

DRAFT VERSION

Theme: Crises of Democratisation

MCP to DPP: Democratising from Autocracy or Autocratising Democracy?

John Lloyd Chipembere Lwanda. MB ChB; FRCP; PhD.

Malawi was ruled by the 'strong-man' the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) led by Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who often boasted of being a dictator by the will of the people, from 1963 to 1994. Various imperatives for multiparty governance eventually forced his hand and he lost a referendum to those favouring a multi-party dispensation. In the 1994 elections, while the choice for Malawians was essentially between the 'autocratic despot' (Banda) and '*wakuba yemweyo*' (a person with a previous criminal record) (Bakili Muluzi), the voting pattern revealed voting on a regional or ethnic basis. After five years of Muluzi - a period characterized by conspicuous consumption by Muluzi and his fellow United Democratic Front (UDF) elite and their Alliance For Democracy (AFORD) allies, a failure to 'de-autocratise' Malawi and a marked increase in corruption, the UDF used its monetary advantage to win a second term. In 2003, the UDF attempted and failed to change the constitution to enable a third term for Muluzi, but managed, in 2004, to win a closely contested election with Bingu wa Mutharika, Muluzi's chosen successor, as the presidential candidate. Again there was a noticeable ethnic pattern to the voting. As soon as Mutharika was in power, he distanced himself from the UDF and formed his own party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Between 2004 and 2009, despite the opposition harassing Mutharika's government and blocking legislation, Mutharika managed to deliver an impressive economic performance. He managed this by co-opting any willing AFORD, MCP and UDF MPs to his cause. He also astutely exploited Banda's legacy and memory to appeal to MCP members and to sections of Dr Banda's Chewa constituency. In 2009, once Muluzi had been prevented from standing again, the choice was between JZU Tembo's centre-heavy MCP and Mutharika's southern-heavy DPP. In the event Mutharika achieved a nation-wide landslide popular win. This paper examines the economic, political, social, ethnic and other factors that contributed to Mutharika's landslide win and speculates on whether this win is a consolidation of democracy or a possible return to autocracy.

MCP to DPP: Democratising from Autocracy or Autocratising Democracy?

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MCP to DPP!

DPP to UDF!

UDF to MCP!

Do not doubt, you will see

What has to be will just be! (Lwanda, 2005)¹

I

Introduction

Ia *Dr Banda: the father of the nation*

Palibe mfumu ina, yoposa Kamuzu (There is no greater chief than Kamuzu)

Omenya nkhondo ndi mau okha! (He fights war only with words!)²

And

Kamuzu ndi Mkango eh! eh! eh! (Kamuzu is a lion!)³

Discussions of democracy or autocracy often cite pre-colonial and colonial antecedents.⁴ Some observers have cited Malawi's hierarchical and male dominated cultures as contributory.⁵ Some have detected the roots of autocracy in the nationalist movement and the colonial state response to it.⁶ Yet others have cited events – and actors - in the early months of independence as pivotal in developing and entrenching autocracy.⁷

At any rate, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Malawi's first President, helped by a team including, variously and sequentially, Kanyama Chiume, Albert Muwalo Nqumayo, Aleke Banda, Bakili Muluzi, John Tembo and others, built up a formidable mass political party that ruled Malawi for three decades.⁸ Observers saw Banda using the force of his personality, clever politics, clever hortatory leadership, imaginative use of culture, Machiavellian use of patronage and repressive use of force to prevail.⁹ Banda's construct was based on: the use of his personality cult which included the *mbumba*; the observance of the four cornerstones of loyalty, obedience, unity and discipline; the elimination of rivals; the exploitation of international factors; the neutering of some strong traditional societies; the rigid control of the party machinery; the use of preventative detention laws; the emasculation of parliament; the

¹ Lwanda, J. L. 2008. Politics, Parties and Privilege: Rapping for reasons. In *The Rhino's Lament*. Glasgow: Dudu Nsomba., page 32.

² Nationalist song of the 1950s and 1960s.

³ Nationalist chant of the 1950s and 1960s.

⁴ Cf. Ray, D. I. And Reddy, P. S. (Eds) 2003. *Grassroots governance?: Chiefs in Africa and the Afro-Caribbean*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press.

⁵ Cf. Lwanda, J.L.C. 1993. *Kamuzu Banda of Malawi*. Glasgow: Dudu Nsomba Publications; and Forster, P. G 1994. Culture, nationalism, and the invention of tradition in Malawi. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 32, 3: 477 - 497.

⁶ Cf. McCracken, J. 1998 Democracy and nationalism in historical perspective: the case of Malawi. *African Affairs*, 97: 231 – 250

⁷ Lwanda, J. L. 1993, *Kamuzu Banda*; and Ross, A. C. 2008 *Colonialism to Cabinet Crisis*. Zomba: Kachere.

