by officially banning government advertising in all the NPL titles, including the *Weekend Nation*. When Joyce Banda ascended to power “the same cycle repeated itself” by her political party officials making public pronouncements against the *Weekend Nation* when the newspaper unearthed deep-rooted corruption within the short period she took office. In her view, this was a clear vindication that the newspaper played a critical role to consolidate democracy and good governance as spelt out in the editorial policy. Achuthan posited that “the columnists are there to unpack issues so that audiences look at them in a three-dimensional manner not just what just the politicians said”.

The withdrawal of advertising was also a key recurring issue for journalists Mwanyungwe (2014, Kasunda (2014), Tukula (2014) and Somanje (2014) as an exoneration of the *Weekend Nation*’s critical role in exposing various facets of bad governance during the era that Malawi had three different political leaders and political parties. Tukula specifically observed that under the three leaders (Bakili Muluzi 1994-2004, Bingu wa Mutharika 2004-2012 and Joyce Banda 2012-2014) Malawi had since democracy, advertising was a tool they used to “get back at us for exposing bad governance but the private sector supported us due to the goodwill we had established with them from the onset”. Somanje (2014) in particular noted: “All governments at some point never liked us because we were hard hitting on many related issues of governance.” Likewise, Ntonga (2013) cited the opinion columns in the *Weekend Nation* as platforms through which the editors engaged the public on issues of governance during the period Malawi had three different presidencies with their own political parties. Ntonga observed that during the first democratic government under Muluzi and the UDF, the newspaper hailed him as a champion of democracy but condemned him on fiscal management. For Ntonga, the newspaper took on Mutharika on bad laws and human rights abuse, “and JB! [Joyce Banda]... she doesn’t seem to have a clear agenda”.

For Namangale (2014), Theu (2014) and Chitsulo (2013), by exposing those who failed to uphold the rule of law while in public office, the *Weekend Nation* played a critical role in safeguarding democratic governance. Also noting that the *Weekend Nation* had a pivotal role to ensure that multi-party democracy was respected, Kasakula (2013) asserted that the role was to “tell the leaders where

they go astray in respect of the 1994 Constitution”. This, according to Kasakula entailed sensitising public officials on issues of human rights, accountability and transparency.

In respect of safeguarding democracy and good governance in Malawi, Tukula (2014) and Khanje (2014) highlighted uncovering systemic corruption as being one major aspect of their political role. Tukula (2014) cited a *Weekend Nation* expose of endemic corruption at the government Road Traffic Directorate ranging from the certification of un-roadworthy vehicles and licensing unqualified drivers. The investigation led to a major shakeup at the department, according to Tukula. Correspondingly, Khanje (2014) expressed the view that the newspaper was a “pillar of exposing bad governance” particularly on corruption.

Boldly, Banda (2014) argued that “we looked at good governance in terms of corruption”. This was so because, according to Banda, corruption was an easy subject to understand and sell the newspaper. To this effect, Mabvuto Banda’s vivid recollection was a *Weekend Nation* expose about then cabinet minister, Yusuf Mwawa, for fraudulently using public funds to cater for his wedding in 2005. Following the story, Banda recalled, the minister was fired and a few months later sentenced to prison for five years: “That story was the first high-profile case of corruption when Mutharika ascended to power and it set the agenda that anyone can be touched.” However, Banda pointed out that in the later stages of Mutharika’s rule, governance was synonymous with human rights violations. In this regard, Banda was of the view that the article that he [Banda] wrote in the *Weekend Nation* which led to a diplomatic row between Great Britain and Malawi in 2011, “threw Malawi into an international spotlight on governance issues”. Banda argued that the international community then looked at Malawi from a different perspective because “their focus on the region was just about Zimbabwe”. Banda further pointed out that it was a very critical role for the *Weekend Nation* “to tell the story the way it was”. Correspondingly, Nkolokosa (2014) and Mita (2014) observed that the muckraking characteristic of the *Weekend Nation* was significant in exposing bad governance. Because of the devotion towards investigative stories and in-depth analyses, Nkolokosa held the view that the newspaper “did a good public watchdog role”. For Mita, the *Weekend Nation* was the NPL’s flagship newspaper in exposing “the rot in the government with the hope that it would change some policies”.

Nhlane (2014) recalled that the *Weekend Nation* would take a position on a particular pertinent issue and then promote that stance. In that regard, Nhlane echoed earlier observations by Achuthan (2014) that one major issue the newspaper promoted pertaining to governance was the third term debate: “We took a stance and condemned Muluzi’s third term proposition relentlessly because it was a violation of the constitution.” Nhlane’s view was shared by Chapalapata (2014) who pointed out that

the *Weekend Nation* officially had the conviction to safeguard the Malawian Constitution when the third term issue arose. Chapalapata (2014) argued: “We wrote many stories against the third term because it was what the editorial team believed in and not because AKB [Aleke Banda] was an interested party.”

6.3.5 On the issue of floor-crossing (Section 65)

Chitsulo (2013) believed that the *Weekend Nation* was a “torch-bearer” in championing the cause of respecting Section 65 of the Malawian Constitution. This was a conviction that the newspaper held, according to Chitsulo, because of the belief that floor-crossing weakened the spirit of democracy in that MPs from the weaker parties were virtually just “swallowed up”. Although the *Weekend Nation* columnists relentlessly condemned any whimsical floor-crossing by MPs, Chitsulo was convinced that the civil society organisations were weak to conjointly take-up the issue with the legislature vociferously. The civil society was a feature that also recurred in a response by Achuthan (2014). Achuthan pointed out that as much as the news media vehemently raised the issue of floor-crossing over the years during which it had been in the public domain, “the systems are weak”. For Achuthan (2014), their role as the media was like a catalyst: “Once the media brings up these issues, where is the civil society to take up these issues, to lobby and to put pressure?” Achuthan concluded that both sides of parliament ignored pressuring the issue of floor-crossing because they “know they could be forming the next government”.

Banda (2014) picked up a similar argument with a recollection that the newspaper may have highlighted Section 65 and its significance to the country’s democracy but the legislature itself was to blame because “they know that I may become the next president without enough MPs.” Banda further posited that “We set the agenda for that but we haven’t gotten anywhere because we are not in parliament to change laws”. Nhlane (2014) echoed Banda’s observations and recalled that in the time he worked for the *Weekend Nation* there were many stories, editorial comments and columns in respect of Section 65 but MPs still navigated their way back to parliament through court injunctions. Nhlane posited thus: “Probably the problem is the law itself.” For Kasakula (2013), Section 65 was an area that good governance had not been adhered to in Malawi’s democracy. In the view of Kasakula, the root cause of the problems associated with Section 65 emanated from Section 64, which in a historical context, MPs unanimously repealed in 1995 but it had provided for constituents to recall their MPs if deemed not satisfactory to their expectations: “They [MPs] argued that there won’t be job security and now the MPs have manipulated Section 65, which is the sad part”. In this vein, Ntonga (2013) asserted that from the onset, the *Weekend Nation*’s role was to condemn the causative

factor behind the Section 65 manipulation. Ntonga recounted that throughout the presidential eras of Muluzi, Mutharika and Joyce Banda, the newspaper's position was to condemn the greed that forced MPs to whimsically cross the floor. For this reason, Ntonga asserted that Section 65 should also be applied to independent MPs not just those who are elected under particular political parties. Ntonga's view was corroborated by Kasunda (2014), Mita (2014) and Somanje (2014). Mita argued that while Section 65 applied only to party-affiliated MPs, the *Weekend Nation* advocated for floor-crossing to extend to independent parliamentarians. Somanje also observed that the newspaper exhaustively pointed out that floor-crossing was an issue of "greed". Kasunda similarly concurred that the newspaper played a critical role to expose "the selfish motives" of MPs. In Kasunda's view, the courts were the "major disappointment" because they granted numerous injunctions without enforcing judicial reviews on the matter. Tukula (2014) noted that Section 65 was such a heated debate during the initial years of Mutharika's rule to the extent that it divided the newspaper on opinion. Tukula noted: "That could be seen through the columns."

Officially, Tukula pointed out that the *Weekend Nation*'s position during that time was to appeal to the parliamentarians to let both the budget and Section 65 "go together". In retrospect, Nkolokosa (2014) pointed out that the issue of floor-crossing reached a critical point when the opposition parties – the MCP and the UDF – persistently refused to endorse the national budget at the National Assembly when Mutharika "poached" some of their MPs to the DPP:

It was a dilemma because if the constitution was to be respected then we thought of how costly it would be to hold so many by-elections . . . Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the public were largely empathising with Bingu [wa Mutharika] . . . but then, were we advocating good governance?

In this respect, Chapalapata (2014) argued that during the budget crisis, the *Weekend Nation* fell short of taking a clear stance because if the newspaper had disregarded the empathic concerns from CSOs and Mutharika, the Section 65 debate would not have carried over to Joyce Banda's era. Chapalapata noted that "JB [Joyce Banda] has also ignored the issue and we may not be far off from a potential political crisis emanating from Section 65 again".

6.3.6 On the *Weekend Nation*'s position and the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP)

Chitsulo (2014) was very clear in response to this question, noting that "We did not take a clear position as such". Chitsulo recalled that the newspaper welcomed the initiative by Mutharika because Malawi at the time had grappled with perennial food crises, the thinking at the time being that "we needed an ICU [Intensive Care Unit] intervention and that's what Mutharika did". But after noting

that the programme was subsequently riddled with loopholes, the budget for it increasing annually, and that scholarly research was against the continuation of the programme, the newspaper had to conclude that the country ought to “graduate from the FISP” (Chitsulo, 2013). Banda (2014) aligned with Chitsulo’s initial reaction to the question in that there was no position that the newspaper took on the FISP, but further remarked that

We were just like a conveyor belt . . . the stories we did at the time were not investigative and lacked in-depth analysis . . . the only thing we knew was subsidies and the World Bank saying no.

What Banda recollected was that when the FISP was launched, the newspaper followed an agenda that had been set by Mutharika and overlooked the fact that it was expected to be an interim project that would enable poor households to consequently afford their own farm inputs. But Banda further observed ultimately that the focus shifted after noting that “it’s all about politics, it’s about winning elections and not about changing people’s lives”. Given the fact that the *Weekend Nation* had no clear position on the FISP, Theu (2014) acknowledged that it impacted on the journalists focusing on breaking stories that dwelt on the weaknesses of the policy. Theu confessed that the newspaper largely focussed on stories of corruption related to the FISP and posited that this “boils down to the sense of journalism where we tend to look for negative stories, and that also informed the trend of the way we covered the FISP.” Mwanyungwe (2014) similarly held this view, recalling that it was a great challenge for most reporters to “contextualise issues related to” the FISP. But unlike Theu, Mwanyungwe (2014) attributed this to the lack of the capacity of reporters to understand the intricacies of the FISP and for this reason the issue was covered “just like an event story and not in context”.

These observations notwithstanding, Achuthan (2014) contended that the *Weekend Nation* played a significant role in evaluating the merits and demerits of the FISP. For Achuthan, from the time the programme was launched, the newspaper had been tracking the policy through multiple dimensions such as political implications and its sustainability. Along similar lines, Ntonga (2013) argued that the newspaper took a critical stance after noting that the scheme was merely political in nature and not necessarily a subsidy. The newspaper, Ntonga argued, was very vocal against the electioneering aspect of the FISP “because they give the people subsidies in anticipation of tangible returns by the way of voting”. Ntonga cited a related case in which Mutharika’s administration handed out subsidy vouchers to clerics of the Presbyterian Church in the Synod of Blantyre who were in fact not befitting the criteria of “poor rural households”. Coupled with budgetary increment towards the scheme, the newspaper took a bold stance to call for an “exit strategy” from the FISP, Ntonga posited. Likewise,

Kasunda (2014) postulated that the *Weekend Nation* took a critical stance because the FISP was about “blindfolding the electorate” further arguing that the “issue of subsidies in the Malawian context is political”. For that reason, Kasunda asserted that it was unsurprising that no presidential candidate for the 2014 elections was brave enough to tell the public that agricultural subsidies would be phased out regardless of multiple scholarly research to the contrary. Kasunda’s observation was echoed in Namangale’s response, who noted that it was “so political and a hot potato that they [politicians] ignore it because it’s for votes”.

For Kasakula (2013), the position of the *Weekend Nation* changed over time since the FISP was implemented. Kasakula noted that the newspaper hailed the immediate results of the FISP especially for poor rural households and further pointed out that there was then food security at national level. Concurring with Ntonga’s observations, Kasakula firmly asserted that “our position now is that the FISP has to be phased out”. Somanje (2014) similarly pointed out that the position of the newspaper was evolutionary. This was so because initially the newspaper noted that the FISP had an immediate impact on mitigating food insecurity. But Somanje argued that “now that it is the very same people benefiting from the subsidies, and that they don’t seem to graduate out of it, I recommend the discontinuation of the FISP”.

In Khanje’s view, (2014) the *Weekend Nation* had to applaud the agricultural subsidy programme because it had the hallmarks of Aleke Banda, the newspaper’s founder. Khanje situated the FISP in a historical context, recalling that under the UDF government, when Aleke Banda was agriculture minister, he initiated a farming subsidy programme called the *starter pack*. Khanje recalled that poor households at the time would receive small packs of fertiliser, maize and legume seeds. The major difference was that the FISP was a far reaching policy, but “naturally the *Weekend Nation* had to support the FISP” right away when Mutharika launched it in 2005. That notwithstanding, Khanje noted that the newspaper’s coverage of the FISP in subsequent years unmasked corruption and politics that was enmeshed in Mutharika’s flagship project. Conjointly, Nhlane (2014) argued that the FISP was associated with Mutharika’s presidency but in fact it was an expanded policy that had emanated from the founder [Aleke Banda] of the *Weekend Nation*. Nhlane further contended “because of the background that it was introduced by [Aleke] Banda, and that it was bearing fruits, the newspaper supported it in the many articles that we wrote”.

The *Weekend Nation*’s founder Aleke Banda’s link to the FISP was a recurring thread in responses by Nkolokosa (2014), Chapalapata (2014) and Tukula (2014). Nkolokosa precisely recalled that

Aleke Banda launched the *starter pack* programme in 1997 and the newspaper position portrayed that it had produced positive results “way from that time”. Nkolokosa further pointed out that when “Mutharika ascended to power, I interviewed AKB [Aleke Banda] . . . you could see that he was supporting Bingu [Mutharika] on that . . . It did not come as a surprise that the *Weekend Nation* advocated for the FISP.” Nkolokosa was convinced that the newspaper’s initial support for the FISP was that it was conceived by Aleke Banda. Nkolokosa, however, acknowledged that in the subsequent years, the newspaper raised the alarm about the FISP through senior journalists’ opinion columns like the *Backbencher*. Chapalapata equally noted that “Aleke was the mastermind of this programme”. But in Chapalapata’s view, Aleke Banda’s newspaper took a critical stance when it became clear that Mutharika’s project was political:

Some politicians probably would have thought we were criticising Mutharika’s project but the corruption embroiled in the FISP was vivid to everyone to see.

While acknowledging that the founder of the *Weekend Nation* – Aleke Banda – had launched a similar policy but on a smaller scale when he was the minister of agriculture, Tukula (2014) resolutely asserted that that the newspaper did not take a position to support the FISP for that reason. Tukula mentioned that if that had been the case, the newspaper would have taken a stance to undermine the FISP policy. Tukula argued that the newspaper had sided with the FISP in the initial stages to a point where the *Weekend Nation* named Mutharika as “Nation Achiever of 2007” due to the food security policy. Like earlier observations, the newspaper had to call for the end of the programme after noting numerous “holes” in it.

The preceding section was about interviews with journalists who worked at the *Weekend Nation* on the political beat between 2002 and 2012. The interviewees’ responses were in relation to six questions in relation to the central research question on this study. The participants responded in like manner to some question but differed on others. In a number of instances, it was observed that there were instances of subtle editorial interference in the journalistic practices at the *Weekend Nation* especially with regards to the issues that affected the economic and not the political standing of the ownership. These findings are of great interest to the critical political economy theory and are analysed in the next chapter, Data Analysis.

6.4 Summary

This chapter has provided an account of how the *Weekend Nation* and its journalists addressed the major political issues identified to have dominated the political domain in Malawi between 2002

and 2012, namely: Good governance, floor-crossing (Section 65) and the FISP. Findings from the editorials and opinion columns with regards to good governance were presented in three sections: Accountability and transparency, corruption and human rights.

The chapter has also presented views elicited from journalists who worked on the political beat of the newspaper in the period investigation in an attempt to address the central and additional research questions in this research study. With respect to the individual interviews, responses were towards six questions in relation to the central research question of this study.

The next chapter analyses the research findings.

CHAPTER 7

Data Analysis

7.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses this study's research findings presented in the previous chapter. The analysis is two-fold. First is an analysis of the *Weekend Nation*'s editorials and opinion column pieces. Second is a thematic analysis of the views elicited from individual interviews with the research participants, that is, the newspaper's journalists who worked on the political beat between 2002 and 2012. In analysing the research findings, this researcher has employed the critical political economy theory, which was chosen as a theoretical framework to analyse the implications of political ownership of the *Weekend Nation* and its impact on the political role of the journalists in the democratisation of Malawi. The analysis begins with a brief recapturing of a definition of the theoretical framework, since greater attention has been given in the Theoretical Framework chapter. The theory is then used to analyse how the *Weekend Nation* journalists tackled major political themes identified in this study, namely: good governance, floor-crossing (Section 65), and the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP). The next section looks back at the definition of the theoretical framework employed in this study.

7.2 Defining critical political economy and the media

In media studies, the critical political economy theory searches for answers to the question of power of the media in the analysis of their structures of ownership and control (Boyd-Barrett, 1997:186; Curran *et al.*, 1982:16). In this approach, Curran *et al.* (1982:18) observe, contents of the media and the meanings carried by their messages are primarily determined by the economic base of the organisations in which they are produced. In the view of Boyd-Barrett (1997:186), critical political economy is the study of social relations, particularly power relations that constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources, including communication resources.

Similarly, Herman and Chomsky (1994:xi) assert that media owners serve as the primary definers of news and play a key role in fixing basic principles and the dominant ideologies. Such assertions are interrogated through the critical political economy approach. The approach, therefore, is relevant to analyse the implications of media ownership of the *Weekend Nation* newspaper and the political role

of its journalists in executing their tasks with regards to the democratisation of Malawi. The first section of the analysis is next.

7.3 Analysis of the *Weekend Nation*'s editorials and opinion columns

In this section, content analysis was used to examine the *Weekend Nation*'s editorials and opinion columns in accordance with the chronological structure laid out in the preceding chapter, specifically: good governance, floor-Crossing (Section 65) and the FISP.

7.3.1 Good governance

In this study, the issue of governance is content-analysed in three facets as laid out in Chapter 6, that is, accountability and transparency, corruption and human rights. Therefore, the analysis will be in that order.

7.3.1.1 Accountability and transparency: A critical political economy analysis

An examination of the editorials and opinion column pieces between 2002 and 2004 revealed that the *Weekend Nation* became very critical of Bakili Muluzi on economic governance (*Weekend Nation* Comment 2002a:2). It must be noted that it was during this period that Muluzi's 10 year tenure of office was scheduled to end after he had been elected as Malawi's first political leader in a democratic era in 1994. This was more so when key financial donors such as the World Bank, the European Union and Denmark withdrew their support citing systemic corruption (Resnick, 2012:6; Tenthani, 2002a). The editorial's criticism was underscored by the newspaper's senior editor, Steve Nhlane (2004a:23) who argued that due to economic indiscipline, the UDF that Muluzi had led since the advent of democracy in 1994, was not befitting to be given another mandate to continue governing the country. But in Muluzi's view, the critical stance that the newspaper had taken was influenced by its founder – Aleke Banda – who was now leading the Progressive People's Movement (PPM) (Nhlane, 2004b:23).

Significantly, during the UDF regime under attack for financial indiscipline by the newspaper, Aleke Banda was the UDF party's vice-president and senior cabinet minister of finance and later agriculture (Tambulasi & Kayuni, 2005:154; Van Donge, 2002:660). It was also noted that the criticism against the UDF leadership on poor economic governance dated back to 2002 when international donors withdrew their financial support. During this period Aleke Banda was still the vice-president of the then governing UDF. This implies that the *Weekend Nation*'s position on economic governance was not influenced by its owner as further evidenced in Nhlane's (Nhlane, 2004b:23) opinion column that

All the newspaper was questioning and drawing attention to is whether or not the UDF had its priorities right. . . Obviously the answer is no.

This was a significant finding with regards to the critical political economy theory of the media which asks questions related to ownership by the elite and editorial independence because Aleke Banda, who founded the *Weekend Nation*, was a key member of the UDF party regime that was being criticised by the newspaper. Nevertheless, by taking this seemingly independent editorial line, the newspaper's trust with the economic base, including the readership and advertisers, was strengthened. This affirms the assertion advanced by Golding and Murdock (1991:18) that critical political political economy of the media researchers are interested in the interplay between the economic organisation and the political, social and cultural life.

The position of the *Weekend Nation* on highlighting the issue of accountability and transparency did not falter even when Muluzi's successor, Bingu wa Mutharika, took presidential office in 2004. As was the case with the previous administration, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2004a:2) cautioned the new government on economic governance after noting that three months into power, neither Mutharika nor his cabinet had declared their assets as required by law. During this period, the *Weekend Nation*'s founder, Aleke Banda, had left the UDF to join a then newly formed party – the People's Progressive Movement (PPM) – where he was elected president (Ross, 2004:91). Even more so when Mutharika commenced the construction of his private palace at his farm in the district of Thyolo (*Weekend Nation* Comment 2009a:2), the newspaper observed that the project was shrouded in secrecy.

Following the ascendancy of Joyce Banda to power in 2012 after Mutharika's death in office, the *Weekend Nation* adopted an aggressive stance vis-à-vis Joyce Banda and her People's Party (PP). This was evidenced in an editorial comment (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2012a:2) which described Joyce Banda as a "hypocrite" for flouting the Constitution which she had sworn to uphold, yet she and her cabinet ministers had not declared their assets as stipulated by the Declaration of Assets and Liabilities Act. Significantly, the *Weekend Nation* founder, Aleke Banda, had by then retired from politics in 2008 and died in April 2010 (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2010b:2). With regards to accountability and transparency, a key noticeable aspect was the pattern of the critical stance which the newspaper had taken from the reign of Bakili Muluzi as president, including Aleke Banda as a cabinet minister, to Mutharika and Joyce Banda presidential eras in that it did not appear to waver. This was a key indicator that the political ownership of the newspaper had no influence on the

journalistic practices, contrary to assertions advanced by the critical political economy theory of the media.

The next sub-section is an analysis of the findings of the *Weekend Nation* and its journalists' take on governance with respect to corruption.

7.3.1.2 Critical political economy analysis on corruption

Over the years the UDF party under Muluzi governed Malawi, the *Weekend Nation* senior editors (Nhlane, 2002b:21; Ntonga, 2002b:7) noted that it had continued to ignore one of the key tenets of democratic governance by not seriously curbing systemic corruption. The assertion by these senior journalists implied that Aleke Banda, who founded the *Weekend Nation*, was among the politicians who had ignored the fight against corruption in the country. In the context of the critical political economy theory, what was significant to note was that Nhlane (2002a:21) clearly pointed out that the Anti-Corruption Bureau did not investigate systemic corruption involving cabinet ministers. Given that the founder of the *Weekend Nation* was at the time the vice-president of the UDF and a cabinet minister, Nhlane's critical stance was noteworthy. Even more striking was that when a cabinet colleague of Aleke Banda, Finance Minister Friday Jumbe, attacked the media for exposing corruption scandals to the international community as noted in Nhlane (2002b:19), the *Weekend Nation* editor, Steve Nhlane, argued that the minister's argument was wrong and that the media would not relent unless "you put your foot down on dubious deals" (Nhlane, 2002b:19). The views from the *Weekend Nation*'s editors reveal that the trajectory of critical political economy theory of the media, which notes that owners control the newspapers they own, is not always applicable.

During Mutharika's presidency, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006b:2), observed that his government was "hypocritical" on the inaugural pledge on zero-tolerance on corruption. The newspaper pointed this out when instead of commending the Anti-Corruption Bureau for charging former president Muluzi in July, 2006 with corruption while in office, the bureau's director, Gustave Kaliwo, was suspended and ultimately the charges were dropped (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006b:2). This, the newspaper further argued, was done in fear of the majority of the UDF MPs in that they would retaliate by sabotaging Bills proposed by Mutharika's newly formed party, the DPP, which had few legislators in parliament. The critical stance adopted by the *Weekend Nation* lingered on into Mutharika's second term of office as noted in Ntonga (2009b:16). In the observation, Ntonga's confidence in his journalistic independence could be noted when he argued that the "DPP government was entrenched with remnants of a regime that was so corrupt, that 30 per cent of the national revenue was going down the drain every year". The corrupt regime Ntonga referred to was that of the UDF,

with Muluzi as its president and Aleke Banda, founder of the *Weekend Nation*, as party vice-president and senior cabinet minister.

As Wasko (2004:310) argues, the critical political economy theory of the media is oriented towards social change and practice. With regards to the *Weekend Nation*, this is suggestive to the newspaper's multiple platforms, vis-à-vis editorials and opinion columns, which were clearly observed to be independent in articulating the stance on economic governance. As mentioned in Chapter 3, democratic governance not only entails the economic aspects but also focuses on among others, the protection of human rights (Guhan, 1998:185). Next is an analysis of the *Weekend Nation*'s editorials and opinion columns on human rights governance.

7.3.1.3 Critical political economy analysis on human rights

In examining media ownership and control through the critical political economy approach, Louw (2001:6) observes that power elites are seen to be in a position to manipulate media content to serve their own interests. With respect to human rights coverage, evidence of this could not be seen in the era of Muluzi who was deputised by the *Weekend Nation* proprietor, Aleke Banda in the then UDF governing party. Notably, the *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2002b:2) criticised the Malawi anti-riot police for confronting and dispersing demonstrators against Muluzi's attempt to run for the third term of office. The editorial further pointed out that the police action was a violation of the constitutional right to demonstrate peacefully. Similarly, the newspaper criticised Muluzi for ignoring the violence perpetrated by the UDF's youth wing – the Young Democrats – on the media, including an assault on the *Weekend Nation*'s journalist, Daniel Nyirenda, at a party convention in 2003 (Nhlane, 2003:21). The newspaper was unrelenting on the issue of human rights when Muluzi was succeeded by Mutharika as Malawi's second president in a democracy.