⁸ Cf. Mkandawire, A.C., *Albert Muwalo Nqumalo: His Life and Times, His death and Legacy*. Balaka: Montfort Media; Ross, AC, 1997. 'Some reflections on the Malawi Cabinet Crisis, 1964 -65, *Religion in Malawi*, 1 - 7, and Lwanda, J. 1996, *Promises, power Politics and Poverty*, Glasgow: Dudu Nsomba Publications.

⁹ Joffe, S. H. 1973: Political culture and communication in Malawi: the hortatory regime of Dr Banda. PhD Thesis, Boston University and Hooper, J 'The Politics of Patronage: an Assessment of the political economy of Malawi Since Independence', University of York, M.A. dissertation, 1984

strict control of the press; the use of the army, police and paramilitary Malawi Young Pioneers; the silencing of the Churches, professions and civil society organizations; the silencing and marginalization of intellectuals; the use of expatriates and the control of the judiciary and justice system.¹⁰

Banda, born in 1898, was always fired by a desire to 'obtain an education and be of service to my homeland'. He eventually obtained education in the USA and Scotland before becoming a GP in England after the Nyasaland Government had frustrated his attempts at returning to Malawi as the 'equal of any white man'. In the late 1940s and early 1950s his house in London was one of those meeting points for African nationalists. From London he was able to influence, by his energy and will power, certain aspects of the Nyasaland African Congress. It is a measure of the power of his personality and leadership that within two years of returning to Malawi, in 1958, he was the Malawi Congress Party's absolute leader and by 1971 he was President for Life.¹¹

Ib

The Transition

Zinthu zatani? Zasintha (The politicians view)

Zinthu zasintha Malamulo sanasinthe (Saleta Phiri, musician)¹²

In order to loosen Dr Banda's hold on Malawi all these pillars had to be shaken.¹³ And yet a number of observers saw the transition from Dr Banda to multiparty rule as easy or smooth and peaceful. The absence of violence, *Operation Bwezani* excepted,¹⁴ was cited as a good example of the peaceful nature of the transition.¹⁵ Indeed *Bwezani* itself, given its mere de-arming of the Malawi Young Pioneers without toppling Dr Banda from power,¹⁶ is often held up as an example of some inherent orderliness in the Malawi transition; though some saw it as a transition without leadership.¹⁷

I would argue that, just as the South African transition from apartheid to black rule was remarkable for its lack of violence because, as some suggested, there was a compromise between the African National Congress (ANC) and the white-dominated military-industrial complex,¹⁸ so it was that in Malawi a comparable compromise occurred. This formidable Banda autocratic construct - despite the façade of its makeover during the transition, complete with an elaborate new constitution and the 'freedom of expression' - was inherited

¹⁰ Lwanda, J 2009 *Kamuzu Banda of Malawi: Promise, Power and Legacy*. Zomba: Kachere.

¹¹ For details of Dr Banda's life history see Short, P. 1974. *Banda*. Routledge and Kegan. London; Lwanda, J 1993. *Kamuzu Banda of Malawi*. Glasgow: Dudu Nsomba; and Ross, A. C. 2008. *Colonialism to Cabinet Crisis*. Zomba: Kachere.

¹² Phiri, Saleta. 1998. 2000. *Zinthu zasintha, Malamulo sanasinthe*. On the CD *Ndirande Blues*. Glasgow: Pamtondo

¹³ Cf. Lwanda. 1993. *Kamuzu Banda* and Lwanda. 1996. *Promises*; Chimombo, Steve, and Chimombo. Moira. 1996. *The Culture of Democracy: Language, Literature, the Arts, and Politics in Malawi, 1992-1994*. Limbe, WASI. and Phiri, K. M and Ross, K. R. 1998 (Eds) 1998. *Democratisation in Malawi: a Stocktaking*. Zomba: Kachere.

¹⁴ During *Operation Bwezani* the Malawi Army dis-armed the Malawi Young Pioneers, Dr Banda's MCP paramilitary wing. The perceived lack of casualties in that exercise may be due to the fact that journalists were excluded from the exercise.

¹⁵ Cf. Venter, D 1995. 'Malawi: The transition to multi-party rule' In Wiseman, J A. 1995 *Democracy and Political Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*: London: Routledge, pages 152 - 192.

¹⁶ Chirambo, R. 2004. 'Operation Bwezani: the army, political change, and Dr Banda's Hegemony in Malawi', *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 12,2, pages 146 - 163.