This was evident when Mutharika and the DPP, shortly after gaining an outright victory in the 2009 elections, commenced the drafting of the Publications Amendment Bill (Kasakula, 2011a:15) and the Civil Procedures Injunctions Amendment Bill (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011a:2). It was observed that Mutharika had turned into a dictator (Kasakula, 2011b:19; Munthali, 2011:13). Correspondingly, when the anti-riot police killed 19 protestors in July, 2011, the *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011d:2) noted that people felt that there were “political and economic crises in the country, Bingu wa Mutharika and his government think the country's political and economic governance are on track”. In this regard, the editorial insinuated that the matter was a clear indication of worsening democratic governance in Malawi. What was noticeable in the *Weekend Nation*'s

editorials and opinion columns (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011d:2; *Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011b:2; Kasakula, 2011f:15; Munthali, 2011:13; *Weekend Nation* Comment, 2003a:2; Nhlane, 2003:21; *Weekend Nation* Comment, 2002b:2) was that the position on human rights that was affirmed since the newspaper's founder, Aleke Banda, was in the UDF party under former president Muluzi, did not falter until the era of Mutharika and the DPP. The newspaper's editorials were critical of Muluzi and Mutharika's human rights' violations, and simultaneously, the *Weekend Nation*'s journalists through their opinion columns, shared a similar viewpoint on the issue regardless of the political position of the founder. This was a finding not consistent with the assertions put forward by the critical political economy theory.

It was noted that oftentimes, the *Weekend Nation*'s editorials and columnists (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011d:2; Kasakula, 2011a:19; Kasakula, 2010b:17; *Weekend Nation* Comment, 2002b:2) referred to the "Constitution" to rationalise their stance. This was further reflected when Joyce Banda was expelled from the DPP for refusing to endorse Mutharika's brother, Peter, as the next president of the party (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011e:2; Kasakula, 2010b:17). The *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2011e:2) was critical of the Mutharika's government for unconstitutionally reducing funding to the office Joyce Banda simply because she was not supportive of the Mutharika's intentions. Kasakula (2010b:17) similarly brought in the issue of the Malawian Constitution in that it was clear that the Joyce Banda could be the next leader of the country if anything tragic would befall Mutharika. Thus, "adherence to the Constitution" was a recurring theme in both the editorials and opinion columns in the *Weekend Nation* – as mentioned in the foregoing – on the issue of political governance, specifically human rights, from the time the founder of the newspaper, Aleke Banda, was in the governing UDF until when he retired from politics in 2008 as leader of the PPM and then died in 2010. The newspaper's stance on political governance, as evidenced from the editorials and opinion columns, did not waver according to ownership throughout the period 2002 and 2012.

The next section is an analysis of the issue of floor-crossing, commonly referred to as Section 65 in the Malawian media.

7.3.2 Floor-crossing (Section 65): A critical political economy analysis

When the issue of Section 65 surfaced – between 2001 and 2003 – a *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2002d:2) was of the view that it was aimed at promoting partisan interests and greed at the expense of the Malawian Constitution. This view was informed by a 2001

amendment of Section 65 of the Malawian Constitution which originally barred party-elected MPs from not only joining another party within the National Assembly but with the revision, it was to affect even those who associated with any political grouping deemed political in nature (Chirwa, 2011:409; Matumbi, 2007:248). Against this background, when the governing UDF asked the then Speaker of Parliament, Sam Mpasu, to declare vacant seats of parliamentarians who were associating with a political pressure group called the Forum for the Defence of the Constitution, the *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2002d:2) found that to be a strategy to settle political scores. This was so because the editorial noted that the aforementioned pressure group was campaigning against Muluzi's attempt to run for the third term of the presidency beyond the constitutional mandate of the maximum two terms.

The pattern was further reflected in the newspaper's editor, Alfred Ntonga's (Ntonga, 2002c:22) argument that even the opposition MCP attempted to utilise the amended Section 65 with the aim of expelling their MPs who were involved in leadership wrangles with John Tembo, the party's president. It is thus seen that while the *Weekend Nation* founder was still within the governing UDF party, the newspaper took a balanced approach to condemn the manner in which Section 65 was being utilised by political parties in parliament, more in particular following its 2001 amendment. Evidently, the *Weekend Nation* concentrated on "intra-party victimisation" with regards to the issue of Section 65 initially. However, when the matter became predominant in the first phase of Mutharika's rule (2005 to 2009), the newspaper noted that it was more about MPs' "greed" than serving their constituents. It is worth noting that when Mutharika left the UDF and formed the DPP in 2005, he had no MPs representing his new party in parliament. For this reason, Mutharika and the then newly formed DPP, established an "underground taskforce" to entice members of the opposition parties in parliament into joining the new political party (Nhlane, 2005:11).

The *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006e:2) was concerned about this and in its editorial noted that MPs who crossed the floor were not only flouting Section 65 of the Constitution but were being "greedy and betraying the trust of their constituents". The theme of "greed" similarly emerged in the newspaper's senior editor's opinion column (Ntonga, 2006a:10). Ntonga, however took the issue from a different angle by focusing on independent MPs who were not affected by Section 65 in any way because it only applied to those who were elected on a political party ticket. Ntonga felt that independent MPs who joined the governing party were just promoting their self-interests rather than those of their constituents. Ntonga's personalised approach was seemingly an avenue to stimulate debate and draw attention to an idea that Section 65 ought to have been applied

on independent MPs as well because some of them were “greedy”. Notably, during this period, Aleke Banda, founder of the *Weekend Nation*, was an MP and president of the PPM party (Chitsulo, 2005).

When the issue of Section 65 reached a critical point following opposition parties’ refusal to pass the national budget, the *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2006c:2) proposed for a government of national unity. But the newspaper’s editor, Steve Nhlane (Nhlane, 2007:7), criticised that stance arguing that it was like “correcting a misdemeanour by committing a felony”. This was significant in that the newspaper, through its editorial and Nhlane’s opinion column cited above, debated the issue of Section 65 from different viewpoints. With regards to the critical political economy, this was noteworthy because it was a clear indicator of editorial independence. Put another way, this was in contrast to the assertions advanced by the critical political economy theory in relation to the implications of the political ownership and media content. In addition, it was noted that as the 2009 elections approached, the *Weekend Nation*’s senior editors (Kasakula, 2008b:7; Ntonga, 20008c:6) urged the electorate to go to the polls while bearing in mind that Mutharika had flouted Section 65 of the Constitution during his first term of office. In like manner, when Joyce Banda ascended to power in April, 2012, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2012c:2) condemned her government, under her People’s Party, for disregarding Section 65 of the Constitution when the newspaper noted a mass exodus of MPs crossing the floor to align themselves with the governing party. Significant to note was the pattern in which the newspaper seamlessly referred to the Constitution as a fundamental principle of democratic governance in relation to the issue of floor-crossing. Such an unwavering standpoint reveals that on the issue of Section 65, the political ownership of the newspaper did not influence its journalistic role in promoting democracy in Malawi.

The next analysis focuses on subject of the subject of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP).

7.3.3 The Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP): A critical political economy analysis

From the onset, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2005b:2) applauded the launch of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme postulating that it was expected to deal with hunger and poverty particularly for poor rural households. Thus, the newspaper’s editorials (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2005b:2; *Weekend Nation* Comment, 2007a:2; *Weekend Nation* Comment, 2007b:2) and opinion column (Ntonga (2005b:28) focused on the issue of food security during the initial stages.

7.3.3.1 The FISP and the food security theme

When Mutharika launched the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) in 2005, the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2005b:2) praised the policy arguing that it was a good strategy to tackle food insecurity which had been of major concern on the country. The positive standpoint adopted by the *Weekend Nation* was similarly evident in an argument by Ntonga (2005b:28) when he rebuked the opposition UDF party in particular, for aligning itself with the MCP in attacking the FISP policy, with these two opposition parties arguing in parliament that it should have been extended to commercial farmers as well, and not only small-scale subsistence maize rural growers as devised by the Mutharika government. In Chapter 1, it was mentioned that after being voted into office in 2004, Mutharika left the governing party that elected him into power – the UDF – and formed the DPP in 2005. This left the UDF as an opposition party in the National Assembly. Thus, Ntonga (2005b:28) singled out the UDF in his condemnation, underlining that in the 10 years under Muluzi “not once did poor Malawians get universal subsidies”.

The views expressed by the *Weekend Nation*, particularly by its senior editor Ntonga, reflected independence of thought. This was significantly so because the period Ntonga alluded to in his condemnation above, Aleke Banda was the UDF’s vice-president, even more so, Minister of Finance from 1994 before being appointed Minister of Agriculture in 1997 (Tambulasi & Kayuni, 2005:154; Van Donge, 2002:675). The portfolios that Aleke Banda held as cabinet minister were central to matters related to agricultural subsidies. But, as noted in the foregoing, senior journalist Ntonga attacked the regime in which the *Weekend Nation* founder, Aleke Banda, played some key roles on such policies.

The *Weekend Nation* reinforced its positive conviction on the FISP even when issues of corruption and maladministration started to emerge (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2007a:2). The editorial criticised opposition party politicians for seeking to score some “cheap political points” by using the weaknesses associated with FISP to attack the government. While acknowledging that the FISP had some loopholes, it was noted that the point being emphasised in the editorial was that of “collective responsibility” towards a plausible solution in tackling food security. This participatory approach advanced by the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2007a:2) editorial was evident in the excerpt:

It is possible to look at the issues soberly . . . Bringing politics into every national programme is not in anybody’s best interests because an otherwise notable exercise like this one may be caught in the

usual verbal crossfire . . . that could end up derailing it and prevent poor farmers from reaping its benefits.

It was also observed that in an editorial comment (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2007b:2), the *Weekend Nation* defended Mutharika on the FISP after noting that some opposition party politicians and analysts blamed the president for failing to deal with corruption and poor logistical management of the policy as well as a wide-scale examination leakage for final year secondary school students. Mutharika was at the helm of both Agriculture and Education portfolios which the opposition political parties and independent analysts believed were too big to be under the leadership of one person. But the editorial could be seen as being empathetic towards Mutharika while at the same time directing the focus of the blame game on “systems”, not the president. The editorial further noted that it did “not matter whether the president, the minister or the PS was around or not, the system should deliver”.

Interestingly, Ntonga (2007:6) differed with the position of the editorial above. For Ntonga, it was taxing for the president to head two major portfolios because the consequences stemmed from lack of accountability. Ntonga’s independent articulation of his stance was reflected when he expressed his “hope” that “the Mutharika cheer-leaders are able to see the folly of being the president and heading two major portfolios at the same time”. This is significant with regards to the critical political economy theory in that the *Weekend Nation*’s official position on an issue related to the FISP was criticised by the newspaper’s senior editor in his opinion column as noted above. It illustrates that the views expressed by the newspaper were not influenced by the elite ownership as propounded by the critical political economy theory.

While it was noted that the central theme that repeatedly emerged out of the *Weekend Nation* editorials and opinion columns initially was that of collectively rallying behind Mutharika for launching FISP as a strategy of tackling food insecurity, the newspaper was later observed to have diverged towards a critical standpoint noting that the policy had turned political. The next sub-section is an analysis of the *Weekend Nation* and its journalists on FISP as a “political” issue.

7.3.3.2 The FISP as a political theme

Within three years of the FISP’s launch, the *Weekend Nation*, through its editorials (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2012e:2; 2010a:2; 2008:2) and journalists’ opinion columns (Ntonga; 2012c:26; Ntonga, 2008d:6) demonstrated editorial independence when the positive viewpoint over the policy digressed to that of an attack for politicising the programme. For example, this was reflected in a *Weekend Nation* editorial (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2008:2) which rebuked the then deputy Minister of

Agriculture, Frank Mwenefumbo, for donating fertiliser coupons to some key pastors of the largest Protestant church in Malawi, the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central African Presbyterian Church (C.C.A.P), who were not befitting the criteria for beneficiaries. The editorial candidly asserted that the gesture was a ploy by the governing DPP to woo votes from the congregants bearing in mind that the following year, Malawians would be heading for the polls.

Through a different angle, Ntonga (2008d:6) shared the view that the FISP was being used by the governing Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as a tool to garner votes for the 2009 elections. Ntonga's view was informed by the government's retention of the price of subsidised fertiliser at its inaugural cost when over the years the budgetary allocation to it had risen. When the *Weekend Nation* (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2010:2) noted that the FISP was unsustainable and political, the newspaper called for an end to the policy. This was reiterated when Joyce Banda took over the presidency in 2012 through an editorial comment (*Weekend Nation* Comment, 2012e:2). The editorial argued that because the government's budgetary allocation towards the FISP continued to increase, yet the targeted beneficiaries still faced hunger, it was paramount for policy makers to re-examine the policy. In addition, Ntonga (2012c:26) further attacked Joyce Banda for continuing with a programme that the *Weekend Nation*'s senior editor perceived to be a political tool for enticing votes from the rural electorate.

It was thus noted that the *Weekend Nation*, through its editorials and opinion columns initially supported the FISP and focussed on the notion of food security for poor and rural households. However, the viewpoint shifted a few years later to that of being critical towards the policy and what was significant to note was an emergence of the newspaper's political perception towards the FISP. This implied that the *Weekend Nation* was not embedded to any rigid ideological stance related to the FISP. Additionally, this also reflects that the *Weekend Nation* focussed on the issue of the FISP, apparently as a government policy that was initiated in good faith – to mitigate food insecurity amongst the rural and poor households – because the previous regime had failed to deliver in this regard. It was observed that the *Weekend Nation* stimulated the debate of inclusiveness and collective responsibility across all political parties in the National Assembly, emphasising on food security as the focus. But when the newspaper observed politicisation and financial donor fatigue in the FISP, it urged political leaders to consider abandoning it.

Having examined the findings from *Weekend Nation*'s editorials and opinion columns with regards to the political issues at stake between 2002 and 2012, the next section analyses individual interviews

held with the newspaper's political journalists in response to the central and additional research questions in this study.

7.4 Section II: Interviews – A critical political economy analysis

7.4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 5 – Research Design and Methodology – this study involved 17 research participants. Sixteen of the participants were professional journalists who worked on the political beat for the *Weekend Nation* during the research period of this study (between 2002 and 2012). The other participant, Mbumba Achuthan, is not a professional journalist but it was deemed important to involve her in the study because she has been part of the newspaper's daily managerial operations team from its launch in 1995 and is the daughter of the founder of the *Weekend Nation*, Aleke Banda. The research participants responded to six research questions outlined in Chapter 5. The questions are attached as Addendum A.

In this section, content analysis was used to analyse interviews with the research participants in this study. This allowed in-depth descriptions of patterns within the data. A critical political economy theoretical framework was employed as well on the interviews.

7.4.2 Interviews

As Curran *et al.* (1982:18) contend, among other things, the critical political economy of the media approach looks at the precise mechanisms and processes whereby media ownership or control of their economics are translated into controls over the message. One of the key significant recurring themes that emerged from most of the participants in this research during the interviews was that of linking editorial policy to editorial independence. This is discussed next.

7.4.2.1 Editorial policy and editorial independence

Analysis of the overall responses from 17 research participants (Achuthan, 2014; Banda, 2014; Chapalapata, 2014; Kasunda, 2014; Khanje, 2014; Mita, 2014; Mwanyungwe, 2014; Namangale, 2014; Nkolokosa, 2014; Nhlane, 2014; Somanje, 2014; Theu, 2014; Tukula, 2014; Chitsulo, 2013; Kasakula, 2013; Mchulu, 2013; Ntonga, 2013) demonstrated that there was a level of independence at the *Weekend Nation* although the owner was in the governing UDF party and later was the president of the PPM party. This was particularly reflected in individual responses to three questions: On how

they defined their political role of the newspaper, on how they related to the slogan “Freedom of expression, the birth-right of all”, and on the impact of ownership on their political role in Malawi’s democracy.

What was striking in a number of responses (Achuthan, 2014; Mwanyungwe, 2014; Tukula, 2014; Chitsulo, 2013; Ntonga, 2013) was that the research participants attached a similar meaning to the notion of linking “editorial policy” (attached as Addendum E) and “editorial independence”. For instance, responding to how he related to the slogan that the newspaper had adopted at its launch, Mwanyungwe (2014) pointed out that during his time as the editor of the *Weekend Nation*, his decisions were collectively guided by an editorial policy and an independent editorial team. In the interview, Mwanyungwe emphasised that the editorial team was in itself a “safeguard” of the news content. The editorial policy theme similarly emerged in an interview with the newspapers’ CEO and daughter to the founder, Aleke Banda, Mbumba Achuthan (Achuthan, 2014). Achuthan was responding to the question on the impact of ownership on the *Weekend Nation*’s journalistic practices. Achuthan was emphatic that Aleke Banda did not influence the newspaper’s editorial operations, and further asserted that “all he insisted on to us was to follow the editorial policy”. In like manner, in response to the issue of media ownership, Chitsulo (2014) posited that from the onset “the editorial policy insulated staff from ownership”. This also recurred in a response by Nhlane (2014) on the issue of the slogan: “Freedom of expression, the birth-right of all”. Nhlane noted that the slogan was a firm commitment by the journalists working for the newspaper, the editorial team, and the owners towards independence in their profession, adding that they had signed on to an editorial policy “and as long as what you write is true and ethical, no problem”.

It was, thus quite clear that the “editorial policy”, was a significant feature in talking about the *Weekend Nation* and political ownership implications on the political role of its journalists. This was vivid through multiple responses from different questions to the research participants. This was a significant finding in light of the critical political economy theory in the sense that the individual perspectives elicited from the interviews illustrate that the owner of the newspaper made a commitment towards editorial independence. With Curran *et al.* (1982:18) observing that the critical political economy of the media, among other things looks at how media ownership may have an impact on media content, the findings in this study illustrate that the political journalists attached the “editorial policy” to make sense of the reality of “editorial independence”. As Nhlane (2014) underscored that by consenting to sign on to the editorial policy “it was a firm commitment” by the owner, Aleke Banda, not to tamper with the editorial team of the *Weekend Nation*. Bogart (1998:7) holds that links between those who wield political power and those who own the organs of mass

communication may be inescapable and worrying if democracy is to be enhanced. In the context of the *Weekend Nation*, it is noted from the interviews (Achuthan, 2014; Chitsulo, 2013) that the “editorial policy” was critical to safeguard the political journalists on their role to consolidate an emerging democracy in Malawi from the owner who had key positions in the political affairs of the country.

Another noticeable aspect from the respondents was the comparative analogy of editorial independence of the *Weekend Nation* to that of the Times Media Group, publishers of the *Daily Times* and *Malawi News*, owned by the first president of Malawi, Kamuzu Banda and his family. This is analysed next.

7.4.2.2 The *Weekend Nation* ownership implications compared to the Times Media Group

A recurring feature from the research participants was that of comparing experiences of media ownership implications and journalistic practices between the *Weekend Nation* and the Times Media Group, publishers of the *Daily Times* and *Malawi News*. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Times Media Group is the oldest news media house in Malawi, dating back to the colonial times and the dictatorial regime of Kamuzu Banda after independence. A number of journalists, who worked for the *Weekend Nation*, as it will be noted next, had worked for the Times Media Group at some point. This comparative analogy was evident in interviews with Achuthan (2014), Banda (2014), Chapalapata (2014), Khanje (2014), Mwanyungwe (2014), Nhlane (2014), Chitsulo (2013) and Ntonga (2013). In the case of Mwanyungwe, for instance, when asked about the political role of the *Weekend Nation*, his response was: “In comparison to other print media houses, the *Weekend Nation* was a true independent watchdog of democracy in Malawi.” Mwanyungwe had worked for the *Daily Times* for before joining the *Weekend Nation* in 1998.

In light on the critical political economy of the media theory, the initial impressions that the interviewees above had when they joined the *Weekend Nation* were drawn from their experiences of editorial interference by the political ownership of the previous news media institution – The Times Media Group of the Kamuzu Banda family. Among other things, the critical political economy asserts that media owners are able to regulate the output of the media institution by intervening in the day-to-day operations (Murdock, 2000:147). Against this notion, journalists who had worked for a politically affiliated media house – the Times Media Group – before joining the Nation Publication Limited (NPL), had an impression that Murdock’s assertions would to some extent be exhibited at the *Weekend Nation* because of bearing somewhat similar political foundational structures. But

revelations in this study were to the contrary. Additionally, Bogart (1998:3) observes that despite the spread of democracy, the news media remain vulnerable to manipulation by political authorities motivated by ideological zeal or “crude self-interest”. This was the case during the one party-regime of Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) who owned and controlled the news media to advance multiple political agendas. As noted by Bogart (1993:ibid), media ownership may also threaten the development of democracy. However, Achuthan (2014) strongly asserted that the *Weekend Nation* was founded to “contribute to the consolidation of democracy . . . and as a business, not a political tool comparatively to that of the *Daily Times* of the Kamuzu Banda family and the MCP”. Similarly, this was also a recurring thread in a response by Ntonga (2014) who had previously worked for the *Daily Times*. Ntonga noted that he had reservations to join the NPL, publishers of the *Weekend Nation*, when he was asked by a former *Daily Times* colleague, Ken Lipenga, to join Aleke Banda’s Nation Publications Limited (NPL) newspapers project. Lipenga, according to Ntonga, had been tasked by Aleke Banda to head the NPL project and became its first chief editor in 1993. Ntonga posited that his reservations stemmed from the fact that he had experienced editorial interference from MCP politicians while working for the *Daily Times*, a party that was then led by Kamuzu Banda during the one party regime. Ntonga observed that it was “from one political background to another, but I took a gamble”. In like manner, Nhlane (2014) who was the first editor of the *Weekend Nation*, after it was re-branded from the *Saturday Nation* in 2002, thought he “would be getting orders from the chairman [Aleke Banda] or other shareholders”. This was also echoed in an interview with Chitsulo (2014) who recalled that during his professional time with the *Daily Times*, journalists could not discharge their professional duties because it “it was largely a partisan paper about President Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party”. This was an indication that the *Weekend Nation* was an “independent” newspaper without due influence of the political ownership it had.

Critical political economy theorists (Herman & Chomsky, 2002:xi) argue that media owners serve as primary definers of news and play a key role in fixing basic principles and the dominant ideologies. Although this was the case during the political dictatorial ownership of the *Daily Times* and *Malawi News* under Kamuzu Banda and the MCP, it was not replicated in the political ownership of the *Weekend Nation*. Nevertheless, Banda (2014) in his response to the question of media ownership put it that having worked for the *Daily Times* before joining the *Weekend Nation*, he found out that both publications felt the influence of their owners, only that between the two “there was more interference at the *Daily Times* than at the [*Weekend*] *Nation*”. Banda further elaborated that editorial interference that he had noticed at the *Weekend Nation* was largely based on economic rather than political interests. This was also a significant finding because as Golding & Murdock (1991:18) argue, critical

political economy researchers are interested in the interplay between the economic organisation and “political, social and cultural life”. In this study, what was found out was that the political ownership of the newspaper had a bearing on the editorial independence with the journalistic practices that dealt with the “economic” and not the “political” realm.

In the view of the above, it was observed that in positioning themselves within the *Weekend Nation*, in terms of their roles and ownership implications, the point of reference for the journalists, was the *Daily Times*, which was owned by Kamuzu Banda. It was clear that the comparative analogy drew similarities even when the questions posed to the research participants varied. This was significant in the view of the critical political economy theory more in particular that, for journalists who had worked at a newspaper with a similar ownership pattern, were able to express their feelings about a level of independence when they joined the *Weekend Nation*. Another recurring thematic feature which emerged from the research participants was a common reference to the journalism background of Aleke Banda as a significant factor in his approach towards editorial independence at the *Weekend Nation*. This is examined next.

7.4.2.3 Aleke Banda, the journalist and the impact on the *Weekend Nation*

A key aspect that some of the respondents revealed during the interviews stemmed from the fact that Aleke Banda, founder of the *Weekend Nation*, had been a professional journalist in his early years of political life. In response to the question on political ownership and editorial implications, Ntonga (2014) strongly asserted that Aleke Banda was not only a politician but had a solid background in journalism. Ntonga attributed this “journalism background” factor as having a huge bearing when the politician, Aleke Banda, endorsed the editorial policy. The editorial policy was drafted by the journalists and management after the NPL media company, publishers of the *Weekend Nation*, was launched. The issue of Aleke Banda’s professional background similarly recurred in Kasakula (2014) who was of the view he [Aleke Banda] did not interfere with the editorial independence to a certain extent because he understood journalism and left the newspaper to be run by professionals. It was also observed that Nhlane (2014), in response to the question of ownership and the journalists’ political role, pointed out that Aleke Banda “very much distanced himself from the daily work of the paper except for some professional advice, having been a journalist himself before”.

The above observations implied that among other factors, given that Aleke Banda had been a professional journalist in his early political life, the *Weekend Nation* journalists found that to have been of profound effect in his ownership of the newspaper. In this case, he left it to be run by professionals guided by an editorial policy. However, even as it might appear that there were no political ownership implications associated with the political role of the journalists at the *Weekend*

Nation (2002-2012), some responses from the research participants (Banda, 2014; Chapalapata, 2014; Khanje, 2014; Nkolokosa, 2014) revealed a significant feature that was embedded within the newspaper in line with the assertions advanced by the critical political economy theory – advertising. This forms the subject of the next analytical look.

7.4.2.4 Advertising interests and the *Weekend Nation*

Before proceeding with this section, it is worth mentioning that the issue of advertising was not part of the interview questions, which are attached as Addendum A, in this investigation. The issue arises here because some interviewees alluded to it during the interview. As McChesney (1998:3) observes, one key dimension in the study of the critical political economy of the media entails looking specifically at how ownership, support mechanisms such as advertising influence media behaviour and content. In consonance with McChesney's observation, Nkolokosa (2014), in his response to the question of media ownership and its implications at the *Weekend Nation*, argued that ownership interference “would always be there for economic rather than political reasons”. To underline his argument, Nkolokosa recalled that during his time as sub-editor for the newspaper, they could not publish anything negative about the Press Corporation, which is Malawi's largest conglomerate with major stakes in the banking, telecommunications, insurance, supermarket, beverage and agricultural sectors (Van Donge, 2002:674). This was so, it emerged from the interview, because the Press Corporation contributed a huge bulk of revenue to the news media through advertising. It was also observed that the notion of advertising featured in an interview with Banda (2014) when responding to the issue of media ownership. Banda firmly pointed out that political ownership “was not such a big threat” to editorial independence as the “commercial threat”. What was striking about this was that from a number of examples which Banda cited to back up his argument, he singled out the Press Corporation as “big advertisers” whose stories were deemed to be of public interest by investigative journalists, were not published. Banda was so emphatic that “the more the newspapers go commercial, the more editorial independence gets trampled upon”.