¹⁷ Page, M. 1992 'Malawi: Revolution without Leadership?' *Southern Africa Report*, 8, 1,

¹⁸ See Kriger, N. And Bond, P. 1995. 'Negotiations and the Military in South Africa', available at <http://www.jstor.org/pss/4187034>.

by Bakili Muluzi and his colleagues almost wholesale.¹⁹ In support of this contention is the fact that the senate was rubbed off the constitutional implementation, the new president remained very executive, patronage thrived, ‘MCP party culture’ – complete with the *mbumba* phenomenon - was copied wholesale, and the various Machiavellian tricks the colonial regime and Banda had developed, including the ethnic balancing techniques, were maintained. Indeed, many of the same crucial people from the previous two decades of Dr Banda’s rule – like Bakili Muluzi, Edward Bwanali and Aleke Banda, together with their business associates - came to dominate the United Democratic Front (UDF) or MCP ‘B’ Team as Chakufwa Chihana of the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) dubbed it.²⁰ At the time Chakufwa Chihana was the leader of AFORD, a party that then had the promise of being the most ‘ideological’ of all the major parties in Malawi.

The compromise in South Africa was predicated on the need to maintain the economy and jobs for stability in the hope of preventing white flight and black unemployment. In Malawi, with a smaller agricultural and small scale commercial-based economy, similar imperatives prevailed. The United Democratic *Front* (UDF), not a party, but a collection of interest groups led by business patrimonials and neo-patrimonials prevailed in the compromise.²¹ One of the victims of this moving front, ruthlessly marginalized as a presidential aspirant at the UDF Convention of 1993, was Bingu wa Mutharika, who later formed his own United Party (UP) in 1999. As Mapanje suggested, Malawi had been ‘democratised’ but not ‘de-autocratised’.²²

It is a measure of the power of release from autocracy that voters will, at the first opportunity, afford perceived liberators tremendous liberties and latitudes. So strong was this imperative, in the 1994 presidential elections, that people, openly and proudly, preferred *wakuba yemweyo* (better the thief) to the *wakupha* (the killer). The absence of a critical media perhaps partly explains the lack of critical analysis of the nature of those who were ranged against Dr Banda in the underground phase of the transition, during the referendum for or against multi-party rule, during the drafting of the new constitution and during the first democratic election campaign in 1993 – 1994. While the present paper cannot go into some of the crucial factors in detail, it is essential to highlight a number of them.

In the western democratic models constitutions are held to be the repository of ‘possibilities and limits’ to democratic political activity. The drafting of the Malawi constitution is a classic study in conflict, collusion and confusion. The motives and interests of the business-politicians, intellectuals, donors, newly-liberated lawyers and their foreign advisers, religious leaders and others confusingly conflicted, collided and compromised.²³ The ‘perfect document’ preserved an ‘executive presidency with powers that are all but impossible to challenge. A prime ministerial system was rejected (it would not have controlled enough patronage); the senate was still-born and, while the constitution trumpeted the right to press freedom (section 36), the national media MBC and TVM were soon to be as tightly controlled as under Banda. Thus, during the 1999, 2004 and 2009 elections ruling party got blanket coverage.²⁴

Muluzi’s first term has been seen by some commentators as successful in consolidating democracy and in certain economic aspects. But this is a partial reading of the

¹⁹ Cf. Englund, H. (ed) 2002. *A democracy of chameleons: politics and culture in the New Malawi*. Uppsala: Nordic African Institute

²⁰ Cf. Lwanda. 1996. *Promises*.

²¹ *ibid*

²² Mapanje, J. 1995. ‘Orality and the memory of justice’. *Leeds African Studies Bulletin*, 60, 1995, pages 9 - 21.

²³ Cf. Ng’ong’ola, C. 2002. ‘Judicial Mediation in Electoral Politics in Malawi’ In H. Englund (Ed) *A democracy of Chameleons*, pages 62 – 86.

²⁴ Tobias Jere and Turnbull, B. 2009. ‘Is this the End of Regionalism or Going Back to a One Party State?’ Lilongwe, Centre for Social Concern, May 2009, page 5.

situation. While Muluzi was, in the public sphere, the perfect personification of ‘a man of the people’, the president who cared, was pro-development, attended funerals and ‘Robin Hood-like’ gave money to the poor, entertained them with self-deprecating jokes, behind the scenes he was entrenching autocracy. Muluzi had developed a great love for the practice and trappings of power. Between 1994 and 1999 he slowly neutered his executive with a strong unaccountable cabal emerging around the president and he developed a culture of ‘presidential directives and indulged in the ‘raping the constitution’ (for example introducing a second vice president), and ultimately was developing the discourse and actions of autocracy.

To continue the South Africa example, Muluzi and his associates, instead of instituting a Truth and Reconciliation exercise in which, as previous actors in the Banda regime, some of them may have been found culpable,²⁵ instead went for the acquisition of the Press Group of companies, Malawi’s biggest company. To wrestle control of Press from Banda, he had to put his predecessor on trial.²⁶ Press was required to consolidate the UDFs resources for what we could term the patronage of democratic autocracy. Under Banda, people donated money; with Muluzi people got money at his rallies. This money had to come from somewhere. But just as the openly autocratic Banda regime was ‘parasitical’ on the populace via donations, the Muluzi administration was ‘parasitical’ on the population by misusing money from Press, donor money (from all sources) intended for development projects and other internal businesses while giving people at mass rallies impressive ‘peanuts’ As some commentators put it, to illustrate the change in circumstances ‘Banda abused profits while Muluzi abused both capital and profits.’²⁷

Muluzi’s democratic credentials were further challenged when he instituted his attempt at passing a Third Presidential Term Bill (*ayimanso*). The violence of money in politics was seen to the extent to which, within ten years of the release from Banda, Muluzi nearly succeeded in reducing Malawi to an Equatorial Guinea, where the president has been in power for two decades, in political terms. The Third Presidential Term Bill was only defeated by three votes in Parliament. He had, it is alleged, even designed his son as a possible successor in 2009.