The issue of economic interests and media ownership was recurrent in interviews with Khanje (2014) and Chapalapata (2014) who both posited that there were some stories which were seemingly not publishable at the *Weekend Nation* to enable the business to survive financially. Chapalapata, in particular contended that there “was no direct interference but there was this invisible hand that made you question why some stories were not carried”. The above observations are in line with an argument advanced by Boyd-Barret (1997:188) that a Political Economy of the mass media needs to look at how sectors within the media industries are interlinked through corporate control, and their activities

can only be understood in the broad economic context. In the view of the realisation of an indirect editorial interference related to the *Weekend Nation*'s economic interests, some research participants revealed an interesting feature of "self-censorship" in their working practices. This theme is analysed next.

7.4.2.5 Self-censorship and the *Weekend Nation*

Rather than being affected by direct editorial interference, an interesting theme that emerged from the interviews among the research participants was that some journalists resorted to censor their own news stories if they were to be deemed publishable. This was a telling revelation in interviews with Banda (2014), Chapalapata (2014), Nkolokosa (2014), Khanje (2014), Nhlane (2014), Theu (2014), Namangale (2014), and Mita (2014). Particularly for Banda (2014), in response to the question of media ownership and control, self-censorship was "always" at the back of his mind because he was aware that the founder of the newspaper, Aleke Banda, held influential positions in the governing UDF party. Banda asserted that although he had signed on to the editorial policy, which was aimed at safeguarding his professional practices at the *Weekend Nation*, he realised that any critical stories against the UDF, would put the late "Aleke Banda in trouble" against his party colleagues. For Banda, the way to go around it was simply by toning down the story and "you kill the punch out it". This was a striking revelation because it was observed that Banda had argued earlier that "there was more editorial interference at the *Daily Times* than at the [*Weekend*] *Nation*". This could mean that although there was no direct editorial interference at the *Weekend Nation*, it existed subtly or was self-imposed.

Journalists Mita (2014), Namangale (2014) and Theu (2014) also "hinted" that there was self-censorship when asked to talk about the issue of media ownership and their political role as journalists at the *Weekend Nation*. Mita specifically mentioned that the issue was rooted within the members of the editorial team who "wanted to please their master" and it "all trickled down to the journalists". Nkolokosa (2014) similarly shared the view and labelled the editors as "gatekeepers".

Self-censorship resonated with Khanje (2014) and Chapalapata (2014), but it was observed that it was not about Aleke Banda being in constant clash with his UDF party colleagues over the stories that had appeared in the *Weekend Nation* but rather due to the direct involvement of his daughter [Achuthan] in the management of the newspaper. Conjointly, Khanje and Chapalapata asserted that editorial independence would have been practically possible to a greater degree if an independent person and not Achuthan was in charge of the daily operations of the newspaper because she knew which stories would and would not come out the next day. But in making sense of reality, Achuthan

(2014) felt that it was necessary to be involved in the daily operations at the newspaper which “made it possible for me to be a like a bridge . . . Perhaps a regular employee would have felt limited in a way.” What Khanje and Chapalapata implied in the preceding responses underscores observations by Murdock (2000:147) that media owners may intervene in the operations of the organisation through managerial and editorial appointments to suit their [owners] perceived goals

The notion of self-censorship, nevertheless, attests to the argument put forward by Curran *et al.* (1982:26) that in a critical political economy approach, the role of the media is seen as that of concealing and misrepresenting economic class struggles by a way of “false consciousness”. In the context of the *Weekend Nation*, it was observed that sometimes journalists employed self-censorship as a way of getting their stories published. This attests to Murdock’s (2005:118) assertion that in the political economy theory of the media, owners of capital, whom he describes as allocative controllers, set the overall goals and objectives of the company. Operational controllers on the other hand, only implement the goals and objectives already set up by the allocative controllers (*ibid*). In the *Weekend Nation* case, it was observed that journalists engaged in self-censorship after noting that some stories were not being published at the “operational control” level. However, what was interesting to note from the interviews was that through his ownership of the *Weekend Nation*, Aleke Banda was constantly at loggerheads with his fellow UDF party colleagues. This was one key feature that was significant in relation to the critical political economy theory and it is the subject of the next examination.

7.4.2.6 The *Weekend Nation*’s ownership at odds with political interests

It was observed from the interviews that by owning a political newspaper, Aleke Banda risked his political life, more in particular his survival in the UDF of which he was vice-president from the eve of democracy in 1994. This featured in an interview with Ntonga (2014) when responding to the question related to ownership implications on journalists’ political role in the democratisation of Malawi. Ntonga, in an attempt to exemplify editorial independence, recalled an incident when the then governing UDF purchased luxury vehicles for cabinet ministers at the time when the British government had just donated financial aid to assist in hunger relief. This did not go down well within the UDF hierarchy when it was reported in the *Weekend Nation* because, as Ntonga further put it, some within the party thought it was a ploy by Aleke Banda to undermine the government and this “thought lingered on when he left the UDF to help form the PPM party”.

Tukula (2014) similarly revealed that Aleke Banda's media ownership was of great concern within the UDF party. From an interview with Tukula, it emerged that even Aleke Banda himself felt the pressure of being an owner of a key newspaper while at the same time nurturing a political life in the governing UDF, particularly when Muluzi attempted to run for the third term of office. It was a critical point with regards to media ownership implications because as Tukula pointed out, Aleke Banda felt that the newspaper should not write anything about the third term debate but "the editorial team reasoned with him that the matter was of public interest". This stemmed from the fact that by being vice-president, Aleke Banda was one of the likely candidates to succeed Muluzi and, in this vein, he felt that other UDF party members would view him as posturing for the presidency through his newspaper and he was, therefore, under pressure to interfere by attempting to silence the journalists. But Tukula recalled that the editorial team held a different view and let the third term debate out in the public domain.

The issue of the antagonism between Aleke Banda and the hierarchy within the UDF party due to his ownership of the *Weekend Nation* was underscored by Banda (2014), Mwanyungwe (2014), Khanje (2014), Chapalapata (2014) who all noted that his political inclinations were of major concern to himself [Aleke Banda] and his career than to the journalists who worked for his newspaper.

Revelations that the founder of the *Weekend Nation* was in constant friction with his political party colleagues because of news articles that were in discordance with the UDF government are of profound significance in regards to the critical political economy theory. As Louw (2001:4) observes, one of the aspects a critical political economist is concerned with in relation to the media is mapping out human relationships and the way some individuals gain more power than others, through their positioning relative to others, and their positioning relative to media production and circulation systems.

The *Weekend Nation* case in this regard was striking because in view of Louw's assertion, Aleke Banda would have been expected to promote the interests of his political party due to his key positions in the UDF. On the other hand, the UDF would have been expected to utilise the *Weekend Nation* as a platform to advance the party's multiple agendas. But as it has been observed, this was in sharp contrast to the theory. This implies that the fact that Aleke Banda was a politician in the governing party, and later president of an opposition party, the PPM, this had no bearing on the political role of the journalists at the *Weekend Nation*.

7.5 Summary

This chapter was divided into two sections. In the first section, the researcher analysed editorials and opinion columns that appeared in the *Weekend Nation* between 2002 and 2012 in relation to the three political themes, namely, good governance, floor-crossing (Section 65) and the FISP. In the second section, the researcher analysed views that were drawn from interviews with journalists who worked on the political beat for the newspaper during the period under investigation. This was done to ascertain the implications of the political ownership of the newspaper on the political role of its journalists in the democratisation of Malawi. The analysis employed the critical political economy theory of the media.

The analysis has given a clear indication that in many respects, the political ownership of the *Weekend Nation* had no bearing on the political role of the journalists in the enhancement of democracy in Malawi. It was in fact established that the political ownership of the newspaper had risky implications to the political career of its founder – Aleke Banda – because the content from the *Weekend Nation* regularly did not please the UDF party in which he served as its vice-president and cabinet minister.

The analysis, however, revealed that due to a profit-oriented motive, the *Weekend Nation* ignored public interest stories that involved major corporations in Malawi, who were among the newspaper's major source of advertising revenue. This offers an insight in the implications of media ownership and editorial independence because it has been clearly observed that the owners of capital, the allocative controllers, in this context the Aleke Banda family, indirectly ensured that editorial decisions (operational control) reflected their interests to secure and enhance key strategic positions in the socio-economic order.

The next chapter offers the concluding remarks and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

The focus of this study was to investigate the political role of the *Weekend Nation* newspaper in the democratisation of Malawi between 2002 and 2012 within the context of its ownership by a top politician. Bearing in mind that the newspaper was founded in the advent of multi-party politics in Malawi by a politician in the first democratically elected governing party – the UDF – to consolidate democracy, this research sought to examine the implications of media ownership on journalistic practices and their political role in Malawi’s democratic governance. Specifically, the study sought to examine the newspaper’s editorial independence with regards to democratisation of Malawi amidst political ownership. The independence in this regard entails the freedom of expression by the journalists through editorials and opinion columns. As noted by Breed (1997:109), “news columns and editorials are a guide” to a newspaper’s norms. Additionally, the study sought to elicit the underlying meanings and sense of reality from the *Weekend Nation* journalists on the notion of political ownership and their journalistic practices.

This type study took into cognisance Bennet’s (1982:294) observation that “to speak of the political role of the media is not an abstract undertaking”. Bennett further observes that to embark on such a study, it is important not only to focus on the media institution but to look at the political issues at stake during that particular period. In this study, multiple political scholars (Chinsinga, 2012:4; Mayaya, 2012:21; Wroe, 2012:135; Chirwa & Dorward, 2013:1) on Malawi identified good governance, floor-crossing and the FISP as having been the major political issues between 2002 and 2012. In view of the foregoing, editorials and opinion columns in the *Weekend Nation* tackling the issues of good governance, floor crossing and the FISP were examined from January 5, 2002 until December 29, 2012. In addition, individual interviews with journalists who worked on the political beat during the study period were conducted.

Before proceeding with the conclusions, it is pertinent to have a recap of the review of literature, theoretical frameworks, and the research methodology in this investigation. This revisit is tackled in the next sections.

8.2 Literature review

As this study was on the political role of the news media in the democratisation of Malawi, the literature review dwelt on the role of the media in democratic governance. The literature examined the role of the media in democracies of the Americas, Europe and Asia. Additionally, there was

particular attention to the media's role in shaping the democratic culture in sub-Saharan Africa which Malawi is part of. This view was informed by scholars (Nyamnjoh, 2005:2; Bourgault, 1995:xi) who observe that whereas the media are perceived to play a central role in the enhancement of democracy in developed countries, the landscape of the news media and the way they carry out their political role in African societies varies and they do not have the same potential in every society. The next sub-section is about the theory employed in this study.

8.3 Theoretical frameworks

This research employed the critical political economy theory of the media to explore the ramifications of the *Weekend Nation*'s foundational and ownership structures on the political role of its journalists to enhance democratic governance in Malawi. The theoretical framework chosen was defined in detail. By employing the critical political economy theory of the media, this researcher was aware that this approach also focuses on the issues of ownership and advertising as advanced by Herman and Chomsky (1994:xi). The study was also aware of the caveat put forward by Murdock and Golding (2005:63) that the critical political economy theory may look at the environment in which the media operates in that it may serve as a facilitating factor on one hand, but limited on the other due to the structures put in place which may relate to managerial or editorial appointments within the interests of the owners.

However, this study's main focus was on the implications of the political ownership of the *Weekend Nation* on its journalists in the execution of their political role in the enhancement of democracy and good governance in Malawi. Thus, the study's focal point was on the political role of the *Weekend Nation* newspaper in Malawi's democracy in the context of media ownership by the country's top politician. Next is a summary of the study's chosen research design and methodology.

8.4 Research design and methodology

The research design of this study was the case study to better understand the *Weekend Nation* newspaper's particularity and ordinariness. In this case study, qualitative data gathering methodology using content analysis – to gather and analyse data – and the thematic analysis of individual interviews were used. The combined approach is called triangulation. The combination of the methods was aimed at interlinking inferences made in the editorials and opinion columns with the underlying meanings, perceptions and reality elicited from the responses with the research participants in this study.

The conclusions drawn from this research study are next.

8.5 Conclusions on the positions of the *Weekend Nation* on the identified major political issues at stake between 2002 and 2012

This section provides the conclusions on the positions of the *Weekend Nation* newspaper on the major political issues at stake from 2002 until 2012. These were good governance, floor-crossing (Section 65) and the FISP. The section is in two divisions – editorial and opinion columns content, and interviews.

8.5.1 Editorial and opinion columns content

8.5.1.1 Good governance

It is worth noting that conclusions on the position of the *Weekend Nation* on good governance are into three categories, namely, accountability and transparency, corruption and human rights.

8.5.1.1.1 Accountability and transparency

From a critical political economy theory of the media perspective, the political ownership of the newspaper overall had no direct bearing on the political role of the journalists. This was evidenced by the critical stances the *Weekend Nation* took during the presidencies of Bakili Muluzi of the UDF in which Aleke Banda was part of (1994-2003), that of the late Bingu wa Mutharika of the DPP (2004-2012), and that of Joyce Banda of the People's Party (from 2012-2014). In this regard, the *Weekend Nation* took an independent approach in executing the political role during the period when Malawi was governed by leaders of different political parties regardless of the political inclinations of the ownership.

8.5.1.1.2 Corruption

In light of the assertions advanced by the critical political economy theory of the media that media owners are the primary definers of news (Herman & Chomsky, 1994:xi), this was not necessarily the case with the *Weekend Nation*. For example, the newspaper and its individual journalists criticised the UDF for corrupt malpractices which led to Malawi's financial donors withdrawing aid when the *Weekend Nation* founder, Aleke Banda, was the governing party's vice-president and cabinet minister. The newspaper similarly took a swipe at Mutharika and the DPP when similar corrupt tendencies emerged. The stance lingered on Joyce Banda and her People's Party (PP) era in 2012. On the basis of the available evidence gathered by this study, the conclusion was that the newspaper and its journalists articulated their positions on corruption without much interference of the ownership.

8.5.1.1.3 Human rights

The *Weekend Nation*'s editorial independence was clear on the issue of human rights for it constantly justified its critical stance by referring to the Malawian Constitution. For instance, between 2002 and

2004, the newspaper reminded Muluzi to respect the Constitution when he attempted to run for the third term of office and the governing UDF then used the police to silence anti-Muluzi protestors. In like manner, the *Weekend Nation* through its editorials and individual journalists' opinion columns criticised Mutharika for dictatorial tendencies such as the drafting of laws aimed at stifling the news media and multiple gross violations of human rights against the citizenry. In this vein, between 2002 and 2012, the ownership of the newspaper did not affect the way the *Weekend Nation* carried out its political role in the democratisation of Malawi.

8.5.1.2 Floor-crossing (Section 65)

From a critical political economy of the media perspective, this study concludes that Aleke Banda's political ownership of the *Weekend Nation* did not impact on the political role of its journalists with respect to the issue of floor-crossing (Section 65). When the issue surfaced between 2001 and 2003, the founder of the *Weekend Nation* was a prominent member of the then governing UDF party. When floor-crossing became a major political issue during the era of Mutharika and the DPP, Aleke Banda was an MP and president of a rather smaller party – the People's Progressive Movement. Nevertheless, the *Weekend Nation* was independent in criticising MPs who left political parties that aided them into the National Assembly to join the governing party of the day. The newspaper's stance was constant in that its editorials and individual opinion columnists cited greed as the motive against the interests of the electorate. This position was also noted when Joyce Banda ascended to power in 2012. In this respect, it is clear that the political role of the *Weekend Nation* on the issue of floor-crossing (Section 65) was not influenced by its political ownership. Next, is the the political issue – FISP.

8.5.1.3 The Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP)

This study concludes that the position of the *Weekend Nation* and its journalists on the issue of the FISP was not influenced by the owners. Editorials and individual opinion columns initially hailed Mutharika for launching the FISP in 2005, underscoring that it was a long-overdue food security that would probably mitigate regular spells of hunger in the majority of rural-based poor households. The newspaper pointed out that the strategy had to receive unanimous support from all politicians regardless of party affiliation.

When some members of the opposition parties – the MCP and the UDF – attacked Mutharika's DPP MPs in the National Assembly, arguing that the FISP should have been extended to commercial farmers and not subsistence growers alone, the *Weekend Nation* and its individual journalists defended the governing DPP and even more so criticised the UDF that during their 10 year rule – 1994 to 2004 – they (the UDF) did not implement such a far-reaching crucial food security policy. In

light of the assertions advanced by the critical political economy theory of the media, this was evidence of editorial independence because it is worth noting that Aleke Banda, founder of the *Weekend Nation*, held the portfolios of finance and agriculture in the then governing UDF party which was being criticised by the newspaper.

Over the years the newspaper shifted from its cheerleading stance to that of being critics of Mutharika and the DPP for politicising the FISP. The newspaper subsequently urged the governing DPP to abandon the much touted food security policy relying on academic research studies (Chinsinga, 2014:3), international multi-lateral organisations such as the World Bank (Kilic, Whitney & Winters, 2013:4) and from their own investigations team (Munthali, 2014:7) to justify the position of withdrawal from the FISP. The newspaper reiterated this stance even when Joyce Banda took office in 2012. This was a clear indication that the political ownership of the newspaper had no bearing on the political role of *Weekend Nation* in Malawi's democracy with regards to the issue of the FISP.

Next are the conclusions based on interviews conducted in this research study.

8.6 Interviews

In light of the political role of the *Weekend Nation* journalists, as elicited from individual interviews, this research concludes that the political ownership of the newspaper did not interfere in the newspaper's individual journalists' execution of their tasks specifically in relation to political reporting. Significantly, interviews in this study revealed that the political role of the newspaper impacted on the political career of its founder – Aleke Banda. The newspaper's independent stance was not well received by some of the *Weekend Nation*'s founder's colleagues when he was in the governing UDF party. Some members in the UDF hierarchy were not amused by the criticisms that emanated from the newspaper against party. When the newspaper, for instance criticised Muluzi for attempting to unconstitutionally extend his stay in power, this was perceived by some members of the UDF as Aleke Banda's ploy to use the *Weekend Nation* to block the president's attempt and then take over the party's leadership because he [Aleke Banda] was then the UDF vice-president.

During the third-term debate, the founder of the *Weekend Nation*, Aleke Banda, attempted to interfere with editorial independence of the newspaper by asking the journalists not to write anything about the issue but the editorial team reasoned with him to respect the editorial policy and the critical position against former president Muluzi's bid to amend the Constitution in his favour continued. In this case, the newspaper and its journalists reinforced their political role in Malawi's democratisation process, but this role was interpreted differently by some of its founder's political colleagues in the

governing UDF party. This contrasts the general assertions of the critical political economy theory of the media that owners serve as the primary definers of news. In this vein, citing Muluzi's third term bid as an example, the editorial team used the editorial policy to resist any attempt by the *Weekend Nation* founder, Aleke Banda, to interfere in their editorial independence.

Next, this researcher presents concluding arguments on the *Weekend Nation*'s political role in the democratisation of Malawi within the context of its ownership by the country's top politician.

8.7 Concluding arguments

In the final analysis, it is vital to understand the main focus of this study, because as a researcher in the critical political economy of the media, one has to be aware of the varied trajectories embedded in this approach. One may focus on media systems and how the output may affect a particular social order. In other words, how media content may perpetuate or reinforce some societal norms or relations. Another line of the critical political economy inquiry may focus on the issues of advertising, media concentration or monopolisation and how these finance-related issues could impact on the news content. In addition, the focus could be on media ownership and its implications on journalistic practices. In this vein, the major thrust of this study was on the implications of media ownership by a top politician on the political role of the *Weekend Nation* in the democratisation of Malawi. This dimension was deemed necessary to explore and explain the relationship between the news media and democracy in Malawi.

During the transition from one party rule to multi-party democracy – 1992 to 1994 – the Nation Publications Limited (NPL), publishers of the *Weekend Nation* was launched to consolidate democracy (Achuthan, 2014). Editorials, opinion columns and separate interviews confirmed that the *Weekend Nation* and its journalists had a clear political role in Malawi's nascent democracy. The impact of such a clear mandate – to foster democratic governance – was however thrown into scepticism in the initial stages of the newspaper's launch as articulated by its first Chief sub-Editor and now deputy CEO, Alfred Ntonga (Ntonga, 2013) and then Managing Editor, late Edward Chitsulo (Chitsulo, 2013). This stemmed from the fact that the editors had worked for Blantyre Newspapers, now called the Times Media Group, which was owned by Kamuzu Banda where, then governing politicians from the MCP during the one party era, directly interfered with the journalistic editorial independence. Thus, the foundational and ownership structures of the *Weekend Nation* were manifestly questionable with respect to fulfilling the political role of consolidating Malawi's democracy against the background that its founder, Aleke Banda, was a key member of the then governing UDF.

But from the onset, there was strong commitment from the *Weekend Nation*'s founder towards editorial independence among the *Weekend Nation* journalists. The critical political economy of the media theory recognises that direct and strong ownership interference can be mitigated by journalism's professional ethos (Wasserman & Rao, 2008:171). This was evidenced by the editorial policy drafted by the editorial team when Nation Publications Limited (NPL) the main publishing house, was launched in 1993 which de-linked ownership from interference with journalistic practices. This was clearly noticed through the impartial views from the editorials and opinions on major political issues between 2002 and 2012. Interviews with senior journalists (Mwanyungwe, 2014; Tukula, 2014; Chitsulo; 2013; Ntonga, 2013) and CEO, Achuthan (2014) corroborated this. Among a myriad of incidences which underlined editorial independence mentioned in the preceding chapter, noteworthy was when *Weekend Nation*'s senior journalists, Ntonga (2002b:7) and Nhlane, (2002b:21) through their opinion columns attacked the then governing UDF for corruption at the time when the newspaper's founder was within the top hierarchy of the party as its vice-president. Given that this displeased cabinet colleagues of the newspaper's founder thereby risking his political career within the UDF, the role of its journalists in Malawi's democratic governance was fulfilled without due influence from ownership. As noted in an interview with Ntonga (2013), Aleke Banda would counter the attacks from his political colleagues by asking them to relay any queries about the *Weekend Nation*'s political coverage to the newspaper's editorial team.

The view that emerges from the critical political economy theory that some individuals gain more power by positioning themselves close to media and their modes of production (Louw, 2001:4) was not evident in the *Weekend Nation* newspaper under the foundational and ownership of Aleke Banda with regards to the democratic politics coverage in Malawi. Because the newspaper oftentimes referred to the Malawian constitution to justify its critical positions on major political issues, while at the same time its journalists' opinions were safeguarded by the editorial policy, it provided a landscape where the "freedom of expression" inaugural slogan of the *Weekend Nation* was fulfilled independent of the political interests of the founder.

The non-interference of the owners on the political role of the *Weekend Nation* was further illustrated when the three presidencies that governed Malawi between 2002 and 2012, representing different political parties expressed distaste towards the newspaper. As mentioned earlier, Muluzi attacked the *Weekend Nation* during a political campaign rally for its critical stance against civil servants' salary delays (Nhlane, 2004b:23). The newspaper's journalists were also physically attacked following the condemnation of Muluzi's attempt to run for the third term of office (Nhlane, 2003:21). By the same

token, Mutharika ordered the withdrawal of advertising from the *Weekend Nation* by all government departments when the newspaper relentlessly criticised him for human rights violations (Achuthan, 2014). During Joyce Banda's tenure, her People's Party leadership similarly echoed sentiments of displeasure with the *Weekend Nation* for extravagant spending and corruption.

The preceding evidence illustrates that despite the political position of the owner during the period under study – 2002 to 2012 – the *Weekend Nation* played a significant role of in the democratisation of Malawi. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, it is worth noting that the *Weekend Nation* founder, Aleke Banda, retired from politics in 2008 and died in 2010 but this study revealed that the political role of its journalists – to consolidate Malawi's democracy – remained constant without ownership interference. This study's conclusions do not disregard the view advanced by the critical political economy theory on the relationship between ownership of the media and its influence on the media's trajectory. Rather, this inquiry has established that the general observation that media ownership determines the content of the media did not entirely apply to the *Weekend Nation* during the period of study.

The study has shown that the political ownership of the *Weekend Nation* provided a risky relationship with the founder's political interests but at the same time presented a thriving news media business to become the country's leading newspaper as well the only media house to have survived out of the 20 newspapers that were launched in the advent of democracy in the 1990s. The success was realised in partnership with the corporate world, the major source of revenue to the media through advertising. In light of these findings, the research has highlighted the dimension of the critical political economy theory of the media that looks at how ownership and advertising influence media behaviour and content as postulated by McChesney (2000:110). However, it needs to be emphasised that advertising and its influence on the media was not the focus of this study. This line of inquiry, McChesney (ibid) further notes, focuses in the modes of production and consumption of media.

With respect to the *Weekend Nation*, this study has shown that due to the profit-oriented motive of the owners, stories that were deemed to have been of public interest but were in conflict with Malawi's major advertisers such as conglomerate Press Corporation Limited (PCL) and mobile phone service provider – Bharti Airtel – were either censored by the editors or not published at all. While the major focus of this study was on media ownership and control, it has however revealed findings that underscore a significant research thrust that falls within the critical political economy approach. Inasmuch as that political ownership of the *Weekend Nation* did not have a direct bearing on the political role its journalists in the democratisation of Malawi between 2002 and 2012 – which was

the major focus of this research – the study has unearthed concerns that are of great interest to critical political economy researchers as to really who owns the media. Such power relations, evident in the collusion of the owners with advertisers and the impact on media content legitimately then call into question whether or not there is ever a 100 per cent independent press, as one respondent in this study Nkolokosa (2014) put it.