The subject of Muluzi’s presidentialism has yet to be explored to any great depth. Muluzi, a former civil service clerk who rose from a civil service clerk with a theft charge in 1968 to the Secretary-Generalship of the Malawi Congress Party (effectively then deputy to Dr Banda) eleven years later, has a life history that shows great ambition and self-confidence. Once, during Dr Banda’s visit abroad, and at a time when Malawians were scared to show pretensions to power, an American Peace Corps visitor found Muluzi with his feet on his desk. ‘I am in charge [my friend], running Malawi’, Muluzi said to his surprised guest back in 1981. As a former Malawi Young Pioneers instructor, Muluzi had over the years studied the political methods and culture of his mentor Dr Banda. Indeed, to overcome Banda between 1991 and 1994, Muluzi and his associates had to study the methods that had made Banda succeed. As one of Muluzi’s long-term colleagues put it in June 1995, ‘What shall we

²⁵ Cf. Ross, K., 1998. ‘Does Malawi (still) need a Truth Commission’, In K. Phiri, and K. Ross, (Eds) 1998 *Democratisation in Malawi: a stocktaking*, page 341.

²⁶ See Van Donge, Jan K. 1998. ‘The Mwanza Trial as a Search for a Usable Malawian Political Past’, *African Affairs*. Volume 97, 386 January, 1998. pp. 91-118 and van Donge, JK. 2002. ‘The fate of an African ‘chaebol’: Malawi’s Press Corporation after democratisation’ *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 40, 4, 651-681.

²⁷ For details of the charges laid against Muluzi see the Malawi Anti-Corruption Bureau website accessed 12/11/09 at http://www.sdn.org.mw/ruleoflaw/acb/latest_briefing.html and Banda, Mabvuto. ‘Malawi arrests former leader Muluzi over corruption’, accessed 11/11/09 at <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKTRE51P4I020090226>

call the man who has conquered the lion?'.²⁸ To his credit Muluzi did not succumb to the temptation to which his successor Bingu wa Mutharika did, to call himself Ngwazi. He did however accept the aGama title in an effort to build ethnic bridges with the Ngoni Jere and the Chewa and before finally calling himself *atcheya* (the chairman). Muluzi's use of power was so great that, while using the discourses of democracy, he interfered with all aspects of governance including judges and even attempted to impeach four of them.²⁹

Ultimately, Muluzi's Third Term attempt foundered on opposition from church leaders as they perceived Muluzi as pursuing an 'Islamisation agenda' and a civil society which had become afraid of a return to autocracy.³⁰ However, the Islamisation agenda has been overstated. Malawi Muslims, like Muslims elsewhere in Africa, had been constrained – and sometimes suppressed - during the era of dictatorships and strong-man regimes. After the transition to multi-party rule, like their Christian brothers, Muslims began asserting themselves. Some of this self-assertion was mistaken for an Islamisation agenda. Muluzi's success in ruling Malawi for ten years was based on a modification of Banda's methods. Muluzi used money for patronage, young democrats (thugs who enforced some UDF patrimonial political wishes), the police, ethnic and other Machiavellian tricks where Banda had used repression, the *mbumba* and the Malawi Young Pioneers.³¹

Muluzi's hand-picking a successor, and making himself the Chairperson of the UDF (after the Third Term attempt had failed) in order to perpetuate his rule, and his attempts at standing again in 2009, indirectly and directly emphasized his autocratic tendencies. The Muluzi administration therefore, despite the perceived superficial façade of promoting democracy, while working within and subverting and amending the new constitution to suit Muluzi's dictates, began the process of 'democratising autocracy'.³²

II

The New Lion

Born in 1934, Bingu wa Mutharika's politically formative years lie in the nationalist era of the 1960's, a period of strong man leaders like Banda, Kaunda and Mugabe.³³ He was educated with many of those who became Malawi nationalists and he worked in the Malawi civil service before leaving for Zambia. Had he stayed he would have been one of the most senior African civil servants. His civil service career included working in Malawi in the run up to the Cabinet Crisis (1963 - 1964) and working in Zambia in 1965 – 1966, a time when Kaunda was consolidating his hold on the United National Independence Party (UNIP). Mutharika then worked for various international non-governmental organizations, including the United Nations, the World Bank and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). In these organizations Mutharika was, from the 1980s, in an executive

²⁸ Lwanda, 1996. *Promises*, page 16.