In this study, unlike the dominant media of the West who align themselves directly with political ideologies or parties such as the Chandler family of the *Los Angeles Times* and their support for the Republicans, Ted Turner's CNN liberal views as well as Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation leanings towards the Conservatives (Sutter, 2000:438), the *Weekend Nation* case has revealed that antagonism with politicians and positive relationships with the corporate industry were avenues for maximising profits. To the underlying meanings and sense of reality of the *Weekend Nation*'s political journalists, being critical of the politicians, particularly those of the governing party, was a true reflection of editorial independence and significant in their political role to consolidate democracy in Malawi. But in retrospect, market forces had an impact on media content which may not have had political implications but nevertheless had serious implications with reference to the public interest.

Drawn from this study, this researcher then next makes recommendations for future inquiry.

8.8 Recommendations

8.8.1 Recommendations for future study

It has been noted that overall, the majority of the journalists expressed editorial independence in historical-political context, that is, in comparison to the editorial interference during the repressive one party regime which owned and controlled the news media before Malawi adopted multi-party democracy in 1994. It is clear that in the case of the *Weekend Nation*, the majority of the journalists perceived to have played a critical role to foster democratic governance in Malawi between 2002 and 2012. It has been observed that the position of the newspaper on good governance, floor-crossing and the farm input subsidy programme did not change relatively with the changing of governments between 2002 and 2012 while the newspaper remained an entity of the Aleke Banda family.

But further research needs to be done from the perspective of editorial independence and the collusion with the corporate industry which compromise media content. It is a complex dimension that calls for further research because inasmuch as the privately-owned media, such as the *Weekend Nation*, may not face political interference, they need to have a strong financial base to make profits, retain and

attract vibrant staff that can contribute to the democratisation process. This then implies that they need to rely on other economic support mechanisms such as the corporate industry especially in small economies like Malawi.

8.8.2 Recommendations for journalism education

In this study, one of the major political issues was that of the issue of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP). The study has revealed that coverage of this significant issue was much more focused on the political aspect of it and as former senior journalist Banda (2014) points out in Chapter 6, there was no in-depth analysis of the FISP, which is a policy that has been paramount to Malawi's food security. The policy was launched to be an interim strategy to mitigate hunger and starvation in the country but this notion was not dwelt on by the journalists in this study. As a result, politicians have continued to pre-occupy themselves with the FISP to the extent that it has now been sustained despite recommendations from researchers and Malawi's financial aid partners that it is a political and costly policy. It is incumbent upon journalists to play a role to educate the public on major policies such as the FISP to deter manipulation from politicians.

The next section, which is the last, summarises the concluding chapter of this research study.

8.9 Summary

This chapter has provided concluding remarks on the political role of the *Weekend Nation* newspaper in the democratisation of Malawi between 2002 and 2012. The political role of the newspaper's journalists was investigated against the background of political ownership and foundational structures. This necessitated this researcher to employ the critical political economy as a theoretical framework. The study utilised qualitative content analysis and interviews as tools to gather and analyse data. This research concluded that in general, the political ownership of the *Weekend Nation* newspaper has no direct bearing on the political role of its journalists. To the journalists' underlying meaning and sense of reality, this study concluded that their editorial independence with regards to political journalistic practices and roles were not compromised despite the fact that the founder was amongst Malawi's political elite. Nevertheless, the research further concluded that market-forces had an impact on the *Weekend Nation*'s editorial independence. The motive for more advertising revenue threatened the journalistic standards with respect to other stories of public interest.

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ADDENDUM

Addendum A: Interview guide

The central research question in this study was:

What was the political role of the *Weekend Nation* in the democratisation of Malawi within the context of its ownership by one of the the country's top politicians?

To seek clearer answers to the question, the following questions were posed to the research participants in the study.

- What was the role that the *Weekend Nation* defined for itself since inception?
- Bearing mind that the newspaper was founded by a politician, how did that impact the political role of the journalists?
- How did journalists relate the *Weekend Nation* to the newspapers' slogan: "Freedom of expression, the birth right of all?"
- On the issue of good governance, the civil society, opposition parties and the international community condemned the Bakili Muluzi administration as well as the later stages of the Bingu wa Mutharika led government, what has been the *Weekend Nation's* position on that issue?
- What has been the position of the *Weekend Nation* on the issues of floor-crossing (Section 65)?
- The food security policy – the Farm Input Subsidy Program – initiated by the late President Bingu Wwa Mutharika in 2005 albeit opposition by multilateral donors such as the IMF and the World Bank has been the media domain to this day, what has been the position of the *Weekend Nation* on that?

Addendum B: Consent Form



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY
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STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The political role of the media in the democratisation of Malawi: The Case of the *Weekend Nation* from 2002 to 2012.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Mr. Anthony Gunde, MA (Missouri State Univ); BA (Andrews Univ-Solusi College, Zim); UCE (UNIMA, MLW)** from the Journalism Department, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University. The data collected will contribute to the writing of a thesis or dissertation on the topic above.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because it is hoped that you have some information dealing with the political role of the *Weekend Nation* since Malawi became a democracy and the impact, if any, of the ownership of the newspaper by the political elite on its journalists in carrying out that role.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study seeks to examine the political role of the *Weekend Nation* between 2002 and 2012 in the democratisation of Malawi within the context of its ownership by Malawi's political elite.

1. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- To tell me the role that the *Weekend Nation* defined for itself since inception.
- To provide me with information on any impact and experiences as *Weekend Nation* journalists on the political role of the newspaper bearing in mind that it was founded by a politician.
- To tell me on how you relate/ed the *Weekend Nation* to the newspaper's slogan: "*Freedom of Expression, the Birthright of All*" now changed to "*Making Freedom of Expression a Reality.*"
- On the issue of good governance, the civil society, opposition parties and the international community condemned former President Bakili Muluzi administration as well as the later stages of the late President Bingu Wa Mutharika led government, tell me of the *Weekend Nation's* position on that issue.
- To give me information on the position of the *Weekend Nation* on the issues of "Floor-Crossing (Section 65).

- To provide me with information on the how the *Weekend Nation* dealt with the food security policy – Farm Input Subsidy Program - initiated by the late President Bingu Wa Mutharika in 2005 albeit opposition by multilateral donors such as the IMF and the World Bank, a subject which has been in the media domain to this day.
- To ask me questions for clarification on the discussion or interview we will be having.
- Let me also ask you to allow me to record our discussions/interview so that I can write up everything correctly when the discussions/interviews are over.
- Let me also ask you to provide me with names of other members staff from the *Weekend Nation* who can also give me information dealing with political role of the newspaper in Malawi's democracy and its ownership implications thereof.
- The discussion is not expected to be within a restricted time frame but until the areas under scrutiny have been exhausted.
- The discussion is expected to take place privately at a location where participants feel comfortable.

2. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

- Some participants may have been subjected to unfair labour practices in the course of the duties as journalists and thus on some occasions experience discomfort. I will empathise with them, allow them to pose until they feel at ease to go ahead with the discussion.
- Issues of power and media control have always been conflictual and in the case of the *Weekend Nation's* foundational and ownership structure, some participants may be uncomfortable to divulge critical information in regards to their experiences and journalistic practices. In such a scenario, I will have to assure the potential informant that I am a student collecting the information for academic purposes only and that the information will be treated in the most confidential manner in which the identity and the locations of the informants will not be revealed to anyone. Real names will not be published in the dissertation. My letter of introduction will also count as part of the testimony that I am just a student conducting research for academic work.

3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

- This research is expected to reveal significant findings which will be beneficial to students, teachers, and researchers in schools, colleges, and universities. Thus, you as a participant, relatives or friends will highly benefit from this study.
- The findings could also be consulted by media research institutes, governments and non-governmental organisations in quest for information on the news media ownership and democracy in the African continent.

4. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

The research is for academic purposes only and as such, no payment will be done to participants. As stated earlier, benefits of the study will be realized at a later stage.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of not revealing your identity and that your colleagues. The data will be stored in my laptop computer and flash disks. These will only be accessed by myself and my thesis supervisor at Stellenbosch University. My thesis supervisor is also aware of the confidential nature of the data.

I should reiterate that the information will be used for academic purposes only, namely, the writing of a thesis and the identities of the informants and their specific communities will not be revealed.

Since our discussions/interviews will be audio-taped, you have the right to listen to what was audio-taped and advise on what you want or do not want to be there. These tapes will only be accessed by me and the supervisor of my thesis. The tapes will be kept at the Journalism department, Stellenbosch University.

Since the identities of the informants and those of their communities will be concealed in the process of writing the thesis, the publications emerging from the thesis will not violate the confidential status of the data collected. Additionally, Stellenbosch University has a policy that needs to be followed if one is to publish the results of his/her study and this also ensures that confidentiality of the data is not tampered with.

6. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. I as investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. For example, if it becomes apparent that the information you are giving is meant to mislead me or if you become so emotionally taken up to the extent that it becomes difficult for you to narrate the incident/nces, I may decide that we may no longer hold a meaningful discussion.

7. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me through the following address: **Anthony Gunde (Principal Investigator), Language and Communication Skills Department, University of Malawi, Chancellor College, P.O. Box 280, Zomba, Tel 01 524 222 (Enquiries) or 0888 135 207) Mobile). Email: agunde@cc.ac.mw**

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research

study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me _____,
by _____ in English and I am in command of this language or it was
satisfactorily translated to [me/him/her]. I, _____ was given the
opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to [my/his/her] satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study, I hereby consent that the
subject/participant may participate in this study.] I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject/Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative **Date**

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____
[name of the subject/participant] and/or **[his/her]** representative _____
[name of the representative]. **[He/she]** was encouraged and given ample time to ask me
any questions. This conversation was conducted. This conversation was conducted
in _____ and **[no translator was used/this conversation was translated**
into _____ by _____].



Signature of Investigator

12/11/2013
Date

Addendum C: Approval from REC



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

Approval Notice New Application

13-Nov-2013
Gunde, Anthony A

Proposal #: HS1017/2013

Title: Title: **The political role of the media in the democratisation of Malawi :The Case of the Weekend Nation from 2002 to 2012.**

Dear Mr Anthony Gunde,

Your DESC approved **New Application** received on **11-Nov-2013**, was reviewed by members of the **Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)** via Expedited review procedures on **12-Nov-2013** and was approved.

Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: **12-Nov-2013 - 11-Nov-2014**

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

Please remember to use your **proposal number (HS1017/2013)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 0218839027.

Included Documents:

Letter permission
Questionnaire
REC Application
Email DESC process
Informed consent form
Research proposal
DESC form
Letter

Sincerely,

Susara Oberholzer
REC Coordinator
Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

Addendum D: Approval for data collection from NPL

Gunde, AM, Mnr <18119999@sun.ac.za>

Fri 2013-03-08 10:08 AM

To: tonygunde@yahoo.com <tonygunde@yahoo.com>;

From: ayesha.chikondi@googlemail.com [ayesha.chikondi@googlemail.com]

Sent: 06 March 2013 05:26 PM

To: Gunde, AM, Mnr <18119999@sun.ac.za>

Cc: Edward Chitsulo

Subject: Re: Phd Research

Dear Sir,

Your request to use NPL as a Case Study for your Phd research has been noted and accepted.

Please get in touch with Mr Chitsulo who will be your main point of contact at NPL.

PLEASE provide him with the information you refer to in your letter and also agree with him on the way forward.

Mr Chitsulo will brief Mr Alfred Ntonga, our Deputy Chief Executive Officer so that in his absence you can still be assisted.

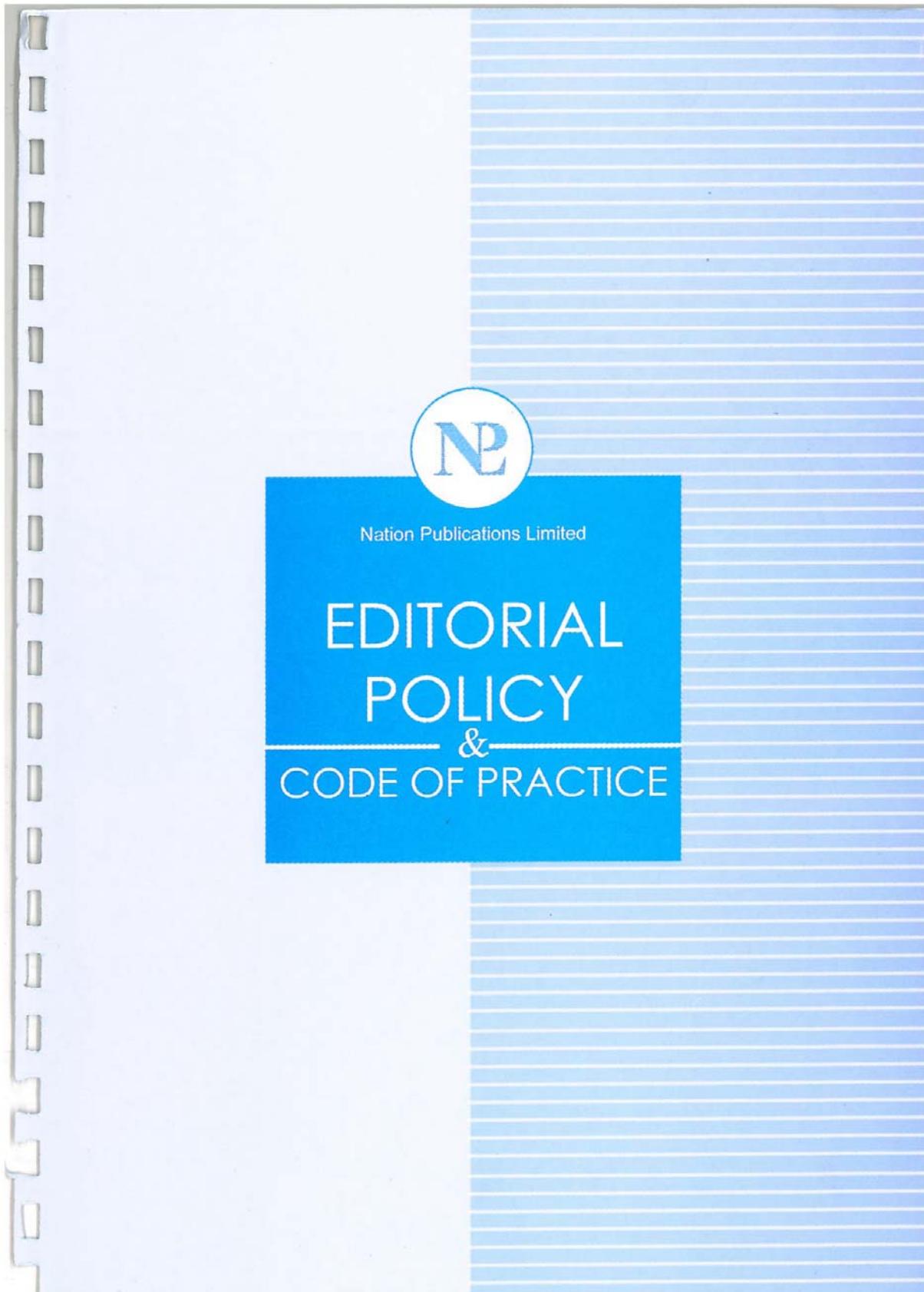
All the best with your studies.

Yours faithfully

Mbumba

Sent from my BlackBerry® smartphone provided by Airtel Malawi.

Addendum E: NPL Editorial Policy



1 FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION THE BIRTHRIGHT OF ALL

1.1 It is a fundamental constitutional right to have the freedom of opinion and expression. This includes the right to hold, receive and impart opinions. The press shall, to this end, have the right to report and publish freely and the right to be accorded the fullest possible facilities for access to public information. Freedom of the press shall mean and include that freedom from restraint which is essential to enable proprietors, editors and journalists of Nation publications to advance the public interest by publishing facts and opinions without which any democratic society cannot develop, progress or make responsible judgment.

1.2 The basic principle to be upheld is that the freedom of the press is indivisible from and subject to the same rights and duties as that of the individual and rests on the public's fundamental right to be informed and to freely receive and disseminate opinions.

2 MISSION

Nation Publications Limited (NPL) was established to promote and safeguard a democratic culture through objective reporting, free expression of opinion and critical debate and assist in nation building by offering innovative services that meet the needs of all stakeholders in Malawi and beyond by using advanced technology and expertise of dedicated, result-oriented staff

3 RELATIONS

3.1 Nation Shareholders, Directors and employees

All Nation shareholders, directors, employees and their spouses and children shall not be investigated except:-

- Where they assume public office or
- Where they are entrusted with public funds

3.2 Other media organisations

Nation shall not engage in media wars against other media organisations

Nation shall respect intellectual property law by crediting all sources of news and pictures

Nation shall not carry refutations of stories that appeared in a rival publication except:-

- Where Nation establishes that the story was false. or
- Where the paper that carried the story in question is unwilling to make a correction.

4 INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

Investigative journalism is an integral part of journalism and the only means of ensuring a corrupt-free society and shall be practised without fear or favour.

NATION PUBLICATIONS LIMITED CODE OF PRACTICE

Editors are responsible for the use of material submitted by journalists employed by Nation Publications limited. They should also satisfy themselves as far as possible that material contributed by non-staff members was obtained in accordance with this code.

This code demands self-restraint by editors and journalists, and it applies in the spirit as well as in the letter.

1 INDEPENDENCE

1.1 Freedom from obligations except of fidelity to the public interest is vital.

1.2 Nation publications shall stand on the principle that all persons are equal before the law and should not be swayed by any political, economic or other social prejudices.

1.3 Nation publications shall not allow themselves to be used privately for individual interests running counter to public interest as defined under section 8, or for worthless or immoral or illegal purposes.

1.4 The promotion of any private interest contrary to the public interest, for whatever reason, is forbidden as it is not compatible with honest journalism.

2 REPORTING NEWS

2.1 Nation Publications shall be obliged to report news truthfully, accurately and fairly.

2.2 News shall be presented in context and in a balanced manner, without an intentional or negligent departure from the facts whether by:-

- Distortion, exaggeration or misrepresentation
- Material omissions: or
- Summarisation

2.3 Only what may reasonably be true having to the source of the news may be represented as facts, and such facts shall be published fairly with due regard to context and importance.

2.4 Nation publications shall usually seek the views of the subject of serious critical reportage in advance of publication, provided that this may not be done where the newspaper has reasonable grounds for believing that by doing so it would be prevented from publishing the report or where evidence might be destroyed or witnesses intimidated.

2.5 Nation publications shall not publish information obtained by dishonest or unfair means, or the publication of which would involve a breach of confidence, unless there is an overriding public interest.

2.6 Nation publications shall not place gratuitous emphasis on the race, nationality, religion, colour, country of origin, gender, sexual preferences, marital status, political views or intellectual or physical disability of either individuals or groups, unless the fact is relevant.

3 ACCURACY

3.1 Nation publications shall take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted material.

3.2 Where there is reason to doubt the accuracy of a report and it is practicable to verify the accuracy thereof, it shall be verified. Where it has not been practicable to verify the accuracy of a report, this shall be mentioned in the report.

4 FACT AND OPINION

4.1 Nation publications shall clearly distinguish between fact and opinion. Generally factual material shall be based on some truth and should be capable of justification.

4.2 Opinions should equally have some factual basis and should not be conjured out of thin air.

4.3 Where a report is not based on facts or is founded on opinions, allegation, rumour or supposition, it shall be presented in such manner as to indicate this clearly.

4.4 Nation publications shall endeavour to make clear distinction between reports and expressions of the newspapers. News reports shall be free from the author's or the newspaper's opinion or bias of any kind.

5 ADVOCACY

Nation publications are justified in strongly advocating their own views on controversial topics provided that they treat their readers fairly by:-

- 5.1 Making fact and opinion clearly distinguishable.
- 5.2 Not misrepresenting or suppressing relevant facts
- 5.3 Not distorting the facts in text or headlines

6 COMMENT

- 6.1 Nation publications shall be entitled to comment upon or criticise any actions or events of public importance provided such comments or criticisms are fairly and honestly made.
- 6.2 Comment by Nation publications shall be presented in such manner that it appears clearly that it is comment, and shall be made on facts truly stated or fairly indicated and referred to.
- 6.3 Comment by Nation publications shall be an honest expression of opinion, without malice or dishonest motives, and shall take fair account of all available facts to the matter commented upon.

7 AFTER PUBLICATION

7.1 Nation publications should make amends for publishing information or comment that is found to be harmfully inaccurate by printing, promptly and with appropriate prominence, a retraction, correction or explanation.

7.2 An apology shall be published wherever deemed appropriate by the Editor.

7.3 A fair opportunity for reply to inaccuracies shall be given to individuals or organisations as appropriate at the Editor's discretion.

8 PRIVACY

8.1 Nation publications, in both news and comment, shall exercise exceptional care and consideration in matters involving the private lives and concerns of individuals, bearing in mind that any right to privacy or breach of confidence may be overridden by a legitimate public interest.

8.2 Publication is in the public interest if it helps in:-

- Detecting or exposing crime, misdemeanour or corrupt practices
- Detecting or exposing anti-social conduct
- Protecting public health and safety
- Preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of an individual or organisation

9 HOSPITALS

9.1 Except where it is in the public interest, reporters making enquiries at hospitals or similar health institutions shall clearly identify themselves to a responsible officer and obtain permission before entering non-public areas.

9.2 The restrictions on intruding into privacy are particularly relevant to enquiries about individuals in hospitals or similar health institutions.

10 MISREPRESENTATIONS

10.1 Journalists shall not generally obtain or seek to obtain information or pictures through misrepresentation or subterfuge except in the public interest.

10.2 Unless it is in the public interest, documents or photographs shall be removed only with the express consent of the owner.

10.3 Subterfuge shall be justified only in the public interest, and only when material cannot be obtained by any other means.

11 HEADLINES, POSTERS, PICTURES AND CAPTIONS

11.1 Headlines and captions to pictures shall give a reasonable reflection of the contents of the report or picture in question.

11.2 Posters shall not mislead the public and shall give a reasonable reflection of the contents of the reports in question.

11.3 Pictures shall not misrepresent or mislead or be manipulated to do so.

12 GATHERING INFORMATION

12.1 Nation journalists shall neither obtain nor seek to obtain information or pictures through intimidation or coercion, unless it is in the public interest.

12.2 Unless their queries are in the public interest, Nation journalists shall not photograph individuals on private property without their consent and shall not persist in telephoning or questioning individuals after having been asked to desist and shall not remain on their property after having been asked to leave and shall not follow them.

13 PAYMENT FOR ARTICLES

No payment or offers of payment shall be made for feature articles or information to witnesses or potential witnesses in current criminal proceedings or to people engaged in crime or to their associates, including family, friends, neighbours and colleagues except where the material concerned ought to be published in the public interest and the payment is necessary for this to be done.

14 BRIBES

14.1 Nation journalists shall not accept bribes from news sources or newsmakers or individuals or organisations.

14.2 Any gift received in the course of duty must be declared to the Editor and other editorial staff

14.3 Nation journalists shall not demand or receive any payment for news coverage from news sources

16 SOCIETAL MORALS

16.1 Reports, photographs or sketches relative to matters involving deaths, suicide, indecency or obscenity shall be presented with due sensitivity towards the prevailing moral climate.

16.2 In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries shall be carried out and any approach made with sympathy.

17 INNOCENT RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

Unless it is in the public interest, reporters shall generally avoid identifying relatives or friends of persons convicted or accused of crime.

18 JUVENILES

18.1 Reporters shall not normally interview or photograph children under the age of 18 on subjects involving the personal welfare of the child, in the absence of or without the consent of a parent or guardian.

18.2 Children shall not be interviewed or photographed while at school without the permission of the school authorities, unless in the public interest.

18.3 Nation journalists shall not reveal the name, address, school or any particulars that would lead to the identification of any person under the age of 18 who is involved in cases concerning sexual offences, whether as victims, or as witnesses or as accused persons unless the Court or the Minister rules otherwise.

19 VIOLENCE

Due care and responsibility shall be exercised by reporters with regard to the presentation of brutality, violence and atrocities. "

20 VICTIMS OF RAPE OR INDECENT ASSAULT OR SEXUAL HARRASSMENT

20.1 The identity of rape victims and other victims of sexual violence shall not be published by Nation publications without their consent.

20.2 The identity of perpetrators of sexual violence and their residence after serving prison terms shall not be protected by Nation publications.

21 REPORTING THE COURTS AND PARLIAMENT

Reporters shall report on Court and Parliamentary proceedings only subject to the restrictions imposed by either of them as per their orders

22 DISCRIMINATION

22.1 Nation publications shall avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to a person's race, religion, sex or sexual orientation or any physical or mental illness or disability.

22.2 Nation publications shall avoid publishing details of a person's race, colour, religion, nationality, country of origin, sex or sexual orientation, marital status, political views or intellectual or physical disability unless these are directly relevant to the story.

22.3 Nation publications shall avoid the use and publication of threatening, abusive or insulting words or material with the intention of stirring up racial hatred or in circumstances where racial hatred is likely to be stirred up.

23 COPYRIGHT

Nation Publications Limited shall own and have sole rights relating to intellectual property rights in the materials submitted and all copies thereof in whatever format. Nation journalists shall not use for their own purpose or profit information or material obtained or received during or in the course of their employment nor shall they pass on such information or material to others, prior to its publication.

24 MOONLIGHTING

Nation journalists shall not, unless with permission, have their stories or photographs published by any other media outlet deemed to have competing interests with Nation Publications Limited and shall declare their interest prior to rendering journalistic services to any other local or international media institutions.

25 CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES

Nation journalists have an obligation to protect confidential sources of information. However, the Editor must be given all sources of information by all journalists. Any information from a confidential source must be corroborated by at least two authentic and independent sources.

26 FAIR PLAY

Nation publications shall not publish unofficial charges affecting reputation or moral character without an opportunity being given to the accused to be heard as fair practice demands the giving of such opportunity in all cases of serious accusation outside judicial or parliamentary proceedings.

27 CONSULTATION

From time to time, where dealing with a sensitive story, the Editor may need to consult with Management. Sensitive stories shall be those that have serious national implications: such as the declaration of war, national disaster, revelations that can affect the position of the national economy, can cause national panic or panic on a wide scale, can cause civil strife or national strikes, etc.

28 DISREPUTE

28.1 While Nation publications shall use their own discretion in matters of taste, care shall be taken to avoid lapses of taste so repugnant as to bring the freedom of the press into disrepute or be extremely offensive to the public.

28.2 Nation journalists have a duty to uphold their professional ethics and conduct and must ensure that they do not bring the profession into disrepute.