²⁹ See for example See Anon. Muluzi and Judiciary clash over Third Term accessed 10/11/09 at [Hhttp://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/2024844.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/2024844.stm)

And Tenthani, R. 'Malawi's prisoners back judges' accessed 10/11/09 at [Hhttp://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1667045.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1667045.stm)

³⁰ Cf. Ross, K. R. 2004. Worrysome Trends: The voice of the churches in Malawi's Third Term Debate. *African Affairs* 103:91-107. <http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/103/410/91>

³¹ Lwanda, J. L. 2006. *Kwacha: The Violence of Money in Malawi's Politics, 1954–2004*, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32, 3, pages. 525-544.

³² Maroleng, C. 2003. Situation report: Malawi: the slippery slope towards autocracy. Accessed 2/11/09 at [Hhttp://www.iss.co.za/af/current/Malawi_Slipslop.html](http://www.iss.co.za/af/current/Malawi_Slipslop.html) and the International Commission of Jurists Report *Malawi – Final Report of a fact-finding Mission and trial observation to Malawi* accessed 13/11/09 at [Hhttp://www.icj.org/news.php3?id_article=2781&lang=en](http://www.icj.org/news.php3?id_article=2781&lang=en)

³³ See the official DPP biography of Bingu wa Mutharika, My 2009.

role for most of his time, so much that this ‘executive’ experience and manner got him in trouble with his COMESA committee.³⁴

Back in 1993, Mutharika was on the intellectual, liberal democratic wing of the UDF. But even then he clearly had presidential ambitions; he wrote about his ‘shared vision for Malawi’ for Malawi. However, at the first UDF Convention at the Natural Resources College, in Lilongwe in December 1993, the executive refused him permission to stand. As Cassim Chilumpha, then one of the UDFs spokes persons said at the time:

Why should we let someone who has called us all sorts of names in the past come and stand as president of our party?³⁵

After the Convention Bingu wa Mutharika still featured in the UDF shadow cabinet, but resigned soon after, prompting the *Chronicle's* satirical demand: ‘Mutharika's resignation: is it a vision?’³⁶ Although it was paradoxical that one new blood politician was marginalising another, Chilumpha had good cause to complain since Mutharika's articles had rankled among some of the UDF founders. Mutharika's articles and spoken word had resonated with those of Chihana who had labelled the UDF the ‘MCP B team’. Mutharika had perhaps failed to acknowledge the considerable personal sacrifice in terms of time, personal security and money the core UDF founders had made.³⁷ That snub and Chilumpha's role in it contributed to the latter friction between the two men. Between 2005 and 2008, Chilumpha, despite being Mutharika's vice-president, was to be confined to house arrest for ‘plotting to kill the president’.

After his forced removal from COMESA by its board, he formed the United Party. This party failed to secure him the presidency in 1999. Surprisingly, despite his antipathy to him at the national UDF convention in 1993, Muluzi appointed him deputy governor of the Reserve Bank of Malawi in 1999.³⁸ It was from this post that he was hand-picked for the UDF presidential candidature. But it was clear even before the elections that Mutharika would do a ‘Mwanawasa’³⁹ on Muluzi; those who knew Mutharika were aware that he was ‘his own man’.

The rupture with Muluzi when it came was therefore not that surprising. There were many reasons for this rupture: the need for Mutharika to exercise power unencumbered; Muluzi's unconstitutional demands and the animosity of some of the UDF executive who had never forgiven Mutharika for taking over the presidency.⁴⁰ Even though, undoubtedly grateful to have been hand-picked for the job, Mutharika had been humiliated by Muluzi throughout the campaign. He was made to play second fiddle to Muluzi in his own election campaign. While Muluzi would, literally, strut his *Atcheya* act, he would only permit Mutharika, the very proud candidate, to speak for ‘two minutes at each rally’. He would not have enjoyed this experience.⁴¹ Thus when Muluzi began to expect Mutharika, the state president to answer to him, something had to give. Mutharika left the UDF and formed his own Democratic People's Party (DPP) with only six MPs. The DPP was formed without original MPs and had to depend on defectors from UDF and MCP. Some ‘opportunistic’

³⁴ Edozie, R. K. 2008. *Reconstructing the Third Wave of Democracy: Comparative African Democratic Politics*, Lanham: University of America, page xii; and Phiri, Grace. 2004. ‘From grass to grace’ *New African*, August, 2004, accessed 1/11/09 at <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/New+African/2004/August/1-p5569>.

³⁵ Lwanda, 1996, page 150 – 151.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, pages 79 – 226.

³⁸ This move is characteristic of some of Muluzi's appointment of former opponents whom he had previously defeated politically or economically.

³⁹ Taylor, S. D. 2006. *Culture and Customs of Zambia*, Westport: Greenwood Press, page 23.

⁴⁰ Mpira, B. 2009. ‘We parted ways because of Atupele’. *The Daily Times*, 15th May 2009, page 2.

⁴¹ For some flavour of the 2004 elections see Ott, M.; Bodo, I. Mhango, B and Christian Peters-Berries (Eds) *The power of the vote: Malawi's 2004 parliamentary and presidential elections*. Zomba: Kachere.

defectors like Dr Hetherwick Ntaba had defected from the MCP to the UDF and then to the DPP.⁴² Because his party was in the minority in Parliament and he had to fight to prevent his MPs from being recalled under Section 65, he had to depend on other parties to pass legislation. Mutharika was, as president, also forced to use presidential directives.

In political terms the rupture was so violent that it forced UDF MPs and party supporters to choose between two sources of power and patronage. Many of the UDF supporters who should have joined got caught between the old patronage chest Muluzi had built and the new one Mutharika was beginning to construct. Significantly, reflecting the origins of the two parties, many big business supporters, particularly those from the South went with Mutharika while the vendors and small minibus types stuck with Muluzi. But this 'top-down' DPP party initially found favour with many sections of civil society and some church leaders who saw Muluzi as a 'defeated corrupt former president' trying to prevent a new 'clean' president from carrying out his development agenda. Muluzi himself had dubbed Mutharika 'the economic engineer'. Again, as during the transition from Banda, people were happy to welcome anyone 'but Muluzi'.

From 2005 until 2008, Mutharika impressed Malawians with his economic performance particularly in the field of agriculture. This was despite a full frontal assault by his former colleagues in the UDF which took the form of refusal to pass some legislation in Parliament, including the budget in 2006 and 2007. Hardcore UDF supporters refused to accept that he had abandoned the party that put him in power. On the other hand, happy with his performance, civil society ignored his growing assurance marked by his self-given name of *chitsulo cha njanje* (as in man of steel).

Mutharika eagerly faced the need to co-opt former UDF and MCP figures. In so doing he also alienated his original supporters like Uladi Mussa and Zikhale Ngoma. Like Banda, he ditched initial supporters who subsequently disagreed with him on tactics and policy.

In the run up to the 2009 election Mutharika surrounded himself with a strategic team that planned the tactics of the impending political campaign. This campaign was to recruit religion, ethnicity, the media, money, culture and music. He built alliances with natural supporters of the MCP in the Central Region, via Dr Banda's family. By exploiting the Banda legacy and name he was able to become identified as *Ngwazi* number 2, a title bestowed upon him by the Inkosi Mbelwa. Mutharika went further and restored Banda's name to a number of structures from which the name had been removed by Muluzi. He also completed Banda's mausoleum, a project the UDF had promised but had never completed. Mutharika also built a heroes' acre with a bronze statue of Dr Banda as its main feature.⁴³ Mutharika also made some alliances with some elements from the north. During the election campaign there was great and imaginative and entertaining use of state propaganda; opposition groups were virtually denied access to the MBC and TVM.

In the event Mutharika won the elections with a big 2,946,103 votes to MCP candidate JZU Tembo's 1,370,044.

Mutharika's second administration has been characterized by an uncompromising strong-man presidential style. He has, like Banda before him, allowed himself to become more identified with one ethnic group, his own Lomwe tribe. A Lomwe cultural heritage group, Mulhako wa aLomwe, was formed and he endorsed and became its patron. In this respect he went further than Banda, who although identifying himself as Chewa and imposing Chewa on the country, claimed 'all tribes were Maravi. The initial tentative alliances with the Tumbuka were strained when he endorsed the return of a quota system in educational selection for university. And, like the Muluzi of 1994 whose supporters shouted '*wina afune*

⁴² See various press comments of the time.

⁴³ Kashoti, D. 2009. 'Kamuzu Day: JZU, Muluzi both absent'. *The Daily Times*, 15th May 2009, page 1.

asafune 1999 wooo! (whether someone likes it or not, we are in power till 1999 and *beyond!*, his supporters began to talk of '*2014 wooo!*'

The culture of DPP rule, with its presidential directives, government media monopoly, tendency to ignore parliamentary committees, judicial interference and the use of the law for political reasons and weak cabinet, though resembling Muluzi's in some respects, was more like Dr Banda's. Unlike Muluzi's core supporters of vendors, minibus operators and small business people, Mutharika's core supporters were those with relatively big business concerns. In contrast to Banda, who looked to the West for aid money and multinational business political donor cum investors, and Muluzi, who looked to the Middle East (religion thought to play a part) and Taiwan (a generous ally over the years) for funding, Mutharika looked to countries like Australia, Portugal and China for funding. Significantly, while Muluzi's funders were looking for ideological friendships and were being begged for aid by Muluzi, Mutharika's partners are countries that leverage business over politics (uranium, timber, cotton and other products).⁴⁴

Whilst Muluzi interfered with government and parastatal contract awarding, favouring those in his patronage circle, Mutharika, an economist, has also interfered with the commercial sector: he ordered minimum tobacco prices at the auction floors and ordered the *kwacha* not to be devalued. And he ordered the closure forex bureaux, blaming them for the scarcity of forex in the country. But Mutharika has so far been lucky with the weather, between 2004 and 2008 the rains fell well and Malawi had bumper harvests. His starter-pack programme for fertilizer has been credited with contributing to bumper harvests and food security.

If UDF had a democratic autocracy based on *atcheya* – one that enabled vendors and minibus operators and other small to medium traders to have input in policy; overall Bingu appears to favour big business elements.

Discussion

In the last two decades various notions, perceptions and theories of postcolonial political economic cultural development in Africa have been advanced. They vary and include Afro-pessimism, through Chabal and Daloz 'disorder theory',⁴⁵ via Bayart's 'politics of the belly',⁴⁶ to the most Afro-optimistic. While some, like Bayart's have much to recommend them, they are only partial explanations, not frame works for more comprehensive understandings. My view is that Ekeh's 'two publics' framework offers a better understanding of postcolonial African political culture and processes.⁴⁷ Colonialism did, after all, bequeath us a major dual heritage: the urban and the rural. Most of the poor *anthu wamba* are from the rural areas and the rich *opeza bwino* and western educated tend to be urban based. While other factors like ethnicity and religion have tended to figure more in discussions of African politics, the urban/rural divide with its inbuilt educational/economic/global advantages and disadvantages has tended to be less discussed. And yet the clever politicians, who usually have strong foot-holds in each 'public' exploit this advantage and recruit those other factors to succeed.

One could argue that, at one level, despite the superficial appearance,⁴⁸ both post-Banda regimes have advanced the culture of 'democratic autocracy'. Democratic autocracy here refers to the process where an elected regime diverts from its initial agenda, exploiting

⁴⁴ See for example Ng'ambi, M. 2009. 'Government defends Kayelekera tax benefits'. *Weekend Nation*, 16th May 2009, page 3.

⁴⁵ Chabal, P. and Daloz, J-P. 1999. *Africa works: disorder as political instrument* London, James Currey.

⁴⁶ Bayart, J-F. 1993: *The state in Africa: the politics of the belly*. London, Longman.

⁴⁷ Ekeh P. 1975. 'Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A theoretical statement', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 17, 1.

⁴⁸ But Cf UNAIDS classification of Malawi as 'partially free'.

culture, ethnicity, religion,⁴⁹ economic and other factors to build a core governing alliance which then runs the agenda. Any dissenting voices or spaces are then easily marginalised. This, at parliamentary level is shown by: the fluid crossing over of MPs to the winning side and the way the ruling party ignores parliamentary committees' decisions.⁵⁰ At the judicial level this is shown by state interference in the judiciary, beginning with the functions of the Anti-Corruption Bureau to the appointment of judges. In the case of Malawi the state effectively controls the functioning of Anti-Corruption Bureau via its appointee the Director of Public Prosecutions. Despite the plethora of press and oral comments and discussions no 'big fish' have yet to be prosecuted. Those that have have either been sacrificial lambs, like Dennis Kambalame of the Petroleum Commission or Sam Mpasu. In the case of Muluzi the process has been so protracted that doubts are being expressed about the governments' real intentions.⁵¹

At the public sphere level, this is demonstrated by the way the state monopolises the media, ensuring that only government views are heard.

In the political arena, this is seen by 'buying off' of politicians, particularly promising young ones. For example, during the tail-end of the Banda era, Du Chisiza Jr was co-opted into the MCP not, it must be said, with considerable willingness on his part. During the UDF era younger and newer politicians like Mapopa Chipeta, Mayinga Mkandawire and Mekki Mtewa were co-opted into the system. During the DPP era Billy Kaunda and a host of new entrants to politics, many highly educated, have been attracted to the DPP and many of those who stood as 'independents' subsequently moved to the winning side.⁵² All these people cited democracy and development as the reasons for standing under DPP colours. How that equates with a party in power that is back-tracking on local government and is seeking to increase presidential tenure from five to seven years is yet to be argued. The only argument advanced so far is that 'opposition MPs do not deliver development, only governing MPs', a potent argument for a one-party state.

A telling manifestation of the two publics phenomenon is the way post-Banda governments have managed to thwart the growth of local government by postponing elections, under-funding local government and continuing with the dominant role of the 'district commissioner', central governments representative in each district, a relic from colonial days. Given that local government is much closer to people's voices and concerns, particularly in the socio-economic sphere, it is clear that there is a continuing and, in the absence of a strong Malawi civil society, self-perpetuating momentum for the '*ife tonse boma*' (we are all government) mentality in which to be a dissident is to place oneself out of the *boma*.

I argue then that there is an element of a democratic autocracy. While Muluzi was the undisputed *atcheya*, the source of all funds and final arbiter of policy in the UDF, in the DPP Mutharika is the *chitsulo cha njanje*, the man of steel, *Mose wa lero* (today's Moses). Some critics have already compared Bingu to Dr Banda.⁵³

Orality and leadership:

⁴⁹ See for example Mmana, D. 2009. 'Priests favour DPP?' *Nation*, 16th May 2009, page 1.

⁵⁰ See for example BBC Focus on Africa 'Democracy being undermined' says Malawi's deposed opposition leader. Accessed 18/11/08 at http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/2009/11/091118_tembo.shtml

⁵¹ See for example *Nyasa Times* comment 'Muluzi trial exposes Thyolo-Lomwe tribalism'. Accessed 15/11/09 at <http://www.nyasatimes.com/columns/muluzi-trial-exposes-thyolo-lomwe-tribalism.html/comment-page-3> and Muwamba, E. 2009. 'Muluzi to take plea – court'. *The Nation*, 11 August, 2009.

⁵² Nyirongo, E. 'Independents flock to DPP'. *Nation*, 25th May 2009, page 3; and MANA 'CZ independent joins DPP', *Daily Times*, May 25th 2009.

⁵³ Cf. Tobias Jere and Turnbull, B. 2009. 'Is this the End of Regionalism or Going Back to a One Party State?' Lilongwe, Centre for Social Concern, May 2009, page 6.

The narratives of democratic autocratic power are orally driven.⁵⁴ The oral messages talk of power, eminence and omnipotence; leaders once democratically elected are lionised: *Ngwazi, Kumtunda* (The highest authority). Narratives of empowerment and disempowerment, e.g. *ife tonse boma* (we are all government), *wina alira* (someone [on the wrong/losing side] will be sorry), *2014 woooo!* (like it or lump it we are governing to 2014 and beyond). Using this popular discourse a minority group can arise from within an elected majority to become politically and patronage empowered to such an extent that by the next election they are unbeatable. In this political methodology, the identity and personality of the leader matters; the leader needs personality, charisma or mystique to succeed. Muluzi was born with bags of charm and a smooth tongue. And it was Muluzi who unwittingly endowed mysterious powers on Mutharika, praising him as an ‘adviser to over twenty presidents’ and, ‘an economic engineer’.

Once the culture of democratic autocracy takes root it recruits other factors, a significant one being the construct of a culture of leadership. Here only the leader has ideas and these ideas form most of the developmental thrust. And all developmental ideas emanate from the leader. This recruits and encourages a culture of anti-intellectualism and, as in Dr Banda’s days, neuters civil society,⁵⁵ facilitating the buying of civil society leaders who become mere technocrats and interpreters of the leader’s or winning party’s ideas. In Dr Banda Malawians had a man who was determined to obtain an education and be of ‘service’ to his homeland. His history shows a man of steel determination even in the 1930s and 1940s. Thus when he was given the chance to lead he took it and held on to it absolutely. Muluzi, often underestimated because of his limited formal education has a life history which also shows great ambition and determination: from a civil service clerk in 1968 to the Secretary General of the Malawi Congress Party eleven years later. The leaders of political parties in Malawi tend to remain leaders ‘for life’. In the wake of the 2009 elections, the MCP has found it almost impossible to remove the ‘tired old man’ JZU Tembo from the leadership.⁵⁶

Mutharika’s life history also shows similar determination and strong will. And all three have shown a penchant for honours awards and titles. A further feature shared by all three leaders is the tendency to fall out and completely marginalize some of their original supporters: Banda with Henry Chipembere and Kanyama Chiume; Muluzi with Charles Kahumbe and Arthur Makhaira, and Mutharika with Zikhale Ngoma and Uladi Mussa.

This short paper attempts to point to a growing tradition of an elected autocracy becoming the norm in Malawi; the initial popular democracy becomes channeled into a narrow spectrum of a patronage-based cabal around the presidency who control politics, business and the economy – until the next election. In the case of Malawi, it is not ethnicity that appears to have been the major barrier to entrenching democracy but the personality of the leader and his ability to exploit all the other secondary factors like ethnicity, gender, religion, patronage and so on.

⁵⁴ Cf. Lwanda, 1993. *Kamuzu Banda*; Chirwa Chirwa, W. J. 2001: Dancing towards dictatorship: political songs and popular culture in Malawi. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 10, 1: 1 –27; and Muyebe OP and Muyebe SJ. 1999: *The religious factor within the body of political symbolism in Malawi, 1964 - 1994*. Florida: Universal Publishers.

⁵⁵ Khunga, S. DPPmajority worries HRCC (Human Rights Consultative Committee). *Daily Times*, May 25th 2009.

⁵⁶ Munthali, K. 2009. *Nation*, 25th May 2009, page 1.